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Boston University

BOSTON UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
Dissertation

**CONSTITUTING SELVES:
AUGUSTINE, SARTRE, AND THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN STRUCTURING
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SELF AND OTHER**

By

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B.A., Boston College, 2003
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

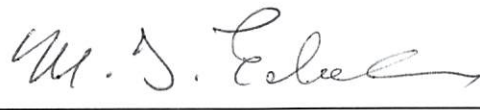
2016

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DEDICATION

For my father,

Renolt Ayad Samaan, M.D.

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Upon entering graduate school I was convinced that my own hard work, achievements, and prowess would be the key factors in my academic and professional success. But if there is one thing I've learned in the process of conceiving and executing this dissertation, it is that inasmuch as the sure result of stubbornly relying solely on one's own limited spiritual, psychological, and material resources is failure, success can only be achieved in tandem with others who are gracious enough to share your goal as their own. And while pursuing a doctoral degree is often an isolating and solitary process, it is by no means an individual effort. And so when, upon the successful defense of this work, my friend Christine told me that she was as happy as if she had done it herself, I could not help but be thankful for those who shared her sentiment and think of the many other people for whom my success is in fact a direct result of their own hard work and endurance, not just my own.

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did I find that I was actually capable of much more than I had anticipated. He has graciously pointed me in the direction of everything from fellowships to fellow graduate students to provide me with the resources I needed to best broaden my knowledge and develop my skills. I am grateful for the support and encouragement he has extended to me throughout my time in this program.

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persevere through a very long dissertation, but their thoughtful and detailed comments on it were extremely helpful in clarifying my own positions.

It does not take long for any graduate student to realize that academia is just as much about navigating through layers of administration as it is about solid scholarship. Without Karen Nardella I would not have been able to make my way through the former in order to attempt the latter. I have found her to be as much of an advocate for me and for many of the other students in our department as are any of our advisors. As all wise people know, an admin can really make or break your experience somewhere and Karen has graciously been an important contributor to making mine at BU go much more smoothly than it otherwise could have.

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meant you had to put off pursuing yours. This accomplishment is in fact every bit as much yours as it is mine.

And now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory... for ever and ever!

Amen.

**CONSTITUTING SELVES:
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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SELF AND OTHER**

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Boston University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, 2016

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ABSTRACT

It is commonly held that Augustine's *Confessions* provides an early source for the modern "turn to the self." But as many critics of modernity note, along with this accentuated sense of self has come a decreased sensitivity to the value and significance of the other. Perhaps the thinker credited (or blamed) for being the source of the modern notion of the self can also be a source for the postmodern retrieval of the other. This dissertation examines the understandings of the self presented in Augustine's *Confessions* and Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* to highlight and challenge structures latent in standard modern conceptions of the self derived from these very works. Despite their many similarities, these models differ fundamentally due to the fact that one arises from within an

ideology of radical autonomy and freedom while the other arises from within an ideology of radical heteronomy and givenness. Sartre rejects givenness and leaves us with a system which asserts that the human self “is a useless passion,” and “Hell is other people;” Augustine assumes givenness and presents a model in which a fully-integrated self is possible only in becoming inseparably bound to the other. By examining how their contrasting ideologies contribute to constituting the stark difference in their conclusions about the similar selves they detail, I explore how structures of a religiously constituted self can preserve the possibility for communion in human relationships that are precluded by a worldview based on an atomistic and autonomous self as exemplified by Sartre. Closely examining the ways in which the self is experienced, expressed, and actualized in these two works, I highlight the fact that their opposing modes of engaging alterity are in fact entailed by their respective religious and modernist orientations. In exploring the role of religion in holding open possibilities for integration and communion between self and other, this work contributes to the contemporary conversation about the “turn to religion” as being a potentially productive response to the failure of modern and even postmodern notions of self to secure a basis for meaningful human experience.

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INTRODUCTION

CONTEXT FOR THE DISSERTATION

Augustine's *Confessions* are often said to be an early source for the modern "turn to the self." Augustine's reflections on the very activity of his own thought opened the door for philosophical explorations of the role of consciousness in constituting human understanding of the world. Augustine's contribution has been traced through Descartes as the root of the characteristically modern understanding of the individual self as a source of meaning, power, and order in the world. Then on, from Descartes and Locke to Nietzsche, Feuerbach, and Heidegger, the key thinkers of modernity have all directed us to look within ourselves to find the resources to overcome the challenges to human freedom and flourishing. In modern thought it is the self, rather than the world or God, which anchors all possibilities of human knowledge and productivity.

But as many critics of modernity note, along with this accentuated sense of self has come a decreased sensitivity to the value and significance of the other. Here, "other" can be understood as God, other individuals, other outlooks considered to be foreign or opposite, or even the natural world. With the turn to subjectivity, anything other than the subject appears as radically external to and absolutely separate from it. This other is objectified and examined while held at a

distance. Its value is then assessed and constituted solely in relation to its ability to contribute to reaching the subject's goals. Since all value is placed in the self, once the other is distanced from this examining subject, it can have no intrinsic value of its own other than what the subject imparts to it. The value of the other becomes purely instrumental, even if that other is another person. The implications of instrumentalization are of course not only operative or cooperative use, but rather the legitimization of exploitation and even annihilation of the other if it so befits the situation. Again, even in the case of persons.

An important result of the above dynamic is that the self can only see the other as contributing to its constitution by means of impinging on it from the outside. The other cannot be seen as a productive co-contributor in the formation of the self's identity; rather he is seen primarily as a threat to the self's free and independent constitution of itself. Consequently, the other stands in relation to the self as something to be overcome or pushed back rather than something to be engaged cooperatively with and embraced.

We can find this orientation clearly promulgated and exemplified in many formative contributions to modern thought, including Cartesian mastery of nature, Nietzschean will to power, and of course, Sartrean being-for-others. This

attitude of opposition, founded on the ideal of self-assertion, has become a staple of modern life; it can be observed at all levels of social life, both benign and malicious. What starts simply as an intent focus on defining and expressing the self develops into an urge to do so at the expense of the other.

While the foregoing characterization of modern sensibilities may seem a bit severe, the understanding of modernity as including a trajectory from radical subjectivity to instrumentalization, meaninglessness, and objectification of the other is well documented among critics of modernity. Elizabeth Brient asserts that in the modern age, "...utility established as meaning generates meaninglessness..." and "...robs everything...of its own intrinsic worth and independent value."¹ Michael Hanby comments that the modern self "simultaneously mastering the universe and draining it of any intrinsic meaning, is understood by many who employ it... to be at the root of the banality and brutality that has so infected modern culture and rendered the modern soul empty."² Charles Taylor describes modern society as "a society of self-fulfillers, whose affiliations are more and more seen as revocable, cannot sustain the strong identification with... community..." and who enter "into a series of mobile,

¹ Elizabeth Brient, *The Immanence of the Infinite: Hans Blumenberg and the Threshold to Modernity* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2002), 81-82.

² Michael Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2003), 6.

changing, revocable associations, often designed merely for highly specific ends.”³ These are examples from only three of the many studies which trace the development of distinctive features of modern society to its focus on the centrality of the self. There are also numerous other studies which, although they do not trace the historical roots of modern social dynamics, assume a characterization of modern society consistent with that laid out above. It is well established in the literature that when one speaks of modernity, one is not only referencing a focus on progress, technology, and scientific knowledge, but also feelings of alienation, dissolution of traditional social ties, meaninglessness, and potential nihilism.⁴ Although based on a cohesive and unified model of the self, modern thought fails to provide a model of the world that in fact establishes a cohesive rather than disintegrative human experience.

In response, postmodern thought developed as a means of discrediting and displacing modern understandings of the self in favor of theories which seem to offer a better account of the disunity that seems to be more fundamental

³ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 508 & 502.

⁴ See Alasdair MacIntyre’s *After Virtue*, Hannah Arendt’s *The Human Condition*, Giorgio Agamben’s *Homo Sacer*, Gavin Flood’s *The Ascetic Self* and Martin Buber’s *I and Thou* for just a few examples of works where these ideas about modernity are implicitly assumed or explicitly expressed as forming the backdrop for the author’s arguments.

to human experience in the world. While the delineation between the realms of modern and postmodern thought is not entirely clear-cut, Jean-Francois Lyotard gives this general guideline for assessing the difference: “modern” thought, he says, “legitimizes itself with reference to metadiscourse... making explicit appeal to some grand narrative...”⁵ In other words, modern thinkers tend to appeal to grand systems of absolute knowledge or deterministic models of natural, biological, or spiritual processes of development to place the whole of reality into one cohesive system. Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Augustine’s *City of God*, and Freud’s *Civilization and its Discontents* are three examples of such narratives in which some single overarching or transcendent principle can be seen to provide the key to understanding the order and meaning of reality. In contrast, says Lyotard, “postmodern” thought is characterized by “incredulity toward metanarratives.”⁶ Put simply, postmodern thinkers tend to reject such appeals.

For postmodernists, the modern obsession with and assurance of the ability to provide a comprehensive explanation for everything is as much a

⁵ Jean-Francois Lyotard as cited in Richard J. Bernstein, “An Allegory of Modernity/Postmodernity: Habermas and Derrida,” in *Working Through Derrida*, ed. Gary B. Madison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 205.

⁶ Jean-Francois Lyotard as cited in Richard J. Bernstein, “An Allegory of Modernity/Postmodernity: Habermas and Derrida,” in *Working Through Derrida*, ed. Gary B. Madison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 205.

reflection as it is the cause of the obsession with self to the detriment of the other.

Brian Treanor gives a clear and concise explanation of the connection:

otherness is precisely what Grand Narratives seek to do away with. Anything unknown—that is anything foreign, novel, surprising, disturbing, or otherwise resistant to the neat categories of the Narrative—challenges the comprehensiveness of the Narrative. Grand narratives will not tolerate otherness; their motto is “a place for everything and everything in its place.”...it is the intractability of otherness itself that defies such neat and tidy categorization, slaying the Grand Narrative.⁷

According to the postmodern view, the grand narratives typical of modernity, be they theological, philosophical, or natural, implicitly seek to completely neutralize the threat of the strange, or the stranger, by constituting him from within the constructs of the familiar; in effect they eradicate what is other by absorbing the other into the self. In the end, in relation to both its explicit content and implicit structure, modern thought reveals itself to be “self-centered” in its approach to understanding reality and proscribing one’s orientation or attitude toward the other within that reality.

In response to such self-centered conceptions of the self’s place and role in the world, postmodern thought seeks to de-center the self as the point of origin and final arbiter of meaning and structure in the world. Instead of appealing to

⁷ Brian Treanor, *Aspects of Alterity: Levinas, Marcel, and the Contemporary Debate* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 2.

grand narratives which purport to supply a single and absolute perspective on the meaning of reality, postmodernists emphasize the multiplicity of narratives present within human experience. Postmodern thinkers still preserve an intent focus on subjective human experience, but unlike modern thinkers they tend to focus on revealing the multitude of factors *beyond the self's control* that constitute its subjectivity and behavior. In this body of work there is an emphasis on the instability of identity, the contingent nature of patterns of value, alterity, and multiplicity of narratives.⁸ Postmodern theory employs notions of subjectivity which seek to destabilize our assumptions about dominant structures we may take for granted. The motivation behind such a move is to reveal the self as less than absolute in its status as a subject so that it can no longer securely define and reduce the other to the status of a mere object.

But if the self's relation to the other can be determined neither with respect to the self nor with respect to a transcendent ordering principle, then by what can it be determined? If absolute determination of any sort is resisted by postmodernism, then is not meaningful relation precluded as well? Many critics of postmodernism pose this question and find that its answer makes postmodern

⁸ For a work which exemplifies all these characteristics see Jacques Derrida, *Circumfession* in *Jacques Derrida*, by Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

thought just as guilty of alienation, dissociation, meaninglessness, and nihilism as is modern thought. Are we then left at a standstill? Is there no way to recover the other without losing the self?

Perhaps the thinker credited (or blamed) for being the source of the modern notion of the self can also be the source of the postmodern retrieval of the other. In recent years there has been a revival of scholarship on Augustine's influence on the postmodern fields of phenomenological and existential philosophy.⁹ The revival of inquiry into the influence of Augustine on these fields seems to indicate that in Augustine one can find not only the roots of modern notions of subjectivity, but also the resources to counter the problems that certain developments some of these notions have caused. Augustine's contribution to notions of subjectivity resonates significantly among thinkers in these fields who are particularly concerned with challenging traditional modern concepts of knowledge and experience in order to recover the meaning of the *subject* in a manner which protects humanity from being reduced to the status of

⁹ For a discussion and listing of such works, especially since 1993, see the Introduction in Craig J.N. de Paulo, ed., *The Influence of Augustine on Heidegger: The Emergence of an Augustinian Phenomenology* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), 1-28.

a mere *object*.¹⁰ Work in this vein is dedicated primarily not to a retrieval of the original intent of Augustine's work, but rather to a reconstruction of the assumptions that Western tradition has made about the self in light of the insights it has taken from Augustine. This body of work undertakes a deliberate repurposing of underdeveloped or alternative strains already present in modern appropriations of Augustine's thought to form a postmodern conception of self that can directly counter the modern self as developed from traditionally dominant strains in that same thought.¹¹

¹⁰ Most notable among these works are *Circumfession* by Jacques Derrida (1993), *The Confession of Augustine*, by Jean-Francois Lyotard (2000), *Au Lieu De Soi: L'approche De Saint Augustin* by Jean Luc Marion (2008). For just a few examples of more recent volumes of essays dedicated to the analysis of the ideas fostered by the above, see Lieven Boeve, Mathijs Lamberigts, and Maarten Wisse, eds., *Augustine and Postmodern Thought: A New Alliance Against Modernity?* (Leuven: Peeters Publishing, 2009); John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, eds., *Transcendence and Beyond: A Postmodern Inquiry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007); Craig J.N De Paulo, ed., *The Influence of Augustine on Heidegger: The Emergence of an Augustinian Phenomenology* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006); John Caputo, and Michael J. Scanlon, eds., *Augustine and Postmodernism: Confessions and Circumfession* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005); John Caputo, Mark Dooley, and Michael J. Scanlon, eds., *Questioning God* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001); John Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, eds., *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

¹¹ For an explication of the application of such repurposing techniques, See Wayne Hankey, "Re-Christianizing Augustine Postmodern Style Readings by Jacques Derrida, Robert Dodaro, Jean-Luc Marion, Rowan Williams, Lewis Ayres and John Milbank," *Animus*, 2 (1997). Online Available HTTP: <http://www.mun.ca/animus/1997/vol2hankey1.ht>.

CONTRIBUTION OF THE DISSERTATION

It is in light of these postmodern responses that I undertake this project. This dissertation will examine the understanding of the self as presented in primarily in Augustine's *Confessions* and Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*. While similar analyses have been done for Augustine and other twentieth-century phenomenological thinkers, there is no significant work available which performs this analysis for Augustine and Sartre. This particular pairing is important because in these works we find the start and end points of the trajectory of the notion of the modern self as it matured from its seminal pre-modern source to its fully-developed form as it butts up against postmodernity. Augustine's *Confessions* are accepted as the earliest precedent for the "turn to the self" characteristic of modern thought. And if, as Feuerbach notes, "the task of the modern era was the realization and humanization of god—the transformation and dissolution of theology into anthropology,"¹² then there is no more thoroughly modern model of the self than that expressed by Sartre. In Sartre's descriptions of the self we find the same categories used by Augustine himself to describe human experience from a decidedly theological perspective—

¹² Ludwig Feuerbach as cited in Stefanos Geroulanos, *An Atheism That Is Not Humanist Emerges in French Thought*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 4.

e.g. nothingness, God, the divided will, Original Sin— being reinterpreted and transformed so as to describe a self-experience for which man rather than God is the source of value and order. The particular way in which Sartre shapes his Augustinian inheritance exemplifies the extreme to which modernity's turn to the self led to the domination and exclusion of the other. As such, Sartre's work represents the culmination of the development of the modern self whose insistence on autonomy and autarchy set the stage for postmodern responses.

My reading of *Confessions* and *Being and Nothingness* in tandem is an extension of the type of postmodern and phenomenological analysis described above. By examining the descriptions of human experience present in these works I seek to highlight and challenge structures latent in standard modern conceptions of the self derived from these very works. Because understandings of self in *Being and Nothingness* have *Confessions* as a precedent, it is not surprising to find that both works share common features. More specifically, Augustine's vision of the self in *Confessions* provides an early paradigm for the problem of the simultaneous subjectivity and objectivity of human experience in Western thought. One can read *Confessions* as an attempt at understanding the paradox of how the same being can experience both subjectivity and objectivity at once; how the same being can feel freedom to create and also experience itself

as a thing that is already given. Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* deals with much the same problem. Both thinkers explore the possibility of a fixed definition for the human self despite the fact that both experience this being as one whose most central characteristic entails a resistance to stability. Both works provide a phenomenological description of the dynamic of struggle in human experience caused by the disparity between what a self is and what it seeks to be. And both works phenomenologically describe the dynamics of this struggle as it plays out under the defining gaze of an other.

Notwithstanding these similarities, my work will hinge on a significant difference between them: the avowedly religious and humanistic modernist frameworks from which they undertake their respective analyses. By examining the effect of this difference in their overall conclusions about the similar selves that these thinkers detail, I will show how structures within the religious standpoint can preserve the possibility for communion in human relationships that are precluded by a worldview based on an atomistic and autonomous self as exemplified by Sartre. The implications of Sartre's firm assertion that "existence precedes essence" are brought into relief when set against Augustine's ambition of conforming to a divinely given order. Sartre insists on an autonomous self free to determine itself apart from any pre-given or transcendent constraints;

conversely, Augustine's work implies that a self can only become fully itself when it conforms to the definition set for it by a transcendent and heteronomous source of value. Given these specific parameters, one can conceive a contrast between the two as a contrast between an ideology of radical autonomy and freedom and one of radical heteronomy and givenness. The stark contrast between the extremes in these thinkers' attitudes toward a principle which transcends the self is what makes this pairing useful because inherent to each thinker's model of the self is a theory of its ontological relationship to an other.¹³ For Augustine, the definition of the self is contingent upon integration with the other; for Sartre it is created in assertion of self over other. By closely examining the ways in which the self is experienced, expressed, and actualized in these two works I will highlight that the fact that these opposite modes of relating to the other occur within these explicitly religious and modernist orientations is not incidental, but is in fact entailed by the orientation.

In exploring the role of religion in facilitating integration and communion between self and other, my work contributes to the conversation in

¹³ In both systems God (negated as he may be for Sartre) holds a place as the ideal other. For a discussion of God as a source of the Look, see Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (London: Routledge, 2008), 375 & 385-6.

phenomenology and continental philosophy about the “theological turn”¹⁴ and “turn to religion”¹⁵ as a response to the failure of modern and even postmodern thought to provide a basis for cohesive and meaningful human experience. Theorists in this tradition have reintroduced a religiously-oriented philosophy that attempts to pick up where the postmodern focus on fragmented and contingent subjectivity has left off. Extending the concept of thrownness well-established in Heideggerian thought, these theorists explore the concept of “givenness” as a basis of human experience. Givenness refers to the phenomenon of there being things that transcend the range of the self’s freedom or creativity. It represents an aspect of human experience that stands in opposition to modernity’s total autonomy of the self as well postmodernity’s traditional resistance to transcendence. These theorists apply phenomenological principles and find evidence for an interpretation of givenness that points to a principle beyond both self and other that grounds human experience. By pointing toward a transcendence which must be received purely as a gift these theorists hope to

¹⁴ For the work which coined the phrase, see Dominique Janicaud, et. al., *Phenomenology and the “Theological Turn”: The French Debate*, trans. Bernard G. Prusak. 1st ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000).

¹⁵ For an analysis of the religious nature of secularity and an explanation for the resilience of religious worldviews in the face of the rationalist pressures of modernity, see Adam B. Seligman, *Modernity’s Wager: Authority, the Self, and Transcendence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003). I will return to this analysis in Chapter 6.

establish a basis for human experience that escapes the economy of opposition, objectification and exchange¹⁶ that is engendered by and inherent in modern models of self and subjectivity.

Notably, one of the strongest critiques of religious systems which rely on transcendence to delineate the relationship between self and other also turns out to highlight the very factor which most strongly recommends them. The experience or idea of a transcendent absolute which underlies much of religious tradition is first and foremost the experience or idea of radical alterity; that is, it is an opening up of self to something which stands as *both* radically or “wholly other” to the self, as Rudolph Otto puts it, *and* as the common principle of the whole of reality. The critique warns that this religious intuition of alterity is not only developed into conceptualizations of the divine and transformed into the basis for identity, familiarity, and community, but is often elaborated into the monstrous; the familiarity and community forged in relation to the divine other is conflated into identity with the divine other (e.g. the sentiment that “God is on *our* side,”) in such a way that the human other becomes represented as a monster and threat. As James K.A. Smith summarizes, “transcendentals divorced from

¹⁶ For examples of such work, see Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

place and history have been the justification for the most horrifying crimes against those confined to the 'wrong place and time,' those from a different place."¹⁷

But transcendence is the ultimate principle of de-centering the self. And it is this openness to alterity as a constitutive element of the self that marks the difference between what constitutes a religious self and the obsession with self-certainty and autonomy that constitutes the modern self. That is not to say that this malady of modernity does not at times find expression in religious life, but it is to say that ultimately it is not valued there in the same way. And it is precisely for this reason that religious life offers a much needed alternative to modern conceptions of self and society.

Now while the truth of beliefs in transcendent sources of value and order is not empirically verifiable, the logical possibilities engendered by such beliefs are. The work of both Sartre and Augustine engage us in the question of the definition of self but differ on the status of givenness. Sartre's leads us to reject givenness and leaves us with a system which asserts that the human self "is a

¹⁷ James K.A. Smith, "Determined Violence: Derrida's Structural Religion," *The Journal of Religion*, 78:2 (Apr., 1998): 210.

useless passion”¹⁸ and “Hell is other people;”¹⁹ Augustine’s assumes givenness and presents a model in which “we are gathered into one”;²⁰ it is a system in which a fully-integrated self is possible only in becoming inseparably bound to the other. Thus, my analysis can be viewed as a case study examining the effectiveness of the assumptions of transcendence and givenness in opening up rather than closing off possibilities for positive human relation.

STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

This dissertation is divided into three parts. The first stands as an introduction to both modern and Augustinian notions of the self. The second part is dedicated to the analysis of the Augustinian and Sartrean selves as they appear primarily in *Confessions* and *Being and Nothingness*, respectively. Each chapter in this part ends with a section entitled “Augustinian Responses.” Here I bring to bear the work of contemporary postmodern “Augustinian” philosophers directly on the questions of selfhood, alterity, and the possibilities for the relation

¹⁸ Sartre, *BN*, 784.

¹⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *No Exit (Huis Clos)*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1947).

²⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, Second Edition, trans. F.J. Sheed, ed. Michael P. Foley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2006), I.iii. Emphasis added. All references are to this version unless otherwise noted.

between self and other.²¹ The third part of the dissertation explores the broader theoretical basis for my central proposition that, as opposed to modernist frameworks which center on an autonomous self, the general structure of religious systems preserves an option for understanding the relation between self and other that does not necessitate conflict, but rather allows for communion.

The chapter outline is as follows:

PART I: LET ME INTRODUCE MY SELVES

CHAPTER 1. The Modern Self: The Road Inward

Chapter 1 traces the development of the modern concept of the self from Augustine's "inward turn," through Descartes, Husserl, and Heidegger and finally to Sartre. This analysis highlights how the various intentions behind each thinker's analysis of the self significantly changed the sets of relationships possible for the self as inherited and developed by Sartre from the ones implied by Augustine's text.

²¹ I put "Augustinian" in quotes here because while these postmodern theorists build their analyses with Augustine's thought, it is based on the examination of certain structural aspects it exhibits rather than beliefs he would necessarily espouse. For a similar approach, see Charles T. Matthews, *Evil and the Augustinian Tradition*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), specifically his discussion on p. 60-62.

CHAPTER 2. The Other in the Self: Augustinian (Re)Directions

This chapter outlines the basis offered in Augustine's work for a recovery of a vision of the self that engenders a more inclusive and positive relation to the other.

PART II: AUGUSTINIAN AND SARTREAN SELVES AND OTHERS

CHAPTER 3. The Questioning Self: Being Posed

Chapter 3 details both thinkers' exploration of the "Question" as expressing the fundamental experience and structure of the self. Under this rubric, both identify void, lack of coincidence, and indeterminacy as inherent features of the self. At stake here is the question of whether a stable identity for the self is possible or even desirable as an ideal for human experience.

CHAPTER 4. The Negating Self: Being Not God

This chapter explores the role of nothingness and negation in each thinker's conception of the self. This analysis is central to each's understanding of human freedom and whether its achievement is exemplified by acting autonomously or heteronomously— i.e., in opposition to or in tandem with the other.

CHAPTER 5. The (Un)Seen Self: Being in Conflict

The fifth chapter analyzes each thinker's account of the significance of the experience of being seen by an other. This chapter looks at the constructs of

Shame, Bad Faith, and disparate self-concepts to examine the phenomenological evidence each presents as supporting an understanding of the other as received or resented in its role of constituting the identity of the self.

PART III: RELIGION AND ALTERITY

CHAPTER 6. The Religious Self: Constituting Other-Orientations

This chapter concludes the dissertation by challenging the acceptance of autonomy as the essential feature of the self. Building on the structure of the Augustinian self detailed in Section II, I review various approaches to the study of religion to argue that the recognition and acceptance of a transcendent or all-encompassing source of value, which is distinctive of religious orientations, implicitly recognizes an other, be it personal or cosmic, as a source of absolute value. As such, religion can serve to structure the self in a way that counters the tendency toward objectification and conflict entailed by the understanding of the modern self.

**PART I:
LET ME INTRODUCE MY SELVES**

CHAPTER 1. THE MODERN SELF: THE ROAD INWARD

When Augustine was writing about the self in the fourth century Roman Empire, the philosophical assumptions and constructs available to frame his conceptions were drastically different than those which structured the self inherited by Sartre over 1500 years later. In this chapter I will trace the path from Augustine's seminal notion of subjectivity through Descartes to the modern notion of self transformed by Husserl and Heidegger and made available to Sartre in the middle of the twentieth century. This analysis will highlight how the various intentions behind the analysis of the self of each thinker in the line significantly changed the sets of relationships possible for the self inherited and developed by Sartre from the ones implied by Augustine's text. Though Augustine's work stands as a seed and source for reflections on subjectivity in the Western tradition, subsequent appropriations and developments of his insights led in modernity to a self that is much more autonomous, assertive, and alone than Augustine would have ever imagined. While the Augustinian self found its ontological and ontic sources in the other, the modern self leaves little if any room for the other as a non-contingent source of value.

Before exploring how Augustine's work can aid in the recovery of a more robust sensitivity to the other, it is first important to understand how he

contributed to the modern notion of the self and the problems arising from this notion. One of the most widely accepted standards for understanding this trace comes from Charles Taylor's *The Sources of the Self*. *Sources* is a key study in the development of the modern notion of the self as an atomistic, radically autonomous, and instrumentalized entity. This study has been critical in establishing Augustine as a key source for the development of this notion. While Augustine's thought is just one of many key factors Taylor traces in this development, his characterization of Augustine seems to have become the standard for both critics and advocates alike.²² In Taylor we find a direct trace from inwardness of Augustine to the self-sufficient, independent, and inviolable will of Descartes. Through this trace Augustine is often held responsible for a modern vision of self which is independently responsible for the determination and valuation of the other and unable to connect to the other except in a manner of opposition. I will begin by following Taylor's standard account of this trace and then highlight further developments in the concept of the self key to

²² For just a couple of examples of Taylor's status as a standard: In *Augustine and Modernity*, Michael Hanby cites Taylor as the "master architect" of the story of continuity between Augustine and modernity via Descartes and characterizes other major theorists he critiques as "builders" who work with Taylor's overall design (London: Routledge, 2003. p.10-11). Taylor is the first secondary source cited in Philip Cary's *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self* in his chapter on Augustine's "Inward turn and Intellectual vision." Cary directs his readers: "on the continuity between Augustine and modern turns to the subject, see Taylor..." (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. p. 168, n12).

understanding the changes that led from the integrated self Augustine envisioned to the alienated and instrumentalized self inherited in particular by Sartre in the middle of the twentieth century.

STARTING DOWN THE ROAD

Taylor credits Augustine with being the first to structure self-understanding in terms of “inwardness”. For Taylor, “Inwardness” is the pivotal idea, or perhaps orientation, shaping the self in the modern West. He opens Part II of *Sources*, which he titles “Inwardness”, with an explanation of what he means by this term:

Our modern notion of the self is related to, one might say constituted by, a certain sense... of inwardness... In our languages of self-understanding, the opposition ‘inside-outside’ plays an important role. We think of our thoughts, ideas, or feelings as being “within” us, while the objects in the world which these mental states bear on are “without”. Or else we think of our capacities and potentialities as “inner”, awaiting the development that will manifest them in the public world.²³

Taylor is quick to assert that although this may seem quite natural to us, it is not the way that people have always conceived of themselves in the world. He then goes on to explain how Augustine is the originator of such an attitude in western thought. Unlike those who came before him, Augustine’s language and ideas about what it means to understand (the self, or anything else) radically shifted

²³ Taylor, 111.

our attention from the objects we seek to know to the activity of knowing itself.²⁴ He moved western thought from an understanding in which the foundation of knowing was to be located outside the self to one in which it could be found within.

Taylor begins his argument by reviewing the Platonic ideals underlying Augustine's general conceptual framework. This is important for Taylor because, before one can speak in terms of inwardness or outwardness, there must be some conception of the self as a unified locale; and it is in Plato that we find this early vision of the unity of the self. Taylor begins by reminding us that for Plato, man becomes good when reason rules the appetites. Only then is a man properly ordered, integrated, and capable of the self-mastery necessary for living the "good life." Taylor explains that Plato's view privileges an ethic of reason in which one is always in control of all his actions rather than those which find their locus of energy in only a part of the body, or in possession by the spirits which is only temporary and locates the source of action entirely outside the actor. The ethic of reason holds as highest the condition in which one is reflective and self-collected. In other words, the privileged condition for Plato is one in which all

²⁴ Taylor, 136.

thoughts and feelings can be held under purview from one central locus. Taylor comments that "Plato's view, just because it privileges a condition of self-collected awareness and designates this as the state of maximum unity with oneself, requires some conception of the mind as a unitary space."²⁵ For Plato, this unitary space is the immaterial rational soul.

The next preliminary step in Taylor's story is the connection is between reason, understanding, and order. He explains that for Plato,

Reason is the capacity to see or understand... So to be ruled by reason is to be ruled by the correct vision or understanding. The correct vision or understanding of ourselves is one which grasps the natural order, the analogue of health... to be ruled by reason is to be ruled by a vision of this order... there is no way one can be ruled by reason and be mistaken or wrong about the order of reality.²⁶

For Plato, the soul properly ordered by the exercise of reason has direct access to an accurate understanding of the reality as it is. This is because reason is the capacity by which man can access the Forms, the eternal, unchanging, and ideal patterns for the material reality he experiences. Taylor notes that for Plato the key to achieving the correct vision of the world is a matter of proper orientation.²⁷ One who focuses his attention on the changing world of things will never have the properly integrated and holistic understanding of what things

²⁵ Taylor, 119.

²⁶ Taylor, 121-122.

²⁷ Taylor, 123.

really are; but one who focuses on the eternal and unchanging Forms will attain true knowledge of reality and be made good by that knowledge. When one exercises reason, he not only orients himself toward the Forms in order to see them, but then also gains direct insight into these patterns and the order created by them.

Taylor argues that the “self” as a topic of inquiry and attention begins with developments in Augustine’s thought.²⁸ For Plato true knowledge of the world is realized when the capacity for knowledge inherent in the rational soul is directed at the proper object, the Forms. But for Christian Augustine, the stage has been somewhat reset. Although Augustine adopts many aspects of the Platonic worldview, including the rational order inherent in the universe, the source of that order is conceived of very differently. For Augustine, the Forms are re-conceptualized as ideas in the mind of a personal and creative God.²⁹ To

²⁸ Taylor, 131.

²⁹ See Sarah Byers, “Augustine and the Philosophers,” in *A Companion to Augustine*, ed. Mark Vessey (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 180-184, for a discussion of Augustine’s notion of the forms inhering in the mind of God as an adaptation of Plotinus’ concept of the forms inhering in the divine Intellect (the second god of the Neo-Platonist tri-theistic trinity as distinct from the One or the Good). Due to their complete independence from the mutable world, Plato’s Forms were only potentially intelligible; according to Byers, following Aristotle’s principle that actuality was in fact more perfect than potentiality, Plotinus “improves” upon Plato’s theory by placing the Forms in a divine mind thereby making them *actually* understood instead of only *potentially* intelligible. And in maintaining the orthodox position of a Triune God, Augustine, in turn, “improves” upon Plotinus by unifying the

participate in the Forms is to participate in God himself. God, not the forms, is the source of all reality and truth. But God, being conceived primarily as a knower, in fact as the primary knower, is just as much part of the activity of knowing as he is the object of its search. God, as the knower of all, is the one who enlightens and guides all who seek to know truth. As Taylor explains, in Augustine's view God is "primarily for us the basic support and underlying principle of our knowing activity."³⁰

It is because of this understanding of God that Augustine is able to make his innovative move. In fact, it is precisely in Augustine's proof for the existence of God that Taylor locates the "inward" move he finds so critical. Augustine argues that while his reader may doubt the existence of many sensible things, his own activity of doubting, a rational activity, makes it impossible for him to doubt his own existence. Argues Augustine, *si fallor sum* (if I am mistaken, I am).³¹ Through a series of further arguments Augustine goes on to demonstrate to his reader that his capacity of reason grounds his capacities of sense. Further, the truths of reason are not something he invents, but are truths accessible to all and

substance in which the Forms inhered into a single God so as to avoid infinite regress in identifying the Form or pattern according to which the Forms themselves were created.

³⁰ Taylor, 129.

³¹ Augustine, *Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: The Penguin Group, 2003), XI.26, 28 (Hereafter, *City of God*).

must in turn be grounded in something higher. This something higher is God—the source of rationality itself. While this is only a very rough sketch of Augustine’s famous and fateful argument, it is not the conclusion it purports to demonstrate but rather its starting point that is important here. Augustine makes central to human being, not reason as a *capacity*, but reasoning as an *activity*.

In adapting the Platonic understanding of reason as humanity’s highest capacity into a Christian framework, Taylor argues that

Augustine takes our focus off the objects that reason knows, the field of Ideas, and directs it onto the activity of striving to know which each of us carries on; and he makes us aware of this in a first-person perspective. At the end of this road we see that God’s is the power sustaining and directing this activity.³²

For in contrast to the domain of objects which is public and common, the activity of knowing is particularized; each of us is engaged in ours. To look towards this activity is to look to the self, to take up a reflexive stance.³³

By shifting the focus of the search for knowledge from common rational objects to particularized rational action, Augustine delimits the domain basic to the constitution of all human being as one that can only be accessed individually.³⁴ This particularization and localization of rational activity makes it possible for

³² Taylor, 136.

³³ Taylor, 130.

³⁴ For a trace through Aristotle and Plotinus of Augustine’s notions of the soul regarding its individuality and its relationship to the body, see Byers, 176ff.

Augustine to speak of turning “inward” in the search for truth.³⁵ Where the “outside” is considered the public domain of things accessible to all, the “inside” is where I am alone with my thinking. In the search for knowledge, the knower must first face his own knowing in an area in which seemingly only he and his knowing are present.

For now, what Taylor wants us to note as the most significant development of Augustine’s thought is the focus on what Taylor calls “radical reflexivity.” This is the call to adopt the first-person standpoint when discussing human experience. Instead of focusing on the objective stance, a “view from nowhere” where the same information is available to all, Augustine’s inward turn directs us to become “aware of our awareness, try to experience our experiencing, focus on the way the world is for us.”³⁶ As Taylor notes, to look towards this activity is to look to the self.

Notice that it is not until now that we appear to be talking about the “self” in a way consonant with what we commonly connote with such a word. For

³⁵ While Taylor focuses mostly on the inner/outer distinction as an innovation on the concept of orientation, Phillip Cary argues and further develops the idea that the conception of the self as a private space is the original invention of Augustine. See Phillip Cary, *Augustine and the Invention of the inner Self: The Legacy of a Christian Platonist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

³⁶ Taylor, 130.

Plato, the rational soul was the aspect of a human being able to contemplate the Forms; unlike later connotations of “soul,” its rationality, not its personality or individuality, was its most important feature. The rational soul was the common feature of all human beings. But here, we have a focus on rational activity conceived as belonging to the exclusive domain of a particular individual. Only when both these elements are combined, rationality *and* individuality, can we begin to see the preliminary outlines of the concept of the self we are used to in the modern West.

CARTESIAN DETOURS

Continuing on the road to this modern idea of the self, we follow Taylor on his path from Augustine to Descartes. As Taylor puts it, “Descartes is in many ways profoundly Augustinian: the emphasis on radical reflexivity, the importance of the cogito, the central role of a proof for God’s existence which starts from ‘within’, from features of my own ideas, instead of starting from external being...all put him in the stream of revived Augustinian piety...”³⁷ Although Taylor notes major differences between Augustine’s and Descartes’ uses of radical reflexivity, he nonetheless concludes that, “Plainly the whole

³⁷ Taylor, 143.

Cartesian project owes a great deal to its Augustinian roots and the enhanced place this tradition gave to inwardness."³⁸ But in many ways it is the detours on which Descartes takes Augustine's thought that are most formative for modern ideas about the self; thus despite the important differences between Augustine and Descartes, it is the continuity that Taylor tracks between them that also seems to be most influential for coloring many assessments of Augustine

Clearly, the most obvious and significant connection between Augustine and Descartes is Descartes' use of the cogito argument which found a very preliminary formulation in Augustine's proof for the existence of God discussed above. Although both seem to build their cases on the basis of the irrefutability of one's own rational activity, Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* gives a much more central role to self-certainty than does Augustine's.

Descartes' program begins with the systematic doubt of every idea that comes to his mind. This method is based on a stoic model of rationality.³⁹ The most important aspect of reason in this model is its ability to grant or withhold assent from ideas which seek to impress themselves on the mind. There is a key

³⁸ Taylor, 156.

³⁹ The stoic roots of Descartes' thought is established in Taylor as well as in Michael Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity* and in Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985).

shift here in how the nature of rationality is conceived. Under the Cartesian model the defining feature of rationality becomes a consolidated and unitary will. Further, the meaning of preserving one's rationality becomes asserting one's will in opposition to any idea having its source in anything other than this immaterial will. In stark contrast to the Platonic model, in which the preservation of rationality meant proper alignment of the soul and body within the overall order of the universe, in the Cartesian model, rationality must assert itself in resistance to the pressures of material reality in hopes of mastering it.

Descartes begins his exercise by doubting anything detected by his physical senses, moves to propositions of logic, and finally even to the God he posits as necessary for ensuring the rationality and coherence of his whole system. Hanby comments that the assertion of the Cartesian cogito is an assertion "into the void,"⁴⁰ since all else has been bracketed or doubted as existing, including God himself. Once he has shown that none of these things can have any necessary claim on our rational activity, i.e. that it is possible to doubt their existence, then the only thing left as a necessary basis for knowledge is rational activity itself. Thus, with nothing else left to ground it, the cogito is self-

⁴⁰ Hanby, 172.

grounding. The cogito is established as a *res cogitans*, a substance independent of any necessary connections to the material world.

If the description of a self-grounding source for the knowledge of all reality sounds eerily familiar, it is because, prior to Descartes, it was the definition of God himself. But with the advent of the Cartesian cogito, the self, internalized, privatized and made aware of itself by Augustine, is now made aware of its power to determine itself in absolute freedom from any external factors. This kind of vision of the self effectively sets it on par with a God conceived of as being the omnipotent creator and master of the material world. Descartes himself writes that “free will is in itself the noblest thing we can have because it makes us in a certain manner equal to God and exempts us from being his subjects...”⁴¹ Putting it on par with God, this vision of the self allows us to understand the self as taking God’s place as the one who establishes the order of reality.

Descartes’ argument effectively turns God’s existence into a moot point. As Hanby explains, in the course of the argument for the existence of God from the idea of perfection, God himself is reduced to an idea which is then subject to

⁴¹ Descartes as cited in Taylor, 147.

the assent of reason like any other idea. Hanby argues that Descartes' arguments for the existence of God stemming from infinity, perfection, and omnipotence are inconsistent and serve to produce a concept of God that is subject to the human will and reason. While God may be infinite, infinity is incomprehensible and, more importantly, does not establish the goodness or reliability that is necessary to ensure that the mind is not being deceived in its assessments of reality. For that perfection is needed. But perfection implies limitation or particularized form. Thus a perfect God is limited and as such can be made subject to human intellect or will. Such a God can easily be negated. Once God is negated, man can effectively take his place.⁴² Human rationality can now be responsible for establishing the order of nature.

Further, because Descartes classifies the immaterial soul as a *res cogitans* that lives on a different plane than the material world of extended things, he effectively accomplishes two things. First, he drains all rationality from the material world. Thus there is no rational order to be discovered in the world; rather rational order must be imposed on the world by the human mind. The world becomes a field of mechanistically functioning matter available for use

⁴² For a detailed analysis of the incoherence of the Cartesian proof of God from his perfections, see Hanby, 173-177.

according to whatever human reason judges to be best. Nature becomes nothing more than an instrument to be used in accomplishing whatever human purpose is currently at hand.

Second, he isolates and alienates the self from the world and others. Because one's essential self is conceived of being a will that maintains its integrity when it acts in opposition to the impressions that the material world tries to give it, instead of attuning the self to the world, the human being sees himself as standing outside the world to survey it. He treats the world as if he were not part of it. As Taylor comments, "Where the platonic soul realizes its eternal nature by becoming absorbed in the supersensible, the Cartesian discovers and affirms his immaterial nature by objectifying the bodily."⁴³ This attitude applies even to one's own body, and more gravely, even to the bodies to others. Since the self is immaterial and private, it can only deal with other selves through their bodies. But all bodies are just mechanisms for my use- and then so are other selves. While Descartes himself would not go this far, these are the implications of the way he conceives of selves in the world. At least these are often the implications which we often see enacted in modern life.

⁴³ Taylor, 146.

In the wake of Descartes (re)formulation of Augustinian inwardness we are left with a very dense notion of the self which leaves no room for an other of any significance as a center of meaning or value in the world. The self, having been effectively dissociated from the materiality of the world thereby is fundamentally isolated from the shared aspect of human reality. Thus the basis for communion and fellowship with the other based on a shared world is broken. Instead the only relation possible is one in which even the personal other can only be accessed through her incorporation into the objectified world which is then mastered and instrumentalized as an aspect of the self's assertion of itself. The other cannot maintain its integrity as an other in the face of such a self. The result of this objectifying notion of the self is such that all selves are at risk of becoming mere objects for each other. Neither the self nor the other is safe in a world in which the other is seen as fundamentally separate from the self.

To say that the modern vision of the self and its alienation from world and the other are entirely a result of Descartes' formulation of the *cogito* is clearly an overstatement. This transformation was not enacted by the work of Descartes singlehandedly or overnight. There are several significant philosophers and philosophies which further entrenched the modern idea of the self as an autonomous, assertive, and alone. Two thinkers especially influential in

establishing such a vision of the self for Sartre were Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. In the work of each of these key thinkers we find further wandering down the path started by Descartes even in their attempts to overcome the dichotomies he created. By focusing on these two thinkers we fast-forward from the start of the modern era to the assumptions about the self established as standards of thought near its close in the mid-twenty-first century. In the work of Husserl and Heidegger we find the most influential philosophical approaches to the self being employed as phenomenology is developing and directly giving rise to major features of Sartre's approach.

... PAVED WITH GOOD INTENTIONS: HUSSERL

The first of these two key thinkers is Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). Husserl is commonly considered the founder of phenomenology—the philosophical methodology Sartre saw himself as employing in *Being and Nothingness*.⁴⁴ Phenomenology, or the study of how things appear in consciousness, is focused on discovering the structures of conscious experience

⁴⁴ The actual faithfulness of Sartre's approach or application of Husserl's insights to Husserl's original methodology is much debated. See the Translator's Introduction in *Being and Nothingness*, p. x-xx.

as experienced from a first-person point of view.⁴⁵ Sartre sees himself as building on Husserl's insights as to the intentional or outward-oriented structure of consciousness and the distinction between the activity of consciousness and the objects it intends. Importantly Sartre sees his work as trying to remedy a gap between self and world and self and other created by certain assumptions of Husserl's philosophy.⁴⁶

To begin, it is interesting to note that Husserl approaches his work with the admirable goal of discovering a philosophical system which could create common ground among people. He seeks to establish a way to find a basis for agreement and dispel not only mistaken ideas but also the conflict and frivolity engendered by disagreement. He writes,

Instead of a serious discussion among conflicting theories that, in their very conflict, demonstrate the intimacy with which they belong together, the commonness of their underlying convictions, and an unswerving belief in a true philosophy, we have a pseudo-reporting and a pseudo-criticizing, a mere semblance of philosophizing seriously with and for one another. This hardly attests a mutual study carried on with a

⁴⁵ David Woodruff Smith, "Phenomenology," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2013, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2013/entries/phenomenology/>.

⁴⁶ For a discussion of the specifics of Sartre's critique, See the Translator's Introduction in Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego: An Existentialist Theory of Consciousness*, trans. Forrest Williams and Robert Kirkpatrick (New York: Hilland Wang, 1960), 11-27.

consciousness of responsibility, in the spirit that characterizes serious collaboration and an intention to produce Objectively [sic] valid results.⁴⁷

For Husserl, philosophy was to provide a path to objective truth and thus to universally accessible and mutually applicable foundations for building a better world.⁴⁸ In Husserl's view, if we can come to an objective understanding about the world we share, then we will be able to rationally critique it and subsequently "elevate mankind through universal scientific reason, according to norms of truth of all forms, to transform it from the bottom up into a new humanity made capable of an absolute self-responsibility on the basis of absolute theoretical insights."⁴⁹ Thus, for Husserl, objective knowledge is the key to the humanity's well-being.

POINTED IN YOUR DIRECTION: INTENTIONALITY AND THE EPOCHÉ

To this end, Husserl embarks on an explicitly Cartesian project of establishing a secure theoretical foundation for objective knowledge. And like Descartes, he begins by turning inward to the thinking subject. In his *Cartesian Meditations* Husserl writes that

⁴⁷ Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1960), 5.

⁴⁸ For further discussion of the humanistic motivations of Husserl's philosophy, see Thomas W. Busch, "Phenomenology as Humanism: The Case of Husserl and Sartre," *Research in Phenomenology*, 9:1, (January 1979): 127-143.

⁴⁹ Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 283.

following Descartes, we make the great reversal that, if made in the right manner, leads to transcendental subjectivity: the turn to the *ego cogito* as the ultimate and apodictically certain basis for judgments, the basis on which any radical philosophy must be grounded.⁵⁰

Although he does not continue with Descartes' program of radical doubt as to the existence of the objects we experience, in the fashion of the inward turn, Husserl directs our attention to the nature of our experiencing. He echoes those before him in emphasizing that while the objects of my experience may be doubtful, the experience itself is certain. However, he is innovative in asserting that if we can uncover the formal structures of that experience then we will have uncovered the universally applicable and objective bases for our knowing. Husserl begins from the insight that all consciousness is intentional, that is, it is consciousness *of* some object and directs itself toward its objects in particular ways. He then focuses on the ways in which a consciousness structured in this way constitutes, or shapes the understanding of, its objects. Thus Husserl pushes us to explore not the objects we experience, but the role subjectivity itself necessarily plays in structuring and giving meaning to that experience.

Husserl's most famous contribution, and the core of his phenomenological methodology, is the transcendental phenomenological reduction, known also as

⁵⁰ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 18.

the *epoché* or bracketing. Husserl asserts that in order to clearly examine the way that consciousness structures my experience, I must suspend all of my assumptions about what I understand the world around me to be. For example, while in my everyday life I take for granted the existence of the objects around me, in this new phenomenological attitude, I bracket the question of their existence in exchange for a description of how those objects appear to me in my consciousness. In turning my attention to my experience I discover that these objects are not merely there, but rather they appear *to me*. And it is *I* for whom they have meaning and existence. This *I*, or pure ego, as Husserl calls it, is not subject to the same bracketing. As Schmitt summarizes,

The transcendental-phenomenological reduction is called "transcendental" because it uncovers the ego for which everything has meaning and existence. It is called "phenomenological" because it transforms the world into mere phenomenon. It is called "reduction" because it leads us back (Lat. *reducere*) to the source of the meaning and existence of the experienced world, in so far as it is experienced, by uncovering intentionality.⁵¹

Thus, when I have effectively performed the reduction, I am led back to a subjectivity which transcends all objectification.

⁵¹ Richard Schmitt, "Husserl's Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 20:2 (Dec., 1959): 240.

Thus, the ego in such a phenomenological attitude stands as an observer of experience in a position to reevaluate what it knows about the world.

What was once a clear datum becomes a complex experience in need of clarification; what seemed actual becomes mere possibility ... We distinguish here... between what is "self-given" ... and what is merely associated opinion. It is here, in reflection, that the distinction between true belief and knowledge is first drawn.⁵²

To clarify the process by which "what seemed actual becomes mere possibility," let us take the example of applying the epoché to reflect on my experience seeing my house. If I what I see when I look at it from across the street, I may answer, "I see my home." But if I apply the methodology of the epoché, I will realize that what I actually *see*, what is given immediately in my experience, is the front of a building. I do not from this point see even the back of the building, much less the added dimension of it being "home." I realize that the fact that I perceive an entire house rather than just a front is because the other sides of the house while not directly presented to my line of sight, are *appresented* to me as an essential feature of perception.⁵³ That is, although I do not immediately see them, my experience of seeing contains with it an indication of the dimensions of things I cannot immediately see. The epoché allows me to differentiate my immediate

⁵² Schmitt, 243.

⁵³ For a more extended discussion of appresentation in Husserl, see Michael Theunissen, *The Other: Studies in the Social Ontology of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Buber*, trans. Christopher E. Macann (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1984), 45ff.

experience from the layers of meaning I add to the experience. It is, by analogy, like a homeowner going through the process of depersonalizing their “home” and putting it on the market for sale as a “house”. It is stripped of all personal attachments and renovated to appeal to the largest number of potential buyers. Similarly the epoché strips me of the meanings I have attached to my perceptions. As I reflect on the distinction between the physical structure I observe and the other attachments and assumptions I make about it, I come to a deeper understanding of the way in which the meaning of the structure is not something fixed but rather something I can contribute to establishing. Thus the epoché opens up the possibility of a process whereby meanings and understandings can be negotiated to “appeal to the largest number of potential buyers”, i.e. reduced to objectively verifiable and agreeable terms. Based on such a description of the reduction, we can begin to see how Husserl envisions a technique which is so dependent on subjective activity to contribute to objective knowledge.

Thus the epoché stands as a powerful tool for the examination of our knowledge of the world. But it also poses some important limitations. Because the goal of phenomenological methodology is an understanding how things appear in consciousness from first-person perspective, the subject employing the

epoché seems to be left in a sort of isolation or solipsism. That is, if the only thing I am ever evaluating is my own experience of the world, then what qualifies any of my evaluations as “objective”? Under this rubric there is very little that will allow me to distinguish between my hallucination of myself walking in the park or my actual walking in the park. It seems that Husserl’s very notion of objectivity is at risk here.

Further, while I may be able to experience feelings, memories, sense data, etc. first-hand, the one thing I can never experience first-hand is someone else’s consciousness. I cannot experience the other’s experience. At the core of the methodology of the reduction is the assertion that, because the intentional structure of consciousness is what makes first-hand experience possible, subjective consciousness itself transcends or lies outside the grasp of such object-oriented experience. Thus, while I may be able to be conscious of the other’s body or voice, I cannot ever experience the very thing that makes him a subject rather than an object. In fact, the only way that the other can appear to my consciousness at all is as its object.

EMPTY INTERSECTIONS: INTERSUBJECTIVITY

Husserl himself recognizes that the transcendental reduction seemed to entail an inability to move out of the bubble of my own subjective experience. In

fact, it seems to entail a solipsistic view of reality in which I can never legitimately verify or experience the subjectivity of the other. But he writes that

a transcendental solipsism is only a subordinate stage philosophically; though, as such, it must first be delimited for purposes of method, in order that the problems of transcendental intersubjectivity, as problems belonging to a higher level, may be correctly stated and attacked.⁵⁴

It seems the epoché is only the first stage in a program that will eventually lead not only to an explanation of subjective experience but also a foundation for *intersubjective* experience.

As Peter Hutcheson explains, the question of solipsism is usually conceived in terms of my ability to prove the existence of other minds. Because the epoché leads us to bracket questions of the existence of the objects we experience, including the subjectivity of other people, solipsism in terms of the existence of other minds is not really a question that is relevant to Husserl's analysis.⁵⁵ Rather, what is in question is our experience of them specifically *as* other subjects. Whether or not I can prove the existence of the subjectivity of other people, I experience them as other subjects. Husserl himself says as much:

the experienced Other, given to me in straightforward consciousness... I experience them at the same time as subjects for this world, as

⁵⁴ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 30-31.

⁵⁵ Peter Hutcheson, "Solipsistic and Intersubjective Phenomenology," *Human Studies*, 4:2 (Apr.- Jun., 1981): 166-168.

experiencing it (this same world that I experience) and, in so doing, experiencing me too, even as I experience the world and others in it.⁵⁶

In fact he has a very involved and complex explanation of how we can come to experience the other as other and affirm her role as subject and not just object.

His two main analyses of the dynamics of the self's experience of the other center on apperception and analogy.⁵⁷ As discussed above, Husserl posits that when I look at any three-dimensional object, I only actually perceive one side of it, previous experience tells me that it has another side; thus I experience the object as a whole object. One side is perceived, but the side out of my view is *apperceived*. Similarly, when I see the body of an other his subjectivity is *apperceived*. This apperception is effected by an analogy I make between his body and my own. I observe my own body as an object in the world and am aware of how my own subjectivity animates it; I then recognize that his body must be animated by an analogous subjectivity. Husserl insists that "apperception is not inference."⁵⁸ He asserts that these conscious processes he

⁵⁶ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 90-91.

⁵⁷ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 108-120.

⁵⁸ "There would be, accordingly, a certain assimilative apperception; but it by no means follows that there would be an inference from analogy. Apperception is not inference, not a thinking act. Every apperception in which we apprehend at a glance, and noticeably grasp, objects given beforehand for example, the already-given everyday world every apperception in which we understand their sense and its horizons forthwith, points back to a 'primal

has outlined are those by which I experience the other subject directly and not merely as an object of thought.

There is much debate as to whether Husserl's arguments have made him successful in overcoming the charge of solipsism; but it seems that he cannot escape the charge of objectification. Because he must describe the experience from the first-hand perspective of a transcendent subjectivity, he remains firmly within the paradigm of a subject experiencing an object. The other is always primarily a function of the appearance of their body in the world. While Husserl insists that it qualifies as experience, his analyses of apperception and analogy hinge on observation rather than encounter. There is little room in Husserl's model for encountering the other (in the Buberian sense) the other as a person rather than as a "subjectivity."

But perhaps the affirmation of the experience of the other's subjectivity affirms the other in a different way. As Matheson Russell explains, since Husserl's goal is to establish objectivity then

in my *own* experience of an object, I cannot constitute it (i.e. encounter it) *as* a real object unless the *sense* that I bestow upon it includes some reference to its possible appearance to others. That is, the intentional relation to something real must include within it (as a 'matter of eidetic

instituting', in which an object with a similar sense became constituted for the first time." Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 111.

necessity', as Husserl would say) a component pertaining to its possible appearance to others.⁵⁹

Objectivity by definition entails not only something's appearance to me but its appearance to other subjects. Thus, if Husserl's philosophy is to make any sense at all, the actual existence and experience of the other must be taken for granted.

Husserl himself seems to support this interpretation when he writes,

The existence-sense [*Seinssinn*] of the world and of Nature in particular, as Objective Nature, includes after all, as we have already mentioned, thereness-for-everyone. This is always cointended wherever we speak of Objective actuality.⁶⁰

I achieve "objectivity" when there is harmony between my experience of the world and that of others in my community. "By bringing its representations into attunement, the community together constitutes the one identical world in which each individual... places itself."⁶¹ Thus Husserl's program of exploring first-person experience seems to rise and fall on the participation of the other in that experience.

So have we found a modern Cartesian model of the self that establishes the value of the other in-himself? Has an amplification of independent subjectivity occasioned a view of the other as an independent center of value?

⁵⁹ Matheson Russell, *Husserl: A Guide for the Perplexed*, (London: Continuum International Publishing, 2006), 165.

⁶⁰ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 92.

⁶¹ Russell, 169.

Unfortunately, no. The role of the other's subjectivity is still held captive to the needs of the self. In this context

Intersubjectivity or 'intersubjective experience' is that manner of experiencing the world in which one's experience is mediated by an awareness of others' experience of the same. Intersubjectivity, in this sense, is not equivalent to the experience of other conscious beings *per se*.⁶²

Thus, intersubjectivity turns out to be about the world but still not about the other as a transcendental ego in his own right. Even though the importance of the other's subjectivity is affirmed, it is affirmed not for its uniqueness, lovability, or dignity, for example, but simply for its instrumentality in establishing objective knowledge. The other remains a means, not an end. As Russell comments, "Husserl's interest in the phenomenon of intersubjectivity is occasioned primarily by its intimate interconnection with the phenomena of reality, transcendence and Objectivity. The community of egos vouches for the reality of *my* experience of *my* world."⁶³ The other is in fact there as an undeniable part of my experience, but his primary value is as a vouchsafe or guarantor for my ability to experience the world meaningfully.

Thus, Husserl's work provides an explicit application of Cartesian modes of thought in the twentieth century context; it also gives a clear example of the

⁶² Russell, 163.

⁶³ Russell, 170. Emphasis added.

resulting alienation between self and other when objective knowledge by an isolated transcendental subject is given such a monopoly in our approach to human experience. The disregard for the dimension of interpersonal encounter is a necessary feature of the structure of his overall project. Russell adeptly characterizes the consequences of this model:

The idea of the Objective 'in-itself' stands over against my personal representations and understandings of the world and forces me into a process of rationalization, experimentation and debate in pursuit of a conception of the world that is *truly Objective* and which therefore commands rational assent by everyone... My personal perceptions and judgements take on the relative validity of 'truthclaims': claimants or pretenders to recognition by the community of egos as truths, but with no intrinsic priority over any others. The consequence is the development of an ever more sophisticated 'scientific' (i.e. Objective) conception of the world. An inevitable tendency of this process of scientific 'Objectification', however, is a steady move *away from* 'subjective' descriptions of the world as it is given in the fullness of my lived-experience *towards* a mathematized view of the world, described in terms of objective space and time. Only such objectified notions of the world can hope to attain universal assent. But, as this process accelerates, the distance between the 'true world' of science and the world of my experience (i.e. the 'apparent world') widens. My entire realm of first-person experience comes to be regarded as a mere 'veil of appearances' hiding the Objective world described by the sciences.⁶⁴

Thus, the world becomes the place where self and other intersect, but also from which the significance and character of subjective experience is progressively emptied. Unfortunately, despite admirable intentions, Husserl leaves us with a

⁶⁴ Russell, 166-167.

system in which the common ground is transformed into an increasing distance between self and other.

DEAD END: HEIDEGGER

Moving on to Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), we find another figure who helps to set the philosophical stage for Sartre's developing thought. Adapting Husserl's original insights, Heidegger develops a phenomenology that centers on the experience of being, rather than the experience of consciousness. Heidegger is a particularly apt next step in this exploration because one of his primary aims is to dissolve the dynamic of objectification created by the Cartesian model of the self discussed above. As Matthias Fritsch describes,

Heidegger seeks to return to a self a 'power of existing' that does not, in the first instance, draw its strength from recognition by others or by mastering a material world at its disposal... The concern...is to be directed toward a self that is genuinely one's own without being masterable or indicating a pre-given essence. It is a self that, as possibility—the "possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do or think," as Foucault put it so plainly but memorably... opens itself toward a future that remains unownable and unknowable.⁶⁵

Heidegger seeks to reveal a fundamental aspect of the self which is not dictated by its objective or objectified place in its material or social world. To do so

⁶⁵ Matthias Fritsch, "Cura et Casus: Heidegger and Augustine on the Care of the Self," in *The Influence of Augustine on Heidegger: The Emergence of an Augustinian Phenomenology*, ed. Craig de Paulo (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), 92.

Heidegger conducts a magnification of subjective experience to reveal the infinite potentiality of the self that defies the Cartesian model's attempt to understand the self and the world as reified actualities. The analysis discussed above demonstrates how through the consolidation of Augustinian inwardness in Descartes the other becomes an object to be used at the discretion of the self; instead of harboring intrinsic value and meaning within itself, the other becomes merely a material positivity on which to impose the self. In Heidegger's appropriation we discover what happens to the orientation towards the other in general when the determining element of the self is conceived in radically different terms, specifically in terms of negativity rather than positivity.

FROM SUBJECTIVITY TO ENACTMENT

For Heidegger, the distinguishing factor of a human being is that it is an "entity which in its Being has this very Being as an issue."⁶⁶ In simpler words, human beings are concerned about the meaning of their existence. It is not enough for them *that* they are, but they are deeply involved with *why* and *how* they are as well. For Heidegger human being is centered on the first-hand experience of having a self that is constantly engaged in finding the meaning of

⁶⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 68.

being itself. The self is a kind of enactment of itself. Looking back to the source of the inward turn, Heidegger recognizes Augustine's unique insights into this aspect of the human condition; he then enacts a direct transformation of Augustine's work to function in a situation where Augustine's assumptions about God and world are no longer acceptable. Heidegger develops enactment as the central idea in his examination of Augustine's relationship with and search for God in *Confessions*. This focus is clearly expressed in the following excerpt from his commentary on the significance of Augustine's search:

... in my search of God, something in me does not only reach "expression," but makes up my facticity and my concern for it. (According to what do I recognize and grasp something as God? What gives the fulfillment of meaning: "sat est" [it suffices]? Vita [Life].) That means, in searching for this something as God, I myself assume a completely different role. I am not only the one from whose place the search proceeds and moves towards some place, or the one in whom the search takes place; but the enactment of the search itself is something of the self. What does it mean that I "am"? (The self gains an "idea" of itself, what kind of idea I have of myself. Kierkegaard)⁶⁷

Using the above quote from Heidegger's lectures as a guide we can begin to explore how his understanding of the self is shaped by his distinctive appropriation of Augustine. First, we notice a transformation of emphasis

⁶⁷ Martin Heidegger, "Augustine and Neo-Platonism Early Freiburg Lecture, Summer Semester 1921," in *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, trans. Matthias Fritsch and Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 120-123. Hereafter *Lectures*.141.

between Augustine and Heidegger. For Heidegger the enactment is the search for something the self can recognize "as God." Heidegger asserts that it is the subjective relation to or attitude towards the God that is central. Heidegger recognizes that it is an orientation toward an absolute that is a search not only for meaning (an objective or epistemic answer), but for satisfaction (an existential or experiential sense of completeness). He highlights that the activity is formative for the self. It is in the search that the self constitutes something of what it is to be itself. The activity is constitutive, not just the expression of a fixed being. It is in the activity that the self moves towards completeness or satisfaction. It is the activity of searching, not the object of the search that is constitutive of the self. Heidegger adapts Augustine's understanding of the search for God as the search for self in such a way that the centrality of God is effectively eliminated from the equation.

FROM ENACTMENT TO DEATH

But while Heidegger has adapted Augustinian insights on the nature of the self to marginalize the need for Augustine's God, the adapted model retains the Augustinian structure of seeking an other at the base of the self. So in order for the self to still be able to perform as a self-constituting enactment, Heidegger must find a new other to replace the God he has removed. As Fritsch notes, "In

Being and Time death will take the place of God as that in relation to which the self may gain itself authentically;"⁶⁸ in his Augustine lectures we see how Heidegger effects this transition.

Looking back at our guiding quote we will find a reference to Kierkegaard that will help us in tracing this transition. As Fritsch explains, Kierkegaard is important to Heidegger in formulating his ideas on how the self becomes most fully itself. Heidegger cites Kierkegaard directly in another section detailing the "enactmental complex" of the structure of the self noting, "The criterion for the self is always: that directly before which it is a self; but that in turn is the definition of 'criterion.' The greater the concept of God, the more self there is; the more self, the greater the conception of God."⁶⁹ Fritsch notes that Heidegger appropriates from Kierkegaard the idea that a self becomes "most fully itself if it radically relates itself to that which it is not." But Heidegger takes it a step further by asserting that, "such a relation is radical if the self risks itself in it..."⁷⁰ Heidegger writes, "In the last and purest concern for oneself lurks the possibility of the most abyssal fall, and of authentically losing oneself."⁷¹ For Heidegger the

⁶⁸ Fritsch, 98.

⁶⁹ Kierkegaard as cited in Heidegger, *Lectures*, 186.

⁷⁰ Fritsch, 98.

⁷¹ Heidegger, *Lectures*, 180.

self is most fully engaged in enacting itself when it is put into contact with something which is the limit of all its possibilities as a self. When faced with something radically other than itself the self is forced to actively define itself in relation or risk losing itself in the other. For Heidegger, death provides this radical other which poses the necessary risk.

Augustine is traditionally seen as positing what Heidegger would call the self's "ownmost possibility" as eternal life in the knowledge of and communion with its creator God; Therefore it might seem odd that a direct appropriation of Augustine replaces the ownmost possibility of life with death; but we can shed a bit more light on how Heidegger finds this transition. In *Confessions X* Augustine asks "What is it that I love when I love You?"⁷² And later writes, "in seeking You, my God, it is happiness that I am seeking."⁷³ Heidegger takes the latter as the answer to the former.⁷⁴ In doing so Heidegger is able to interpret Augustine as making one's own experience of happiness in life the central concern. In *Confession s X.xxi-xxii* Augustine explains that, regardless of the

⁷² Augustine, *Confessions*, X.vi.

⁷³ Augustine, *Confessions*, X.xx.

⁷⁴ Daniel Dahlstrom, "The Phenomenological Reformation in Heidegger's Early Augustine Lectures," in *The Influence of Augustine on Heidegger: The Emergence of an Augustinian Phenomenology*, ed., Craig de Paulo (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), 211-212.

different ways in which people pursue it, the experience of happiness is the end to which all human efforts aim; or as he puts it in his commentary on Psalm 7, *delectatio finis curae* [delight is the end of care]. In the end Augustine hopes to direct his readers' attention to the fact that God is the ultimate good and delight of the self- the only one which cannot be stripped away by time, circumstance, or folly.

Heidegger centers his analysis of Augustine's discussion of temptation toward and away from delight in the following chapters of *Confessions* around Augustine's argument that delight is the end of our worldly concerns. We can see Heidegger's interpretation as an extension of Augustine's exposition of how death threatens to strip one of the goods that make him happy. Dodaro summarizes Augustine's argument succinctly:

In his various writings, Augustine... reasons that in fearing death, the soul fears the diminishment of the goods which it most desires... the prospect of death leads [one] to fear the loss of the many temporal goods in his possession.⁷⁵

Heidegger pays particular attention to this experience of fear or conflict present in the pursuit of delight. For example, Heidegger keys in on Augustine's

⁷⁵ Robert Dodaro, "The Fear of Death in the Thought of Augustine of Hippo," in *The Influence of Augustine on Heidegger: The Emergence of an Augustinian Phenomenology*, ed. Craig de Paulo (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), 34-35.

comments that in times of adversity he seeks prosperity and even in times of prosperity he fears adversity.⁷⁶ Heidegger expands on Augustine's analysis of these mixed feelings with regard to the pursuit of the *beata vita* to underscore how a sense of conflict underlies all aspects of human experience. He writes, "Thus the enactment of experience is always insecure about itself. In the complex of experience, there is no *medius locus* [middle ground] where there are not also counter possibilities... In experiencing, a devilish being-torn-apart has been uncovered."⁷⁷ In effect, Heidegger is making the point that, despite Augustine's points to the contrary, it is care, not delight, which is the defining factor of human existence. It is because one is concerned for himself, for his delight, that he experiences both fear and desire as "co-present" in all the pursuits of his possibilities.

Augustine's analysis of this sense of threat that the self's current situation could be otherwise is a major contribution to Heidegger's ability to replace death as the radical other before which the self comes to authentically be itself. Death is the absolute threat, not just that one's current goods are stripped from her, but that her experience of happiness or the possibility of pursuing happiness will

⁷⁶ Heidegger, *Lectures*, 153.

⁷⁷ Heidegger, *Lectures*, 154.

end altogether. In facing death the self faces the possibility of losing the very thing that makes it a self— its ability to enact its possibilities.

But if Heidegger needs to replace an other at the very core of the self—one which is *interior intimo meo*⁷⁸ as Augustine would say — defining the self in the face of something radically other does not seem to fit the bill. Something which is so radically other as to threaten loss of the self rather than promise its fulfillment seems to be the exact opposite of what would complete the model. But because Heidegger is modeling a conception of self in which enactment rather than substance or knowledge is central, the factor of possibility takes on a key role in reconciling this seeming contradiction in the definition of the self. There are always a range of possibilities which the self can enact. It is the ones it chooses to enact that make it the self it is. But for every self, death is always the one possibility which it will inevitably enact. It is the self's final possibility and as such it is the end of all its possibilities. It is at once the most personal and the most foreign possibility for a living self. It is at once the self's "ownmost" possibility, in that it is the only possibility that is guaranteed to the self, and radically other in that in death the self can no longer be itself. For Heidegger

⁷⁸ Augustine, *Confessions*, III.vi.11. Sheed translates this as: "more inward than the most inward place of my heart."

death is the other in the face of which the self has the greatest risk of losing itself. There is no loss more authentic or radical. It is in light of death- the end of possibility- that an authentic self enacts its possibilities. Thus, for Heidegger, death is the radical other which also lies at the very core of what it is to be a self.

Heidegger's model of the self as enactment in the face of death, or as a "being-towards-death" as he will call it in *Being and Time*, has the effect of finding a fundamental structure of the self which "cannot become a publicly accessible and scientifically objectified relation, as it indicates the relation that can only be actualized, enacted, or performed in each case uniquely, by an individual from within his or her own factual lifeworld."⁷⁹ By having the self defined in relation to death as its "ownmost possibility" Heidegger provides for a model of the self which resists the objectifying dynamic of the Cartesian self by maintaining all selves as individualized centers of enactment. Through the radical privatization of possibilities made possible by Heidegger's particular transformation of Augustinian inwardness the self can be maintained as a subject which resists both being defined by objective and public standards and therefore from seeing these as the fundamental criterion by which to measure the other.

⁷⁹ Fritsch, 99.

For Heidegger, authentic selves are occupied only with constantly defining and enacting themselves, not with defining and objectifying the other.

FROM DEATH TO SOLITUDE

But while the Heideggerian self seems to have overcome the dynamic of objectification of the other, there remains a serious consequence of defining the self in terms of itself alone. By removing the substantive other from the equation Heidegger leaves the self alone- without an other from which it can draw to become most authentically itself. For Heidegger the pursuit of authentic life is an individualized and private endeavor; but because of this structure it is an endeavor in which authentic relationship is eclipsed. Removing the personal other as a constitutive element of the self, Heidegger leaves the self in isolation without the possibility of authentic relation in the forms of communion or love. In the end, the Heideggerian self is just as self-centered and isolated as the Cartesian self. The other to which it relates is only an empty shadow of itself. While Heidegger may have succeeded in preventing the self from seeing the other as an object, he has done so by preventing the self from seeing the other at all.

Ironically, Heidegger's analysis seems to result in a vision of the relation between self and other which follows and extends the negative implications of

the Cartesian trajectory rather than countering it. Although he uses a completely different approach, Heidegger, like Descartes, amplifies the subject at the expense of the object. In the end, instead of finding itself at home within an ordered world, as does the consummated self of Augustine, or even facing an unordered world from without, like the radically independent self of Descartes, the self in Heidegger's appropriation finds itself in the world facing only itself as an infinite abyss. Having removed a knowing and loving personal other from the heart of human experience and replaced it with death, there is no longer a positive other to know, much less love.

....

BROKEN BRIDGES: SARTRE'S INHERITANCE

By the time Sartre was writing *Being and Nothingness* in the early 1940's the philosophical landscape in France was undergoing a radical shift. In the wake of World War I and in the throes of World War II, the faith in the rationality and perfectibility of humanity that had dominated European philosophy since the Enlightenment was decidedly eroding. It is here in the inter-war and post-war period that we see the beginnings of the thought that would mature into the movements of existentialism, structuralism, and deconstruction that characterized postmodern thought and aimed to reestablish the relationship

between self, other, and world by dislodging the self from the center of the relation.⁸⁰ Inroads made by Heidegger's thought into France had amplified the understanding of human being as a condition in which the project of self-enactment takes place within a framework in which the subject is firmly embedded in the world in, through, and against which he acts. The French reception of Heidegger confirmed a view of "human reality"⁸¹ as one in which "all subjective access to the surrounding world [is] borne through the engagement with, the knowledge of, and the commitment to this very world," and thus lacking "any ground in structures extraneous to and distinct from the world."⁸² As Stefanos Geroulanos characterizes it, there came an

overturning of the classical transcendental juxtaposition of subject to object, which in turn led to... a kind of philosophical "realism" that denies man any kind of transcendental separation from the reality he finds himself in, attributes to him a contribution to this reality, and forces him to accept his powerlessness to radically change—or escape from—it.⁸³

While embracing Husserl's key insight into the subject's role in the constitution of the "world," subsequent thought rejected his assertion of the

⁸⁰ For a detailed discussion of the historical, philosophical, and political factors that contributed to such a shift, see Stefanos Geroulanos, *An Atheism That Is Not Humanist Emerges in French Thought* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

⁸¹ *Réalité humaine* was the initial French translation of Heidegger's key term *Dasein* (in English, literally, "being-there") which he coined in order to highlight the particular nature of human being-in-the-world.

⁸² Geroulanos, 79.

⁸³ Geroulanos, 51.

transcendence or independence of the ego in that process. Thus the optimistic humanism inherent in Husserl's project of establishing an objective and well-defined view of the world was giving way to a paradigm of thought in which man was no longer the transcendent observer in control of nature and constituting the world to one in which forces beyond his control entrap, constitute, and dominate him.

It is in concert with and in response to such thinking that Sartre throws his hat into ring to challenge the Cartesian conception of the subject which so many blamed for the breakdowns of modern society exemplified and embodied in the World Wars. Sartre sought to "establish a new conception of subjectivity which took into account the sense of entrapment in the world and the sense for a need to act not reduced to humanism but still reflected in the ethics of resistance."⁸⁴ Sartre tries to provide a corrective that mediates between and responds to the several new and pressing problems arising in his day.

To begin, Sartre has inherited from Husserl (and the Cartesian tradition in general) the problem of accounting for human experience of the other as a subject and not just an object. As discussed above, although Husserl has

⁸⁴ Geroulanos, 218.

attempted to overcome his solipsistic view of the world and objectivized view of the other, his attempts seem to fall short. He interposes the world between self and other and characterizes human reality as one in which objectivity can be achieved and struggle can be overcome. In light of the ongoing conflict raging across Europe in Sartre's day, Husserl's model appears to fall short of providing an adequate description of reality. Husserl's world is just a bit too manageable and, being the bridge between self and other, puts the other at too safe a distance.

Heidegger's thought moves beyond Husserl's in that it presents the self as deeply enmeshed in and entangled by the world. Unlike for Husserl's subject, it is impossible for the Heideggerian subject to stand back from the world and observe it as if it were not already a part of her own "enactment complex." Amplifying Husserl's insight about the subjective aspect of the self's engagement with the world, Heidegger effectively erodes the role of the objective aspect and the role of the other in determining values for the self. In presenting the self as a being-toward-death whose enactment is based solely on the choices through which it expresses itself, Heidegger effectively reduces values to those of the self's choosing. Where Husserl's model used the world to put distance between self and other, Heidegger's uses the world to eclipse the other. Heidegger's

model accounts for the complexity of the self's involvement in the world, but not of his involvement with the other.

The third problem which Sartre seeks to address gets to the heart of a more practical concern: he seeks to establish a basis for human striving in a situation where, following Heidegger, the objectivity of values and goals has been destroyed. As a Prisoner of War and member of the French resistance during World War II, Sartre experienced firsthand the immediacy of the drive to stand up for the vision of the world one values even in the face of overwhelming opposition from a conflicting vision. For Sartre, the experience of the other as an imminent threat to the self is too great and too immediate to have an entire world imposed between them. And in the absence of an objective goal toward which they both strive, Sartre must come up with another explanation for this dynamic of conflict he sees as so essential to human reality.

As he embarks upon his major philosophical work in the middle of the twentieth century, Sartre is left with a thoroughly Cartesian self that while newly enmeshed in the world remains alienated from the other. The destruction of the possibility of an objective vision of the world has left it to create its own and thus made it autonomous. The inevitability of conflict has left it with an imperative to be assertive, and its entrapment in its world has left it alone. The modern self is

one which Sartre inherits but does not seek to overcome. Rather, as we will see, his description exemplifies and amplifies these characteristics with the conclusion that, "It is therefore useless for human reality to get out of this dilemma: one must either transcend the Other or allow oneself to be transcended by him. The essence of the relations between consciousnesses is not [Being-with]; it is conflict."⁸⁵

It is the goal of this study to reopen the case that seems for Sartre to be so decisively closed. Using Augustine as an ancient source and postmodern resource I will explore the possibility of responding to the Sartrean self in a way that creates space for engagement with the other that is not based on conflict but rather meaningful encounter.

⁸⁵ Sartre, *BN*, 555.

CHAPTER 2. THE OTHER IN THE SELF: AUGUSTINIAN (RE)DIRECTIONS

Thus we have seen how Augustine's successors have made use of Augustine's ingenious inward turn to the self. But the self as conceived by Augustine was subject to certain constraints lost in these modern transformations. In an essay in Caputo and Scanlon's *Augustine and Postmodernism*, Jean Bethke Elshtain comments that "Augustine.... anticipates postmodern strategies in dethroning the Cartesian subject even before that subject got erected."⁸⁶ The phrasing of Elshtain's statement is clearly a bit anachronistic and misdirects the reader as to Augustine's original goals, but it nonetheless speaks to resources that postmodern thinkers have found in Augustine's own work for deposing the very concept of the subject he is accused of founding.

To discover the roots of these resources we must look at the assumptions Augustine made about the self that were eroded in later developments. Exploring some of these key ideas we can discover some safeguards that Augustine's ancient self had against the failings of the modern self.

⁸⁶ Jean Bethke Elshtain, "Why Augustine? Why Now?" In *Augustine and Postmodernism: Confessions and Circumfession*, eds. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 246.

ESTABLISHING THE DISTANCE: REDIRECTING PLOTINUS

The first resource we find in Augustine is a model of self which affirms the other as a center of value in its own right. We will begin by exploring Augustine's appropriation of Neoplatonic theory through the thought of Plotinus. Philip Cary argues that it was Plotinus's belief that one could find God within the self that initially prompted Augustine's "inward turn." But Cary goes on to show how Augustine's location of the *other* within the self is actually an innovation of his own.

Throughout the *Confessions* Augustine pursues the question of where and how to come to know God. He struggles to understand how an incorporeal God can be found within a corporeal and spatial universe. He writes, that "whatever I tried to see as not in space, seemed to me to be nothing, absolutely nothing... My mind was in search of such images as my eye was accustomed to see."⁸⁷ Augustine sought to know God as he would know any other object in the material world. But in reading "some books of the Platonists"⁸⁸ he finally found the key insights that pointed him to look to the soul within, rather than toward

⁸⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, VII.i.2.

⁸⁸ Augustine, *Confessions*, VII.ix.13.

objects without, to find the answer to his quest. In the writings of Plotinus,⁸⁹

Augustine is encouraged to

consider a soul, not one that has appropriated the unreasoned desires and impulses of the bodily life, or any other such emotion and experience, but one that has cast all this aside, and as far as possible has no commerce with the bodily... he will not doubt his immortality when he sees himself thus entered into the pure, the Intellectual. For, what he sees is an Intellectual-Principle looking on nothing of sense, nothing of this mortality, but by its own eternity having intellection of the eternal...For it is not by running hither and thither outside of itself that the soul understands morality and right conduct....⁹⁰

For Plotinus, entanglement in the physical world outside the self entailed an estrangement from the immaterial, eternal, and divine nature which was the source of life. It is a focus on the bodily that obscures one's knowledge of the divine. Here Augustine is told that in order to come to know the immaterial God, he must turn away from the material world and instead focus on the immaterial soul. By reading Plotinus, he realizes that that while bodily things are close at hand and easy to observe, there is something closer that the self can contemplate and by means of which it can find God—its own soul.

But for Plotinus, the key to locating God is not only in the type of object being observed, but also in the nature of the observing. He writes,

⁸⁹ See Cary, 31-35 for a discussion of the Neoplatonic sources available to Augustine.

⁹⁰ Plotinus, *The Six Enneads*, trans., Stephen MacKenna and B.S. Page (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 4.7.10.

Similarly any one, unable to see himself, but possessed by that God, has but to bring that divine — within before his consciousness and at once he sees an image of himself, himself lifted to a better beauty: now let him ignore that image, lovely though it is, and sink into a perfect self-identity, no such separation remaining... if he plans to see in separation, he sets himself outside...to see the divine as something external is to be outside of it; to become it is to be most truly in beauty: since sight deals with the external, there can here be no vision unless in the sense of identification with the object. And this identification amounts to a self-knowing, a self-consciousness...⁹¹

There are two things to note here. First, that one comes to know God by first coming to know the self. The agent of knowing is the self and the object of its knowledge is also the self. Second, that the type of knowledge that obtains enacts a union between the self and the divine. Cary explains that,

In contrast to mortal vision, [this type of] intellectual knowledge does not leave us as mere spectators of something other than ourselves. Ultimately, contemplation is not like seeing something outside oneself, but rather is a way of being reunified with the ground of one's own being, which is the ground of all being... [In contemplative ascent] we leave behind the... duality between knower and known... we do not *see* the One, nor even know it, but are made one with it.⁹²

For Plotinus, to know one's own soul in its pure form was to know the divine in the most intimate sense. One turned inward to find God because inwardly one was God. "The Soul once seen to be thus precious, thus divine, you may hold the faith that by its possession you are already nearing God: in the strength of this power make upwards towards Him: at no great distance you must attain: there is

⁹¹ Plotinus, *Enneads*, 5.8.11.

⁹² Cary, 42.

not much between.”⁹³ In contemplation, the space between self and God is collapsed and the soul becomes aware of the divinity that has been its nature all along. The union effected is a reintegration of the soul with itself.

It is in both his embrace and transformation of this concept of union with God that we find the resources Augustine gives us for understanding the other as an integral part of the self. Augustine accepted Plotinus’ insights as to the “location” of God within the self.⁹⁴ Augustine’s own experience confirmed Plotinus’ insights that “running hither and thither outside the self” only leads the soul to dissipation and despair.⁹⁵ He also recognized truth in Plotinus’ conception of the soul’s need to be reintegrated with the more spiritual aspects of itself, to become a whole instead of parts.⁹⁶ However, his Christian commitments would not allow him to accept the identification of God with the self. Augustine cannot concede that in that reintegration the soul achieves divinity. Whereas Plotinus asserts that there is “no great distance” between the soul and its divine source, Augustine holds quite the opposite. He asserts that the divine source of

⁹³ Plotinus, *Enneads*, 5.1.3.

⁹⁴ Cary discusses how Augustine’s commitment to locating God within also has a source in Biblical language about Christ and the “Inner Man”. See p. 47ff.

⁹⁵ Augustine writes of his experience chasing the lusts of the flesh, “I was tossed about and wasted and poured out and boiling over in my fornications.” *Confessions*, II.ii.2.

⁹⁶ Augustine prays to be “collected and bound up into unity within ourself, whereas we had been scattered about in multiplicity.” *Confessions*, X.xxix.40.

life “was above because it made me, and I was below because made by it.”⁹⁷

Because Augustine believes thoroughly in the gap between creator and creature, Augustine adds a new dimension to the directions he is given in the writings of Plotinus: in addition to looking in, to find God one had to look up.

Cary explains that Augustine’s addition of this upward dimension establishes an “ontological gap” between the soul and God⁹⁸ allowing for a true *other* at the very core of the self. We see that under the traditional Neoplatonic perspective, unity with the divine was simply a matter of understanding the nature of the self; the unity between self and other dissolves the distinction between them thereby abolishing the identity of either. In contrast, Augustinian thought builds on Neoplatonic conceptions to encourage integration of self in *conjunction* with an other. He asserts that as created beings, humans are not privy to unmitigated divine self-knowledge; but as their creator, God knows their every facet. And so in his redirection of Plotinian insights Augustine writes,

Let me know **Thee** who knowest me, *let me know thee even as I am known*...there is something of man that the very spirit of man that is in him does not know. But **You** Lord know all of him, for **you** made him...I

⁹⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, VII.x.16.

⁹⁸ Cary, 42.

will confess therefore what I know of myself and what I do not know; for what I know of myself I know through the shining of **your** light...⁹⁹

So in the most intimate activity of self-knowing he finds that what is definitive for his success is the activity of an other.

But in addition to the space created between knower and known, there is also a transformation in the direction of knowing that performs the reintegration of the self. For Augustine, knowledge of the self also comes from outside, not just the inside. The agent of knowing that turns out to be definitive in the Augustinian dynamic of self-knowledge is not only the self, but also God. We can see from the quote above that Augustine's search for God stems from his desire for some measure of self-understanding that he has not been able to attain. In his coming to know God, Augustine finds that he can only do so because God already knows him. Augustine writes, "No nature exists save because You know it."¹⁰⁰ Thus, God's knowledge not only determines him, but also is the source of his very existence. As mentioned above, God is not the contributor of a certain aspect of his being, but is the very source of his entire being, including its rational nature. God's knowing him is the ontological basis of his being and it

⁹⁹ Augustine, *Confessions*, X.i.1 and X.v.7 Bold emphasis added.

¹⁰⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, VII.iv.6.

also ensures that his being is by nature intelligible. It is only because he is totally known by an other that he has any chance of knowing himself.

In the contemporary context, Augustine's concerns about maintaining the space and relation between divinity and humanity may not be as pressing, however his understanding of the self as an arena which can be permeated and filled by the influence of an other is valuable. In the Augustinian anthropology we find a basis for a fundamental relatedness to the other;¹⁰¹ his attitude toward being known by God is directly transferable to his attitude toward being known by others in general. Peter Brown comments that Augustine was a man who "felt compelled to reveal himself." And in writing *Confessions* he "was glad to have an audience whose ideal of friendship had prepared them to listen without contempt."¹⁰² Through revelation Augustine intends to effect a relation of love. Augustine writes, "To such shall I show myself...that...many should pray to You for me... So let the mind of my brethren act... who rejoice for what they see good in me and are grieved for what they see ill, but whether they see good or ill, still

¹⁰¹ Charles T. Mathewes, "Augustinian Anthropology: Interior intimo meo." *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, 27:2 (Summer, 1999): 216.

¹⁰² Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography, Revised Edition with a New Epilogue* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 153.

love me.”¹⁰³ For Augustine, the possibility of being totally known by an other seems to enhance his ability to establish his own identity. As Brown notes, the more Augustine’s friends know about him, the more he is able to obtain “constant response and reassurance” about the aspects of himself which he knows he cannot see from his limited perspective. The ability to rely on his friends’ knowledge, “both to know that he was loved, and to know that there was something worth loving, encouraged him greatly to love in return.”¹⁰⁴ Augustine is not only open to letting the other’s knowledge of himself shape his understanding of himself, but also he is intent on using that knowledge to build even stronger positive relationships.

When Augustine writes, “Let me know Thee who knowest me, *let me know thee even as I am known,*” he is speaking to God, but as noted above, the attitude is transferable to the human other as well. In stark contrast to the model that develops in Cartesian modernity, Augustine gives us resources for a model in which there is a desire to know the other not as an object or extension of the self, but rather as a rational subject in his own right. Augustine uses the desire for self-knowledge as the basis for personal relation with the other who can

¹⁰³ Confessions, X.iv.

¹⁰⁴ Brown, 195.

reciprocate. Instead of striving for a dissolution of the distinction between self and other, Augustine recognizes that he is not self-standing and seeks to know the other as an other in his own right while simultaneously constructing knowledge of himself. At first glance it may seem that he only values knowing the other in order to satisfy his own purposes; but he is in fact first seeking to know the other on his or her own terms. In so doing, Augustine puts forth a model where the other's value is not grounded in the self; rather, it is discovered and affirmed in the process of the self's relating itself to the other as a knowing subject, not an object.

MOVING CLOSER: REDEFINING PLATO

The next key resource in Augustinian thought for remedying the failing of the modern self is the assumption of an established and inherent order in the universe of which all of us are a part. Augustine's quest to gain insight into this order was central to his entire career and body of writing.¹⁰⁵ We saw above how it was through the insights he found in Platonist and Neoplatonist teachings that Augustine was able to find his way in and up to God. But just as his belief in creation dictated his understanding of the distance between self and other, his

¹⁰⁵ Nello Cipirani, O.S.A., "Ethics" in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, edited by Allan Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999), 322.

understanding of the order established in that creation further dictated his interpretation of the union possible between self and other.

We noted in Chapter 1 that Augustine's unique appropriation of the Platonic theory of Forms as ideas in the mind of God led to a unique focus on the activity of knowing. But left out of Taylor's discussion is the focus on the order entailed by that intelligible realm. Cary explains that Augustine's appropriation of Platonic insights entailed a translation of the term "Idea" into a conception more fitting to the Christian framework:

Noting that several names for Platonic Forms were in use—not only "Ideas" (*idea*) but also "Forms" (*formae* and *species*)— [Augustine] adds that "Reasons" (*rationes*) is a good name for them too, even though the word (*ratio* in the singular) translates the Greek *logos* rather than any of Plato's technical terms for the ideas. This turns out to be a key move in his argument to persuade Christians to accept Plato's Forms, for among the many meanings of *ratio* is "plan" in an architectural sense (like a modern blueprint)... Hence he argues that any Christian, believing in the doctrine of creation, will surely believe that God had such a plan in mind as he created—else he created without reason... And the Forms are simply those eternal plans or models in God's mind, by which he created the world.

For Augustine and his Christian audience, the idea that there is a rationality inherent in creation is a given because the God who created it is "not a God of disorder"¹⁰⁶ and does not create without reason. Every aspect of his creation has

¹⁰⁶ I Corinthians 14:33.

a designated function and purpose which contributes to the beauty of the whole.¹⁰⁷

It is this acceptance of a given order that most sets the Augustinian self apart from the Cartesian and modern self. Although Taylor notes and explains many differences between Descartes and Augustine, there does not seem to be enough emphasis in his account on this distinction. For example, Taylor writes the following about Augustine:

To focus on my own thinking activity is to bring to attention not only the order of things in the cosmos which I seek to *find* but also the order I *make* as I struggle to plumb the depths of memory and discern my true being. In the *Confessions* Augustine reflects how our thoughts “must be rallied and drawn together again, that they may be known; that is to say they must as it were be collected and gathered together from their dispersions: whence the word ‘cogitation’ is derived”. And Augustine goes on to point out the etymological link between ‘*cogitare*’ and ‘*cogere*’= ‘to bring together’ or ‘to collect’. This understanding of thinking as a kind of inner assembly of an order we construct will be put to a revolutionary new use by Descartes.¹⁰⁸

To say that in the *Confessions* the order imposed on the self is an order “we construct” is to fundamentally misunderstand what self-knowledge is for Augustine. To come to know the self is to know it as God knows it in the total

¹⁰⁷ See Augustine, *City of God*, XI.22-23. Even evil can be seen as having a purpose in view of the broad picture and purposes of creation. Or *Handbook on Faith, Hope and Love*, 3.11: “In this universe, even what is called evil, when it is rightly ordered and kept in its place, commends the good more eminently, since good things yield greater pleasure and praise when compared to the bad things.”

¹⁰⁸ Taylor, 141.

idea he has of it in its creation. The activity and purpose of the self is already known, already constructed. The Augustinian self is a self that seeks to *re-*construct itself according to a pattern already established. While his narrative begins from a place of dissipation due to the sin of the Fall, Augustine's theoretical starting point is the perfect creation. His reconstruction is performed with this orientation.¹⁰⁹ Not to note the difference between this project and Descartes' project is to see Augustine's view of the self as a beginning and not a middle. For Augustine a holistic and holy creation stands before and at the end of the self being reconstructed in the *Confessions*. To identify the Augustinian self with a project of original construction is to miss its entire motivation and structure. The *re-making* of the self according to the pattern that it *finds* in coming to know God is a remaking according to a pattern where *all* is valued as good. This value is externally determined and the self finds itself only when imbedded in it, not alienated from it.

¹⁰⁹ "For Augustine, this return... to origin is everything. Augustine is not trying to circumvent the divine predestination and knowledge, but rather to demonstrate the divine logic which moves all things and to praise it, to confess it." Wayne Hankey, "Re-Christianizing Augustine Postmodern Style Readings by Jacques Derrida, Robert Dodaro, Jean-Luc Marion, Rowan Williams, Lewis Ayres and John Milbank," *Animus*, 2 (1997): 11. Online Available HTTP: <http://www.mun.ca/animus/1997/vol2hankey1.ht>.

Eric Springstead highlights that this type of assent to a given order bespeaks a renunciation of the perspective of the autonomous self. "For what is at stake ultimately in the assent of the will is... whether we see ourselves as self-sufficient or dependent upon another... It is a sense of oneself in relation to others. It is, in fact, an openness."¹¹⁰ And Elshtain writes that for Augustine, "human relationality defines us. The self is not and cannot be freestanding."¹¹¹ Because for Augustine the rationale for all aspects of the universe obtain in the mind of God, to take one's place in that order is to come into fruitful relation to it all. Because the idea of his own self exists in the mind of God along with the pattern for everything else in creation, to adhere to that order is to adhere to the One in whom all things "live, move, and have our being."¹¹² For Augustine, the unity at stake in the acceptance of an alignment with the given order "may...be described as the production of harmony or peace between people under their creator."¹¹³ So, we find that while Augustine eschewed the conception of *union of*

¹¹⁰ Eric O Springsted, "Will and Order: The Moral Self in Augustine's *De Libero Arbitrio*," *Augustinian Studies* 29:2 (1998): 94.

¹¹¹ Elshtain, 249.

¹¹² Acts 7:28.

¹¹³ Ayers, Lewis, "Augustine on Redemption," in *A Companion to Augustine*, ed. Mark Vessey (Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 419.

self and other he found in the books of the Platonists, he nonetheless understood there to be a deep foundation for *communion between* self and other.

PRESSING FORWARD: REDEEMING WITH PAUL

The final aspect of Augustine's thought on which I would like to focus is his use of eternity as the horizon against which to evaluate all human activity. While seemingly abstract, this dimension of his thought has important practical implications. Because his framework for evaluating human action incorporates an element that transcends human finitude and death, Augustine is able to engender a disposition toward the other that is able to remain continuously open to and hopeful for redemption and reconciliation, even in the face of disappointment. With Paul, Augustine would urge us to "[forget] what is behind and [strain] toward what is ahead... press on toward the goal"¹¹⁴ where self and other find mutual fulfillment in practical service to and enjoyment of one another. If in the section above we saw the ideas that provided the ontological foundations in Augustine's thought for communion between self and other, then in this section we will explore the ideas that provide the practical motivation to enact that communion in lived experience.

¹¹⁴ Philippians 3:13-14a, 12. See also, Augustine's use of this verse in *Ten Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, Homily IV.6ff.

The first aspect of this horizon of eternity is its expression as a characteristic of God himself. In the face of the common human tendency to place too much value and affection with finite things that eventually disappoint, Augustine seeks to reorder human priorities by asserting that “those only are the true objects of enjoyment which we have spoken of as eternal and unchangeable. The rest are for use, that we may be able to arrive at the full enjoyment of the former.”¹¹⁵ Because

there is this great difference between things temporal and things eternal, that a temporal object is valued more before we possess it, and begins to prove worthless the moment we attain it, because it does not satisfy the soul, which has its only true and sure resting-place in eternity: an eternal object, on the other hand, is loved with greater ardour when it is in possession than while it is still an object of desire, for no one in his longing for it can set a higher value on it than really belongs to it.¹¹⁶

God, who is eternal and unchanging, is the only object of human desire which does not hold the potential to lose its ability to fulfil our expectations. Thus, “all things are to be loved in reference to God,”¹¹⁷ since he is the only object of enjoyment which is not subject to change, loss or death. Thus Augustine replaces a scheme in which finite things, including possessions, actions, and people are valued primarily in reference to their ability to provide temporary enjoyment to

¹¹⁵ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), I.22.20.

¹¹⁶ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, I.38.42.

¹¹⁷ Augustitne, *On Christian Doctrine*, I.27.28.

the self with one in which the self and the potential object of its enjoyment are both valued “in reference to God”.

Much criticism has been made of Augustine’s scheme claiming that in it others become a means to the self’s enjoyment of God instead of an end in themselves. In other words, one only loves others in order that he may eventually enjoy the love of God. Other variations argue that when Augustine exhorts one to love the other “in God” he is encouraging the love of what is common to all men instead of what is specific to that person in his own right.¹¹⁸ Critics find in Augustine’s reorientation of human desire a justification for the instrumentalization and objectification of the other in relation to the self. And while these criticisms may be justified by some aspects of Augustine’s texts, Helmut David Baer¹¹⁹ argues that a more comprehensive look at Augustine’s model reveals a disposition not toward use of the other for the sake of the self, but a disposition toward the other which encourages mutual service and relatedness *not* for the sake of *taking* advantage but of giving and sharing it.

¹¹⁸ For such an approach, see Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, eds., Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1929), 95-97.

¹¹⁹ Helmut David Baer, “The Fruit of Charity: Using the Neighbor in ‘De Doctrina Christiana,’” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 24:1, (1996): 47-64.

Baer argues that Augustine's understanding of "using" and "enjoying" the other in reference to God does not fall within the "narrow lines of a personal endeavor to achieve happiness... as if love for God ruled out any other sort of love. Love for God is an inclusive project..."¹²⁰ Baer explains that in making the use/enjoy distinction Augustine is in fact warning against improper use or abuse of the other. Thus Baer argues that, far from advocating for an instrumental view of the other, Augustine's "use" means to "treat it with the respect it is due" rather than enjoying it for its own sake, which would be "an abuse."¹²¹ This is because to enjoy the other "for his own sake" or as "an end in himself" — as we moderns might say — is to refer him back to himself and not to God. But to do so is to do him a disservice because as a finite creature, he cannot find his own happiness in himself. To treat the other as an enduring source of enjoyment does a disservice to both self and other because he cannot satisfy that expectation. On the other hand, to "use" him for the sake of the enjoyment of God is to put both self and other in proper relation to that which can satisfy the desire of both.

¹²⁰ Baer, 58.

¹²¹ Baer, 53. To make his point, Baer references the following quote from Augustine: "For to enjoy a thing is to rest with satisfaction in it for its own sake. To use, on the other hand, is to employ whatever means are at one's disposal to obtain what one desires, if it is a proper object of desire; for an unlawful use ought rather to be called an abuse," (Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 1.4.4).

This model has two preliminary implications. First, ordering all relations between human beings in terms of an eternal God enacts a dynamic of equalization. Augustine is able to exhort his readers to understand that all men “are by nature...equals”¹²² and that “all men are to be loved equally;”¹²³ when viewed in terms of the infinite, the differences between our finite abilities and means become negligible. Thus it puts all individuals on a level playing field. Secondly, it reorders the view of the other in terms of a final goal, not just for the self, but for all. Augustine’s model is one in which all individuals are placed within in the framework of a shared project.

This second implication must be unpacked a bit more.¹²⁴ For Augustine, love of God is always attained *through* love of neighbor because “whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.”¹²⁵ One’s own happiness and ultimate fulfillment can only be attained by actively promoting the happiness and ultimate fulfillment of the other. As Baer explains, “to love the neighbor for God's sake is to desire his

¹²² Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, I.23.23.

¹²³ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, I.28.29.

¹²⁴ Baer, 58.

¹²⁵ I John 4:20; See also Augustine, “Ten Homilies on the First Epistle of John” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series, Volume VII*, ed., Phillip Schaff (New York: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1888), Homily IX.10-11.

blessedness and direct him toward it, helping and sustaining the neighbor in the realization of his true end."¹²⁶ Thus proper use of the other entails a concern and desire for the other's well-being; but further, "it also means actively promoting that well-being through acts of charity."¹²⁷ In his exposition of the story of the Good Samaritan, Augustine concludes that one's neighbor is he

whom it is our duty to help in his need, or whom it would be our duty to help if he were in need. Whence it follows, that he whose duty it would be in turn to help us is our neighbour. For the name "neighbour" is a relative one, and no one can be neighbor except to a neighbour. And, again, who does not see that no exception is made of any one as a person to whom the offices of mercy may be denied..."¹²⁸

Thus it is Augustine's intent that proper "use" of the other entails the proactive performance of acts of mercy, practical help, and any form of "doing good." It is a *use of* the other that specifically seeks to be *useful to* the other.

Furthermore, included in his consideration of neighborliness is the understanding that "neighbor" is a relative term that entails some form of reciprocity. But this reciprocity is not a form of "payback;" rather it is a mutual disposition toward the wellbeing of those in one's proximity. It is only through neighborly acts of mercy, etc. that the goal of loving God is accomplished.

Augustine writes that,

¹²⁶ Baer, 57.

¹²⁷ Baer, 58.

¹²⁸ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, I.30.31.

Therefore, he that loves the sons of God, loves the Son of God, and he that loves the Son of God, loves the Father; nor can any love the Father except he love the Son, and he that loves the sons, loves also the Son of God. What sons of God? The members of the Son of God. And by loving he becomes himself a member, and comes through love to be in the frame of the body of Christ, so there shall be one Christ, loving Himself. For when the members love one another, the body loves itself.¹²⁹

Again, Augustine's vision of the good of the one is inextricably bound up in the good of the all. The self cannot be made whole without the other's being made whole.

Augustine's view of the possibilities for interpersonal relationships is distinctive from modern perspectives in which self-fulfillment and other-fulfillment are structured in terms of trade-off or exchange if they are not mutually exclusive altogether. Rather, in this model, they are not only mutually possible, but mutually entailed. As Augustine explains, when one's acts of charity make it possible for the other to come into a fulfilling relationship with God, then "they were to turn to Him and love Him as the source of blessedness, they would necessarily love us also as companions in a great good."¹³⁰ Baer summarizes his understanding of Augustine's model in the following way:

there are at least three aspects to Augustine's conception of *uti*. First, to "use" a person is to refer that person to God, to seek that person's good with benevolent love. Second, to "use" a person is to make oneself useful

¹²⁹ Augustine, Ten Homilies on the First Epistle of John, Homily X.3.

¹³⁰ Baer, 57.

to that person. It is to serve the other through acts of charity. Third, to "use" the neighbor is to find one's own good through loving the neighbor properly. Taken together, these ideas constitute a distinctive vision of mutual love in which lover and beloved delight in one another in the love of God.¹³¹

By ordering the relationships between finite self and other in terms of a third whose eternity equalizes and encompasses the two, Augustine is able to think in terms of a system where fulfilment of self and other does not entail a zero-sum game, but rather a model where the good of the other is the good of the self and vice-versa because they both share a common, *inexhaustible*, eternal good.

Now while this may sound good on paper, the real world does not often live up such lofty expectations. So what happens when one does good to the other and the other is not responsive in this scheme for mutual fulfilment? This brings us to the second way in which the horizon of eternity works to structure a mode of continued openness to the other. Very simply, the focus on eternity defers one's expectation of fulfilment until after death. Augustine writes, that when it comes to the fulfillment of human desire and perfection we are always "not yet... because not yet eternity."¹³² And so when looking toward the horizon

¹³¹ Baer, 63.

¹³² Augustine, "Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series, Volume VII*, ed. Phillip Schaff, trans. John Gibbs and James Innes (Grand Rapids: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1888), Tractate XLI.10.

of fulfillment, death must necessarily come into view. This has two consequences. First, it provides a mitigating influence against the urge to evaluate both self and other in terms of the material or temporal aspects of their being. One must evaluate on a more essential level. In her discussion of Augustine's theory of fulfillment, Hannah Arendt comments that "in the transcending expectation of eternity, death becomes relative. Death has died. It has lost its importance for the living. Without death there can be no fear of loss, and fearlessness is primarily freedom from fear of loss."¹³³ Because hope for fulfillment is not placed in any finite or temporal object, death loses its ability to act as a final arbiter of value. Because one must look past the death of the self or the other when evaluating, the aspects of the other which could be made use of for personal temporal gain are relativized and devalued.

The second consequence of placing fulfillment in eternity on the other side of death is that it holds open the hope for the duration of one's life. He writes,

Now what thou longest for, thou dost not yet see: howbeit by longing, thou art made capable, so that when that is come which thou mayest see, thou shall be filled... God, by deferring our hope, stretches our desire; by the desiring, stretches the mind; by stretching, makes it more capacious. Let us desire therefore, my brethren, for we shall be filled.¹³⁴

¹³³ Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, 34.

¹³⁴ Augustine, *Ten Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, Homily IV.6.

In one's longing for fulfillment one is made capable of enduring its deferment.

And as we saw above, in this model, one's longing for himself is also his longing for the other. And so when the other, for whom he hopes and to whom he extends his hand in practical service, rejects that hand in the immediate or short term, this does not ruin the project or extinguish the hope.

Augustine's overall disposition toward the goal of human life can be characterized as forward-looking. He characterizes human life as a journey¹³⁵ and writes that we are

made whole in hope rather than in the reality. For so saith the apostle: 'For by hope we are saved.' We have begun therefore to be made whole in faith: but our wholeness shall be perfected 'when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality.' This is hope, not the reality. But he that rejoiceth in hope shall hold the reality also...¹³⁶

While he does not expect perfection or fulfillment from within the confines of human life on earth, that does not discourage him in the least from hoping for it. Taking the long view toward his project allows him to continue to hold out his hand. In the face of disappointment with the actions or reactions of the other, Augustine reminds his readers to continue to work towards his betterment, "for

¹³⁵ e.g., Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, I.4.4 and I.10.10.

¹³⁶ Augustine, *Ten Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, Homily VIII.13

thou lovest in him not what he is, but what thou wishest that he may be."¹³⁷ A person's disposition in the present is not necessarily indicative of her disposition in the future. Knowing that on this side of eternity there is always the possibility of change, one can continue to hope for reciprocity from the other and continue to act on that hope. By placing the actualization of fulfillment in eternity and not in finitude, Augustine redirects our expectations of human experience and of one another.

....

Thus we have given the broad outlines of three key features of Augustine's thought and worldview that allow him to be a resource for postmodern opponents of the modern conception of self. In the following analysis we will see the application of these general features to specific aspects of understanding the self and its relation to the other and, in contrast with Sartre's

¹³⁷ Augustine, *Ten Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, Homily VIII.10. Hannah Arendt comments on this passage saying that this sentiment can in fact be isolating for both the lover and the beloved. She comments that a lover who follows this exhortation lover does not really love his neighbor "in his concrete and worldly encounter with him," for what he is in himself, but loves his neighbor "as himself," or for only what the neighbor has in common with him (*Love and St. Augustine*, 95-97). However, Augustine's comments are actually made in the context of one's enemy and not one's neighbor. He exhorts his readers to love in the hope that this other will become a brother rather than an enemy. The point here is to love despite the enemy's currently unlovable aspects with the aim of contributing to a situation in the future in which those aspects may be ameliorated. Augustine's comments do not indicate that one should turn a blind eye to the other's uniqueness, but rather that one should maintain hope for change in the face of disappointing behavior in the present.

analysis, discover how their observation of similar structures can result in radically different conclusions as to the nature of the possibilities for human relations.

**PART II:
AUGUSTINIAN AND SARTREAN SELVES AND OTHERS**

CHAPTER 3. THE QUESTIONING SELF: BEING POSED

Early on in the analysis of both Augustine's *Confessions* and Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* we come across the centrality of questioning to the exposition of what it is to be a self. Now, it is hardly an astonishing observation that humans question the world around them or even question themselves. At least since Aristotle's assertion that, "All men by nature desire to know,"¹³⁸ (and surely long before) the history of philosophy bears witness to the endless questioning and attempted answering of the boundless whos, whats, wheres, hows, whys, and whens of human life. That two philosophers ask questions about questions is hardly remarkable. But what is remarkable is that *both* Augustine and Sartre assert that the self *is itself* a question. In questioning what it is to be a human self, both thinkers choose to highlight not that questioning is an essential aspect of human life, but that it is the fundamental structure and experience of what it means to be a human being. For both Augustine and Sartre, the core of subjectivity is revealed by the experience of the Question. That is to say, that for both these thinkers, to be a self, is to be a Questioning Self.

¹³⁸ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. W. D Ross (Adelaide: University of Adelaide Library, 2000), I.i.

The following discussion of the “Questioning Self” will set the stage for the content of subsequent chapters by detailing the first of three interrelated features common to both the Augustinian and Sartrean selves. The goal of the analysis is to highlight the similarities between the phenomenologies of the self that occur even within the context of radically different ontologies. Despite what will come to light as marked similarities in their descriptions of the self, the differences in their assumptions about the underlying sources or meaning of such features have a significant impact on the possibilities for the relationship of the self with the other. As Graham Ward notes, “What shape one’s world is will determine how one makes sense of the question, the direction of the subsequent enquiry, and the possible answers that might emerge.”¹³⁹ But in a context where the self is itself the question, it becomes even more significant that the picture one has of the world in which he or she asks determines not only the possible answers, but also the very possibilities for the existence of the question itself.

In this chapter we will explore how void, lack of coincidence, and indeterminacy appear in the work of both thinkers as structuring the possibility of human questioning and as structuring human experience in general. It is

¹³⁹ Graham Ward, “Questioning God,” in *Questioning God*, ed. John D. Caputo, Mark Dooley & Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 279.

through these three structures that the self appears for both as a Questioning Self. However, while for Augustine the Questioning Self is ideally posed toward an other, for Sartre the self appears as a question to itself. We will see that this latter orientation is necessarily dysfunctional as it is fundamentally at odds with the structure of a question.

AUGUSTINE: MIHI MAGNA QUAESTIO FACTUS SUM

Confessions is full of questions. Augustine's very structuring of the book as a prayer highlights his vision of the self as a supplicant whose natural approach is to ask. And from the second paragraph¹⁴⁰ and then continuously throughout to its very last, Augustine bombards his God, his readers, and himself with a relentless barrage of questions about a multitude of objects. Charles Mathewes even suggests that *Confessions* is in large part "a story of Augustine learning to ask questions in the right way and to accept the dynamic of questioning as an

¹⁴⁰It is worth noting that the *very first* words of the *Confessions* are ones of praise. For a discussion of the significance of praise as an opening posture of the *Confessions*, see §2 in Jean Luc Marion, *In the Self's Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012). However I would argue that questioning is the self's "natural" posture as a self that has not found its place of rest in God; praise is its posture of one who has accepted his place in God and so not initially or primarily the one in which the fallen self initially finds itself. See also Charles T. Mathewes, "The Liberation of Questioning in Augustine's *Confessions*," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 70:3 (Sep., 2002): pp. 539-560 for a discussion of how Augustine's *Confessions* is a journey towards a beginning rather than towards an end, from a posture of questioning to a posture of wonder and praise.

energy moving him toward God.”¹⁴¹ But in Book IV.9 of the *Confessions* Augustine makes his famous statement, *mihi magna quaestio factus sum* or “I became a great question to myself.” Here he is not posing a question about some incidental aspect of himself. He is stating that his essence has itself become a question. But what can this possibly mean?

To understand the very fundamental human experience which Augustine is trying to describe, let us look at the context of his statement. Augustine describes his state as his very dear friend had just died. He writes,

My heart was black with grief. Whatever I looked on had the air of death. My native place was a prison-house and my home a strange unhappiness. The things we had done together became sheer torment without him. My eyes were restless looking for him, but he was not there. I hated all places because he was not in them. They could not say, “He will come soon,” as they would in this life when he was absent. *I became a great enigma to myself* and I was forever asking my soul why it was sad and why it disquieted me so sorely. And my soul knew not what to answer me.¹⁴²

I was wretched... I was at once utterly weary of life and in great fear of death... For I thought of my soul and his soul as one soul in two bodies; and my life was a horror to me because I would not live halved. And it may be that I feared to die lest thereby he should die wholly whom I had loved so deeply.¹⁴³

I raged and sighed and wept and was in torment, unable to rest, unable to think. I bore my soul all broken and bleeding and loathing to be borne by me; and I could find nowhere to set it down to rest... When I tried to rest

¹⁴¹ Mathewes, *The Liberation of Questioning in Augustine’s Confessions*, 539.

¹⁴² Augustine, *Confessions*, IV.iv.9. Emphasis added. The latin for what is translated as “enigma” is *quaestio* and can also be translated “question.”

¹⁴³ Augustine, *Confessions*, IV.vi.11.

my burden... it fell as through emptiness and was once more heavy upon me; and I remained to myself a place of unhappiness, in which I could not abide, yet from which I could not depart.¹⁴⁴

Augustine's is a deeply moving description of the experience of grief and loss. In Book IV.iv-vii, he is not only forced to face the world without his dear friend, but also comes face to face with his own inability to find meaning and make sense of that world without him. His values, goals, habits, memories, etc.—the things that make up his identity—all seem to be out of sync in a world without his friend. The loss of his friend occasions in him a loss of his own sense of self. When Augustine writes that he has become an enigma or question to himself, he is expressing the inability of his self to be itself and yet not have anything else to be. As Arendt notes, by asserting "I have become a question to myself," Augustine is initiating a quest into his being.¹⁴⁵ And as Ward reiterates, "The question installs a quest."¹⁴⁶ In light of this event Augustine embarks on a literary, philosophical, and theological exploration of the nature of a being with the ability to have such a profound experience of self-questioning and his beliefs as to the possibility for an answer.

¹⁴⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, IV.vii.12.

¹⁴⁵ Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, 57.

¹⁴⁶ Ward, 280.

... THE AIR OF DEATH

To begin, we must note that the Augustinian *quaestio* is occasioned by death. This is hardly incidental. Much more than a simple autobiography recounting the historical events of his life, the *Confessions* is a carefully structured argument for Augustine's Christian vision of the world presented as the rational result of an examination of fundamental human experience. Augustine's linking of death and his ability to "become a question" is a deft apologetic and analysis of the failure of materialistic belief systems to account for a very fundamental aspect of human experience: the possibility of not being what one is.¹⁴⁷

As a Manichee, Augustine believed that all truth was found in the sensible. Even Good and Evil were ultimately a matter of, well, matter.¹⁴⁸ There is no room in the Manichean universe for non-being. Augustine is alerted to the inconsistency of this view upon the death of his friend. Colin Starnes explains, "The Manichees understood all good at the level of the senses and this was how

¹⁴⁷ For a comparison of the similarities between the implications of materialism in Augustine's Manichean beliefs and Sartre's conception of the *in-itself* and *for-itself* see Jean Guittou, *The Modernity of St. Augustine*, trans. A.V. Littledale (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1959), 29-35.

¹⁴⁸ Manichean beliefs were based on "the notion that good and evil are separated corporeal substances and that the soul of man is likewise divided into two souls: a good soul from God and an evil one from the Prince of Darkness. The Manichee seeks to be liberated from his evil soul by "doing the truth... and the things done in the name of the Manichaeian religion, which belonged to the activities of his good soul... were supposed to liberate him from evil," (Colin Starnes, *Augustine's Conversion: A Guide to the Arguments of Confessions I-IX* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1990), 89-90).

Augustine had loved his friend... In accordance with Manichaeism doctrine, he had supposed the absolute good was in the sensible and he thought he had found it in this friendship of shared pleasures."¹⁴⁹ And so in his attempt to adjust to life without his friend, he turned to his senses to fill the space of the good he had lost. He writes, "My eyes were restless looking for him, but he was not there... They could not say, 'He will come soon,' as they would in this life when he was absent." And so, "Whatever I looked on had the air of death."¹⁵⁰ Everywhere he looked, he saw only a void. In his everyday interactions with the world, Augustine found that his senses "could not say" what he needed in order to find comfort. The sensible in all its fullness could not account for his intense experience of non-being.

Augustine then recounts his attempt at turning to his religion for comfort, exhorting himself to "Trust in God."¹⁵¹ But, as Starnes explains, here Augustine runs into another contradiction:

the Manichees did not understand God as the principle of the actual sensible concrete - which is rather a mixture of Good and Evil, caused by the devil, and which ought not to be. The result was that the "liberation" they promised had logically to result in the dissolution of the actual individual into the contraries from which he was composed. But the

¹⁴⁹ Starnes, 97.

¹⁵⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, IV.iv.9.

¹⁵¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, IV.iv.9.

sensible concrete, in the form of his friend, was what Augustine had actually loved... he preferred to hold on to his misery and grief, and thus keep alive the intuition of the concreteness of his friend, rather than join him in a death which he could only understand as the dissolution of all concreteness.¹⁵²

When Augustine took a closer look at his Manichean God, he found only an abstract, impersonal, “light” or Good. To be liberated in death meant to lose one’s identity as a concrete being and be absorbed into this mass of light. And though the Manichean belief promised the liberation of the man, not just the light,¹⁵³ when Augustine considered the meaning of his friend’s death in the context of his Manichean beliefs, he found that the man he loved so dearly was now nothing, nowhere, and no more. Augustine realizes that his Manichean God could not sustain the being of his friend or his own being in any meaningful sense. Starnes comments, that when Augustine “tried to look to God as a stable abiding good he found only ‘a void,’ since the good he had taken to be God was just what had vanished with his friend.”¹⁵⁴ And so once again, Augustine’s Manichean beliefs promise relief but leave him in the contradictory state where he “was at once utterly weary of life and in great fear of death... [fearing] to die

¹⁵² Starnes, 95.

¹⁵³ Starnes, 95.

¹⁵⁴ Starnes, 97.

lest thereby he should die wholly whom [he] had loved so deeply.”¹⁵⁵ The dualistic account of the nature of his being could not account for the consistency with which he longed for a response which would maintain his integrity as person- even in the face of death.

Given no answer by the things he questioned externally, Augustine turned inward. “I was forever asking my soul why it was sad and why it disquieted me so sorely.” But having only conceptions of the sensible to answer a question of the non-sensible, his “soul knew not what to answer.”¹⁵⁶ The clamor of Augustine’s existence is met with silence from within his very core.

Augustine’s deft juxtaposition of the experience of his senses, his reason, and his soul express a comprehensive experience of silence, of void, of a gap in being that is critical to the understanding of what it is to be a question. In every question there must be a space between the questioner and the questioned. But when the questioner and questioned are the same entity, what happens is that a space is opened up within the entity itself. Its identity is shattered and a void created within its very being. When Augustine writes that his own soul “knew not what to answer,” he is not simply indicating that he lacked a particular piece

¹⁵⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*, IV.vi.11.

¹⁵⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, IV.iv.9.

of knowledge. He is expressing his inability to account for himself in a very fundamental sense. By placing the *quaestio* in the context of death Augustine is highlighting that humans do not have the ability to account for or ultimately sustain their being. When Augustine finds himself to be a question, he is faced with the fact that he can in himself provide no answer. For Augustine, at the core and limit of all human faculties—the sensible, the rational, and the spiritual—the self finds in itself nothing but a void, a nullity, non-being.

... A PLACE IN WHICH I COULD NOT ABIDE

As noted above, every question requires a space between the questioner and the questioned. But the consequence of the void opened up in the heart of the Questioning Self is the creation of a dichotomy within that self. Augustine expresses this rupture and lack of coincidence within himself in the face of his friend's death. Augustine describes a movement from being so in sync with the activities that defined the space of his life that his "native land" is "home" to one in which he feels "strange" or at odds not only with the space in which he lived, but also with himself. Activities he had once taken for granted as a seamless expression of his values and desires he now experienced as "torment" — a self-awareness of the most painful sort. It is in the creation of this space between what were once expressions of his identity and his awareness of the fact that they

are no longer such that Augustine experiences himself as a question, as a being which lacks coincidence with itself.

This experience of lacking coincidence with one's self is a theme Augustine explores extensively throughout the *Confessions*. He communicates about it most evocatively through the motif of *distentio*. Often translated as "distension," it is "a word that connotes extension compounded by distress (it was for example, a word used for being tortured on the rack)."¹⁵⁷ Jean-Luc Marion notes alternative translations of "distancing," "stretching," "ecstasis," "dissipation," "slacking-off," and "diversion" and finally settles on "distraction".¹⁵⁸ In all of its facets, *distentio* indicates a movement "away from." And for Augustine it describes in particular the self's tortured movement away from itself in a way that disperses its intentionality and thereby, ultimately dissolves its integrity.

Augustine's most overt exploration of *distentio* in human experience is conducted in relation to the self's experience of and in time. Augustine first uses the term *distentio* in Book XI.xxiii.30 in reference to time itself, claiming that it is

¹⁵⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, XI.xxiii.30, fn 87.

¹⁵⁸ Jean-Luc Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 224 and 227.

itself a *distentio*.¹⁵⁹ Having performed an extensive analysis of the relationship between time, memory, and identity, Augustine exclaims that “Great is the power of memory, a thing, O my God, to be in awe of, a profound and immeasurable multiplicity; and this thing *is* my mind, this thing *am* I. *What* then am I, O my God? *What* nature am I?”¹⁶⁰ Time imposes *distentio* on memory, pulling it apart, not only by rendering one forgetful of things past, but also, for example, by hiding innumerable facets of one’s life from consciousness until recalled.¹⁶¹ Augustine finds that his identity is based in his memory, but due to the *distentio* imposed by time on memory, his identity as a whole remains out of reach. He describes himself as being “divided up in time, whose order I do not know, and my thoughts and the deepest places of my soul are torn with every kind of tumult...”¹⁶² Likening human life in time to the recitation of a psalm, Augustine writes,

Before I begin, my expectation is directed to the whole of it; but when I have begun, so much of it as I pluck off and drop away into the past

¹⁵⁹ In his footnote (103) on *Confessions* XI.xxix.39, Sheed highlights that while Augustine may have adopted the term *distentio* from Plotinus (*Enneads* 3.7.11-12), his assertion that life itself is a distension is a novel adaptation of Plotinus’ claim that time involves a distension of life. For Plotinus, time is the result of the outpouring of life generally and is a kind of reflection of Eternity; for Augustine, a life or self, envisioned as being a unified whole, is distended and in many ways disfigured by time.

¹⁶⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, X.xvii.26. Emphasis added.

¹⁶¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, X.xvi.

¹⁶² Augustine, *Confessions*, XI.xxix.39.

becomes matter for my memory; and whole energy of the action is divided between my memory...and my expectation... until the whole of my expectation is used up when the action is completed and passed wholly into memory... Indeed it is the same for the whole life of man, of which all a man's actions are parts.¹⁶³

Time spreads the self out before itself in such a way that the entirety of its identity is not ever accessible to itself. Augustine's analysis of *distentio* in time pictures the self as ebbing away from itself in such a way that it is never experienced as a whole.¹⁶⁴

Having searched the farthest reaches of himself and found them too fleeting to gather into an answer, Augustine nonetheless persists in asking, "What am I?" And here in his exploration of *distentio* in time Augustine highlights for us another facet of what it is for the self to be a question: it is an identity that is always incomplete and always seeking completion.

To reinforce the comprehensive nature of *distentio* in human experience, Augustine extends his exploration from an analysis of time to imagery of space and place; by doing so he is better able to highlight dynamics of orientation and energy involved in pulling the self out of coincidence with itself. In the event of

¹⁶³ Augustine, *Confessions*, XI.xxviii.38.

¹⁶⁴ Since for Augustine the self as a whole is always incomplete on this side of eternity, we may be able to say that this is Augustine's version of "existence precedes essence." However, for Augustine, the fact that the self has not yet achieved or reclaimed its essence never negates the fact that there exists an essence or nature to be reclaimed.

his friend's death, we see Augustine illustrating *distentio* by contrasting the affirmation he sought in friendship with the dissolution he experienced when that friend died. It is in this context that we get a clearer picture of what Augustine means when he pictures himself as a "place in which I could not abide."

Augustine writes of his friendship, "we gave affection and received it back... and kindled a flame which fused our very souls and of many made us one... men value in friends... nothing... save such evidences of [their] affection."¹⁶⁵ Augustine use of the recurrent phrase "made into one" signals his hope for finding the unity of being he so intensely craved. In the affirmation of friendship Augustine sought to recollect to himself the energies he expended in his affection. Instead he finds that he "had spilt [his] soul upon the sand, in loving a mortal man as if he were never to die."¹⁶⁶ The impermanent object of his hope was not able to sustain the energy he directed towards it. Instead, the object gives way and he is "spilt." In another passage Augustine describes his experience as "a broken state in which my very being was torn asunder because I was turned away from Thee, the One, and wasted myself upon the many... I departed further

¹⁶⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*, IV.viii.13- ix.14.

¹⁶⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, IV.viii.13.

from You and You left me to myself: and I was tossed about and wasted and poured out and boiling over..."¹⁶⁷ In these images we see *distentio* as an experience of not only bewildering dispersal imposed on the self by time, but also the experience of being forced outward by desire and absorbed into a diversity of elements. Augustine's "one desire...[is] to love and be loved."¹⁶⁸ But its fulfilment required an other who could sustainably receive and reciprocate such desire without fail. But seeking this affirmation only in the fleeting, Augustine repeatedly finds that he is alone, "left to himself;" but because his desire is unrelenting, he "could not abide" there. Later he finds that there was no "place for my mind save in You [God], in whom all that is scattered in me is brought into one..."¹⁶⁹ But in the state where he had become a question to himself, he was a self that sought itself "outside"¹⁷⁰ itself and was pulling itself apart in the process.

... I COULD NOT REST

So far we have seen Augustine's Questioning Self as one in which void is fundamental and the desire to close the gap propels the self outside itself. The

¹⁶⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, II.i.1, ii.2.

¹⁶⁸ Augustine, *Confessions*, II.ii.2.

¹⁶⁹ Augustine, *Confessions*, X.xl.65.

¹⁷⁰ "Thou wert within me and I outside; and I sought thee outside..." Augustine, *Confessions*, X.xxvii.38.

third essential aspect of the Questioning Self is an exploration of the desire itself. Augustine characterizes his Questioning Self as “unable to rest.” The force of *distentio*, fueled by the desire for completion, renders the self in a constant state of motion. It is not and cannot be static. Being itself a place in which it “cannot abide,” one might say it is “neither here nor there.” Thus, a self in *distentio* is not only incomplete, it is also indeterminate.

Looking at a passage from Adam Phillips’ essay, “An Answer to Questions,” may help us unpack this complicated relationship between questioning, desire, and indeterminacy. He writes,

One way of describing so-called growing up would be to say that it involves a transition from the imperative to the interrogative; from *Food!* through *I want*—to *Can I have?* Questions are, among other things, the grammatical form we give to our desire. Once our wanting has become a question, we have acknowledged—started thinking about—the ways in which wanting in itself doesn't seem to guarantee satisfaction. There is something between us and what we want, and our wishes are leaps... There is a logical sense in which you might decide a question is not a question, but there is no comparable way of making wants disappear. Who we are is what we can't be talked out of. In the world of wanting, the knowledge that my question has no answer can make it more of a question. My frustration may not be a satisfying answer to the question of my desire, but it doesn't—fortunately and unfortunately—abolish my desire.¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ Adam Phillips, “An Answer to Questions,” in *Promises, Promises: Essays on Literature and Psychoanalysis* (New York : BasicBooks, 2001), 175-176.

Phillips highlights for us that the mark of a question is not the answer it desires, but its desire for an answer. Phillips' identification of questioning and desire is consistent with the dynamics of self Augustine is trying to convey. Like Augustine, he highlights the gap that a question entails. Most notably however, Phillips highlights the distinction between desire and the possibility of satisfaction. A lack of satisfaction does not abolish desire; if anything, the lack of satisfaction "can make it more of a question." Thus desire is definitive for the Questioning Self. As Phillips puts it, "Who we are is what we can't be talked out of [wanting]." Regardless of the objective nature of its satisfaction, the subjective definition of self is its desire.

Marion confirms this point and calls our attention to another feature of desire in his commentary on *Confessions*: desire defines the self but is not defined by the self.

Desire in effect enjoys a privilege intentionality by definition ignores: desire is something I can neither aim at nor attain by deciding on my own... For, contrary to appearances, desire does not arise first from me, so as to aim at its object but is enacted in or over me, weighs on me, and invades me even if I neither comprehend or possess its supposed object, or rather precisely *because* I do not possess it, attain it, or even comprehend it... as it never falls to the desirer to decide to desire and as desire alone decides its birth (and its death), I desire only what has the power, the prestige, and the dignity to inspire this desire in me... desire comes to me from elsewhere, therefore from beyond myself. Thus specified, the privilege of desire grows even stronger: desire in imposing

itself on me individualizes me... for the desire to which precisely I respond, no other besides me answers to.¹⁷²

Marion confirms that desire is distinct from the possibility of its satisfaction, and in fact arises from a lack thereof. But the dynamic he describes also explains why desire pulls the self outside itself. The self cannot decide what it desires. Phillips noted that the non-existence of its object cannot abolish desire. This is because, as Marion notes, the object of desire is not a matter of the self's rational choice. As the saying goes, "the heart wants what the heart wants,"-- regardless of what the mind directs. Desire does not come from the self. It is inspired by something "from elsewhere... from beyond myself." The self cannot decide the object of its desire and cannot decide its movement towards it. Thus desire pulls the self continuously and unrelentingly toward its object. Paradoxically, since it is that self alone who desires, desire gives the self its identity, but also simultaneously withdraws it. As such, the Questioning Self is a dynamic self; it is a self in constant motion until its object is reached.¹⁷³ But as Augustine pictures so vividly, in a world where all objects are necessarily fleeting, the Questioning Self is a self that cannot rest.

¹⁷² Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 83-84.

¹⁷³ "Things out of place are in motion: they come to their place and are at rest." Augustine, *Confessions*, XIII.ix.10.

As Mathewes notes, “The danger of understanding questioning as fundamentally a quasi-Faustian seeking after knowledge is that it does not respect the fundamentality of the desire.”¹⁷⁴ The dynamic of desire reveals the Questioning Self as stretching across a void between lack and fulfilment. Pulled apart from itself toward something it does not comprehend, the self is not itself and not yet identifiable with what it seeks. It is always in between, itself spanning the indeterminate expanse between the question and the answer.

NOT ASKING QUESTIONS... BUT MAKING MY CONFESSION TO YOU

Above we have outlined what it means to Augustine for the self to be a question. Void necessitated by death, *distentio* imposed by time, and desire incited by forces beyond one’s control make incompleteness and indeterminacy inescapable aspects of the human experience. The self cannot help but be a question. But there is another distinguishing feature of a question that Augustine insists on depicting: a question is, by nature, directed to an *other*. If, as Phillips put it, a question is “the *grammatical* form we give to our desire,” then referring to the self as such implies that its structure is “linguistic;” that is, its fundamental goal is to communicate self to other; the self as a question becomes problematic

¹⁷⁴ Mathewes, “Liberation of Questioning”, 545

for Augustine precisely because it directs its questioning to external *things* or to *itself*—but not to an other who is capable of answering.¹⁷⁵ While Augustine’s *quaestio* is initiated by an isolated, fractured, disoriented and fleeting self, his goal is to get his reader to accompany this self on the journey it makes toward its resting place as an integrated part of the ordered whole of God’s creation. He deliberately sets his exposition of the self becoming a question to itself within the broader framework of his conversion into a self that is oriented toward God. When we understand that the self as a question *to itself* is disordered and misdirected, then we will understand that, while Augustine does understand the self as fundamentally being a question, he also insists that when properly oriented it is possible for it to find a meaningful answer.

In Book X we find the only other instance in *Confessions* where Augustine refers to himself specifically as a question saying, “O Lord, my God... heal me, Thou in whose eyes I have become a question to myself: and that is my infirmity.”¹⁷⁶ The comment Augustine makes after the colon is revealing: the infirmity from which he needs healing is not that he has become a question *in the*

¹⁷⁵ Ultimately, even Augustine’s orientation toward other people, lovers and friends, can be characterized along these same lines because he finds that, although they are not inanimate objects, as finite creatures they are not capable of giving a consistent and sustained response to his infinite desire for love and recognition.

¹⁷⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, X.xxxiii.50.

sight of God, but that he is a question *to himself*. Augustine recognizes that in order for a question to function properly, it must be directed towards an other. Thus to question oneself is a *dysfunction*, an infirmity.

To unpack this further, if we understand the question as a kind of language or speech, it will be helpful to look at James K.A. Smith's analysis of Augustine's understanding of words as signs. Smith argues that for Augustine,

words, in so far as they are signs, are both necessary... and *insufficient* or *inadequate*... Words cannot present things; when a word is given to me by another, the thing to which it refers is not made present to me. However, the word *does* 'point' or 'indicate' the thing itself, directs me to experience it for myself... This movement of reference marks the *completion* of the sign; and yet, the word, when constituted as a sign, still retains a kind of *insufficiency* or *structural inadequacy* such that its very constitution is to refer beyond itself...its function is *completed* in so far as one is directed to experience the thing itself... therefore the sign can (or at least *should*) never constitute an end in itself.¹⁷⁷

By picturing the self as a question Augustine indicates not only that it be directed towards an other, but also should by its very structure and essence refer to an other.

If we look at the passage in which Augustine's "infirmity" comes to light, we find a performative portrayal of the importance of making such reference.

The passage discusses his question as to the propriety of the use of music in the

¹⁷⁷ James K.A. Smith, "Between Predication and Silence: Augustine on How (Not) to Speak of God," *The Heythrop Journal* 41:1 (January, 2000): 72.

recitation of scripture; although couched in the consideration of an activity which directs the self toward God, his discussion refers most centrally to his *own* experience of pleasure or guilt when he hears the music. Although the scriptural words he is considering are meant to refer his attention to God, he does not look where they point; rather than directing his energies to the consideration of that in which *God* takes pleasure during his worship, he refers himself to himself and ends up in a quandary. Augustine's deft juxtaposition of his distraction with himself against a context in which worship of God is required performatively illustrates the point he is trying to make: in his quest for proper worship the problematic arises not because he does not have a definitive answer, but rather he fails to maintain the proper reference for his question.

For Augustine, the self's infirmity is not that it is a question, but rather that it is directed *to* itself and *for* itself. Such a question cannot be anything but dysfunctional. Smith gives us further insight into the nature of this dysfunctional orientation through his discussion of idols and icons. Analogously to his understanding of words as signs, which point beyond themselves, Augustine

understands the world—all creation, including the self—as a sign which points the human other beyond itself to its creator.¹⁷⁸ But as Smith comments,

While a certain design inheres in things as the imprint of their Creator, it is fundamentally the human self which constitutes things *as* either things to be used or enjoyed, ultimately by what we choose to *love*, since enjoyment ‘consists in clinging to something lovingly for its own sake’ (DC 1.4.4). Thus, what we enjoy for its own sake, as an end in itself, is loved. However, there is a ‘right order of love’ (DC 1.27.28) which ought to be observed... Augustine earlier remarked, ‘that there could have been no error in religion had not the soul worshipped in place of its God either a soul or body or some other phantasm of its own’ (VR 10.18)... that which is to be used, is intended to ‘refer’ (DC 1.4.4) or point the soul to that which is to be enjoyed, God...[Any created thing] then, functioning as a sign, is to be constituted as an *icon* which deflects the intentional aim or ‘love’ of the self to the creator as that which is to be enjoyed. The fallen or sinful self, by enjoying the [created thing] rather than using it, constitutes [it] as an *idol* which ‘absorbs’ its love and concern, going against the ‘right order of love’.¹⁷⁹

As a created thing, the self is structured to refer beyond itself to its creator. The ‘soul’ which chooses to direct the entirety of its energies— i.e. to love, worship, or enjoy— anything other than God, even if it is its own self, not only fails at its function, but also fails to enjoy anything, much less itself. Augustine explains,

if we set ourselves to enjoy those which we ought to use, are hindered in our course, and sometimes even led away from it; so that, getting entangled in the love of lower gratifications, we lag behind in, or even

¹⁷⁸ See Augustine, *Confessions* X.VI where all aspects of the created order redirect Augustine’s attention saying, “We are not God...He made us... *that the invisible things of God may be understood by things which are made.*” See also James J. O’Donnell, *Confessions Volume 3: Commentary Books 8-13 Indexes*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 168 “...created nature is a *signum* of the *res* of divinity.”

¹⁷⁹ Smith, “Between Predication and Silence,” 73-74.

altogether turn back from, the pursuit of the real and proper objects of enjoyment.”¹⁸⁰

For Augustine, God is the only proper object of love, worship, and enjoyment. To put it another way, “for Augustine, the self finds its ‘meaning’ – its identity and definition—in its relations, in its ‘love’ as its intentional aim. In other words, the self is defined by what it loves, by what it directs itself toward, what it refers itself to.”¹⁸¹ It is only when the Questioning Self, which cannot help but be an expression of desire, points itself and refers the human other toward the ultimate source (and satisfaction) of desire that the expression can have a content whose meaning is not void.

Thus, Augustine’s story is one of the Questioning Self trying to find the right direction in which to point itself. As a perpetual question the self needs an eternal conversation partner. So, instead of a question *to itself*, Augustine prays that his self would be

following [God’s] Oneness: *forgetting the things that are behind* and not poured out upon things to come and things transient [i.e. not according to *distentio*] but *stretching forth to those that are before* (not by dispersal but by concentration of energy) [i.e. but according to *intensio* or intention] *I press*

¹⁸⁰ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, I.iii.3.

¹⁸¹ James K.A. Smith, “How (Not) To Tell a Secret: Interiority and the Strategy of ‘Confession,’” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 74:1 (2000): 136.

*toward the prize... where I may hear the voice of Thy praise... which neither comes nor passes away.*¹⁸²

Instead of being pulled apart, addressing his question to “things transient,” Augustine seeks to be extended toward a single focus of intention.¹⁸³ To this end Augustine follows up his portrayal of his Questioning Self in Book IV these words from Psalms 80:7: “*Convert us, O God of hosts, and show us thy face, and we shall be saved,*” adding, “Wherever the soul of man turns, unless toward God, it cleaves to sorrow.”¹⁸⁴ Augustine contrasts a self turned outward toward things or inward toward itself with another turn—a conversion or turn toward God; a God who is called upon to turn his face toward the self as well. Rather than addressing himself to the many things which could not stand up to his question, or his own soul which met it with only silence, Augustine finally presents the only orientation in which his question can finally receive a response: face to face with an other who speaks back with a “Word” that does not pass away.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² Augustine, *Confessions*, XI.xxix.39.

¹⁸³ See Marion’s analysis of Augustine’s move from *distentio* through *intensio* to *extensio*. Marion characterizes it as an “extraction” from “distraction” by “attraction” to God, who as the source of desire fulfils it by deferring satisfaction, thus respecting both human finitude and its continual drive to advance beyond oneself. “If God inspires the desire in me, it is not first to fulfil it by satisfying it, but to fulfil it by hallowing it with achievements that become so many new beginnings,” (*In the Self’s Place*, 227).

¹⁸⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, IV.x.15.

¹⁸⁵ For another illustration of Augustine’s orientation “facing” God, see *Confessions* I.v.5 where he pleads, “speak that I may Hear, Lord, my soul is listening... Hide not thy face from me.” Augustine’s words indicate that he is directing his attention and intention toward God.

To go back to my comment in the opening paragraph of this section, there is a reason that while the second paragraph of *Confessions* reveals the Augustinian self in a mode of questioning, the *first* paragraph discloses it in the mode of praise. Having been converted from a question to himself to a confessor to God and before others, Augustine begins his recollection in the only mode that allows for questions about his identity to be answered.

To understand this we must first remember that Augustine says, “Confession is not said only of sins, but also of praise.”¹⁸⁶ Smith explains, “the richness of ‘confession’ is better understood in terms of ‘witnessing’ and ‘testimony’ — giving an account of one’s experience with God, ‘what God has done in my life.’”¹⁸⁷ But as Augustine clearly understands, his confession is not for God’s benefit, so that God understand him, but firstly for his own, so that he can understand himself.¹⁸⁸ Marion characterizes praise in this way:

Although he quotes Moses’ desire to literally see God’s face, Augustine’s desire here is to have access to God’s wisdom and direction through an intimate relationship with his creator. For a discussion of the broader meaning of the biblical request *Hide not thy face*, see also Merold Westphal, “Inverted Intentionality: On Being Seen and Being Addressed,” *Faith and Philosophy*, 26:3 (July 2009):250. Westphal comments, “... the request is associated with the desire to hear the divine voice, to be addressed as well as to be seen.” In effect, we can understand it as openness to the possibility of mutual recognition.

¹⁸⁶ Augustine, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 138.1, as cited in Marion, *In the Self’s Place*, p.13.

¹⁸⁷ Smith, “How (Not) To Tell a Secret,” 147, fn37.

¹⁸⁸ See Augustine, *Confessions* X. i-ii and v.

Praise is deduced from God by his definition *Deus laudandus*... the greatness of God defines the incommensurability... between the greatness of God and the tiny narrowness of all the created, in particular of... that portion of the created which carries its mortality with it wherever it goes¹⁸⁹... If I do not praise, I would lack not only respect for the creator, I would lack not only God as such, but I would lack first of all myself.¹⁹⁰

Praise...signifies *to* God that I acknowledge him alone as God, by... acknowledging myself a non-god.¹⁹¹

Praise, as the ultimate form of confession, exemplifies the self's lack of self-definition and its address toward the source of its definition. As the only form of speech commensurate with the greatness of God, praise acts first to reveal the self to itself as it is—a created and finite being who is too small to say anything of substance *about* the infinite God.

Instead, such a self cannot help but address itself *to* God. Marion explains the difference. To speak *of* God is to reduce him to the status of an object- one other among the many about which I speak but which cannot participate in the conversation.¹⁹² To speak *of* God is to exclude him from the dialogue one is having with some other.

¹⁸⁹ See Augustine, *Confessions* I.i.1.

¹⁹⁰ Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 16.

¹⁹¹ Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 19.

¹⁹² See also, Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958), 75-76: "the *Thou*... by its nature cannot become *It*...all God's names are hallowed, for in them He is not merely spoken about, but also spoken to... For he who speaks the word God and really has *Thou* in mind (whatever the illusion by which he is held), addresses the

To speak *of* God would in the end mean speaking *of* him but *without*, indeed *against*, him... In opposition, speaking *to* God, as the confessing praise does, implies, first of all, turning one's face *to* God so that he can come over me, claim me, and call me starting from himself well beyond what I could say, predict, or predicate of him starting from myself alone... In the word spoken in praise, the dialogical space puts myself and God into relation. Emmanuel, but backwards: God with me, provided that I speak *to him, myself* toward him.¹⁹³

Praise, because it is first and foremost the self's expression of itself *to* God, puts the self into relation with God by orienting it properly toward him. In continued conversation with its creator, the self can come to an understanding of itself because it directs itself towards the one who knows and gives its definition, purpose and meaning.

But if the first function of confession or praise is to reveal the self to itself, we must not forget its second function, which is to excite the human other to his or her own realization of their relation to God.¹⁹⁴ As Smith puts it, praise "employs language in such a way that respects God's transcendence and *refers* the listener to experience the thing itself."¹⁹⁵ Thus it is the exemplary posture of the self as a question and the reason Augustine opens his work with it. Recognizing that the self will always be a question, Augustine reveals for his

true *Thou* of his life, which cannot be limited by another *Thou*, and to which he stands in a relation that gathers up and includes all others."

¹⁹³ Marion, *In The Self's Place*, 19.

¹⁹⁴ See *Confessions*, X.ii-iv and XI.ii.3.

¹⁹⁵ Smith, "Between Predication and Silence," 79.

reader that there is a mode in which the self, with and in all its fundamental incompleteness, can function meaningfully by fully directing itself and referring the human other toward the divine other who can meet the self's question with an answer as to its meaning and purpose.¹⁹⁶

SARTRE: THE BEING BY WHICH "WHY?" COMES INTO BEING... IS ITSELF AN INTERROGATION

Sartre, like Augustine, depicts the self as a question. While there are important differences, the similarities in their characterization of the Questioning Self are striking. Sartre, like Augustine, focuses on the presence of a void at the self's core, its lack of coincidence with itself, and its indeterminacy. For Sartre, as for Augustine, the self exists in perpetual state of disequilibrium stretching itself out toward that which it is not in order to gain some sense of what it is. But

¹⁹⁶ Perhaps *identity* and *telos*, rather than "meaning" and "purpose," would be terms more familiar to Augustine; but ultimately Augustine's aim is to put together a coherent and cohesive picture of what his life amounts to in its totality. His reflections on time, memory (Book X), and language (Book XI) are all indications of his understanding that, as Fredricksen puts it, "It is only through recollection that a person can understand what he has experienced, and can ascribe meaning to it," (Paula Fredricksen, "The *Confessions* as Autobiography," in *A Companion to Augustine*, ed. Mark Vessey (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 95). In Augustine's own words, his hope is "...that I may apprehend by Him in whom I am apprehended," (Phil. 3:12 as prayed by Augustine in *Confessions*, Xi.xxix.39). "Apprehended" (latin; *apprehendam*) here has the connotation both of being held in one place and being grasped by the mind.

unlike Augustine, Sartre finds that the self's nature as a question dictates that if it is to exist authentically, it will exist without recourse to an answer.

To begin to understand Sartre's conclusions about the self, we must begin by exploring what motivates him to characterize the self as a question in the first place. Although in a very different way, Sartre, like Augustine, is asking what defines the self. For both, the matter at stake is to distinguish a singular source for the meaning of human experience. But unlike Augustine who enters into the issue from the door of personal experience, Sartre approaches the topic as an objective inquiry into the nature of the relationship between man and world. Sartre is trying to solve a philosophical problem, not a spiritual one. As discussed in Chapter 1, Sartre starts his inquiry within a context in which the idea of the self as a transcendent source of meaning and order in the world has been discredited. Like his immediate predecessors, he wants to affirm the elimination of Cartesian duality without succumbing to Newtonian determinism. That is, Sartre seeks to affirm the idea of the self as an integrated part of the world in which it finds itself, but also seeks to establish the seemingly contradictory idea of human freedom from a causal series which is definitive for the world of things. Sartre seeks to isolate a defining feature of human existence which makes it possible to account for the reality of our circumstances without

surrendering our ability or responsibility for changing them.¹⁹⁷ For Sartre, this defining feature is consciousness. Where all other beings in the world are merely things, being simply what they are and no more, consciousness gives human being a measure of freedom to be something more than just what it is. To illustrate how this works, Sartre introduces the Question as the human “attitude” or orientation toward being¹⁹⁸ which reveals the nature of the self’s freedom.

... IT IS POSSIBLE TO REPLY, “NOTHING”

One of the first things we notice when looking at Sartre’s analysis of the Questioning Self is that it is placed within an analysis of the fundamentality of negation and nothingness in human experience.¹⁹⁹ It is hard to ignore the fact that for Sartre, as for Augustine, the question arises due to the fundamental experience of void, or as Sartre puts it, “the permanent objective possibility of a negative reply.”²⁰⁰ For Sartre, however, the nothingness that “lies coiled in the

¹⁹⁷ Sartre’s approach is a response to his predecessors which attempts to temper both Husserl’s tendency toward idealism and Heidegger’s emphasis on external structures in the world as being determinative for human experience. See Gail Linsenbard, *Starting with Sartre* (London: Continuum International Publishing, 2010), 28-29.

¹⁹⁸ “man... stands before being in an attitude of interrogation,” (Sartre, *BN*, 34-35).

¹⁹⁹ “The Question” is the opening section in a chapter called “The Origin of Negation,” which in turn is the first chapter in Part One of the work entitled “The Problem of Nothingness.”

²⁰⁰ Sartre, *BN*, 36.

heart of being—like a worm,”²⁰¹ is a source of freedom rather than dependence. Sartre’s ultimate goal is to establish “freedom as the inner structure of consciousness,”²⁰² and his analysis of the role of negation in questioning allows him to build his case.

Sartre explains that the question is the “pattern of conduct” which “can reveal to me the relation of man with the world.”²⁰³ He writes,

The question is a kind of expectation. I expect a reply from the being questioned... And if I expect a disclosure of being, I am prepared at the same time for the eventuality of a disclosure of non-being. If I question the carburetor, it is because I consider it possible that “there is nothing there” in the carburetor. Thus my question by its nature envelopes a certain pre-judicative comprehension of non-being.²⁰⁴

Sartre chooses questioning as the most revealing form of human conduct because, as an inquiry into the truth of Being, the question reveals something that distinguishes human being from all other beings: an openness to the possibility of Non-Being. If the self were simply an inert object, or a being-in-itself, as Sartre calls it, then it would simply *be*. There would be no sense or experience of lack or negation; there would be no possibility of understanding

²⁰¹ Sartre, *BN*, 56.

²⁰² Sartre, *BN*, 61.

²⁰³ Sartre, *BN*, 34-35.

²⁰⁴ Sartre, *BN*, 35 & 39.

something being other than it is. Sartre uses the idea of destruction to clarify the significance of his point:

“Destruction” presents the same structure as “the question.” In a sense, certainly, man is the only being by whom a destruction can be accomplished. A geological plication, a storm do not destroy—at least they do not destroy *directly*; they merely modify the distribution of masses of beings. There is no *less* after the storm than before. There is *something else*. Even this expression is improper, for to posit otherness there must be a witness who can retain the past in some manner and compare it to the present form of *no longer*. In the absence of this witness, there is being before as after the storm—that is all. If a cyclone can bring about the death of certain living beings, this death will be destruction only if it is experienced as such. In order for destruction to exist there must first be a relation of man to being—i.e., a transcendence.²⁰⁵

The fact that human selves question the world reveals that they, at least in some way, transcend or stand outside the order of brute nature. Thus through his analysis of the Questioning Self Sartre finds that he is able to establish a justification for his assertion of human freedom concluding, “Thus in so far as the questioner must be able to effect in relation to the questioned a kind of nihilating withdrawal, he is not subject to the causal order of the world.”²⁰⁶

But Sartre takes his analysis even further in order to demonstrate that negation is not just a *faculty* of human consciousness, not just a matter of

²⁰⁵ Sartre, *BN*, 39.

²⁰⁶ See also, Sartre, *BN*, 58: “Thus in so far as the questioner must be able to effect in relation to the questioned a kind of nihilating withdrawal, he is not subject to the causal order of the world.”

judgement, but is the very nature of what it is to be a conscious self. As

Linsenbard explains,

Our 'sense of self', in Sartre's view, is ...to be understood as a *negativity* because we are at a distance from ourselves since our conscious awareness drives a gap between us and the world... my sense of self is precisely my ability to nihilate the world by questioning and doubting it (*I am* just this nihilating activity in relation to the world).²⁰⁷

Taking Descartes's suspension of the world to the next level, Sartre's understanding of human consciousness entails negation in a much more substantive way. For Descartes the ability to doubt the physical world indicated the existence of a positivity he called a "thinking substance" that was free from the constraints of "extended substance." But Sartre, having rejected a spiritual essence or substance to human being, draws a different conclusion from the human ability to question the world. Since all objects which can be questioned have only positive being, the possibility of questioning reveals that negation arises from none other than the Questioning Self. For Sartre, "the condition on which human reality can deny all or part of the world is that human reality carry nothingness within itself..."²⁰⁸ Sartre concludes, "The being by which

²⁰⁷ Linsenbard, 40. Initial emphasis added.

²⁰⁸ Sartre, *BN*, 64.

Nothingness comes into the world must be its own Nothingness."²⁰⁹ Rather than the existence of positivity, for Sartre negation implies the existence of nothingness at the core of human being.

... TO PUT HIMSELF OUTSIDE OF BEING

Sartre's overarching goal in exploring The Question was to begin to establish a distance between the self and the world which could serve as the basis for its freedom.²¹⁰ But by defining the self as a nothingness in order to establish this distance, Sartre's reveals dynamics within the self that require that it transcend or elude itself just as it eludes the world. The same void that places the self beyond the world pushes the self outside of itself. Thus we also find in Sartre a description of the self that seems to mirror the dynamics of Augustine's *distentio*.

Although Sartre initially sets out to identify the fundamental relation between human being and the world, once he has used The Question to reveal the structure of consciousness, it becomes clear that The Question reveals

²⁰⁹ Sartre, *BN*, 57-58.

²¹⁰ "What we have been trying to define is the being of man in so far as he conditions the appearance of nothingness, and this being has appeared to us as freedom. Thus freedom as the requisite condition for the nihilation of nothingness is not a *property* which belongs among others to the essence of the human being... there is no difference between the being of man and his *being-free*," (Sartre, *BN*, 60).

consciousness as a fundamental relation of the self to itself as well. The self's ability to question itself reveals a negation within its own being.²¹¹ Sartre explains that in order for consciousness to be aware of the negations it effects it must, as discussed above, be able to stand outside of the realities it observes. That is, it must be able to distance itself from *what is* in the present;²¹² because "[i]nasmuch as my present state would be a prolongation of my prior state, every opening by which negation could slip through would be completely blocked."²¹³ If consciousness were to continue being exactly what it was, it would never be able to be conscious of a change, i.e. effect a negation. Therefore, it is "forced of necessity to produce an act of thought which no prior state can determine or motivate, in short to effect within [itself] a break in being."²¹⁴ To be able "to put [itself] outside being,"²¹⁵ or to be conscious at all, the self must, in effect, break with itself before it can ever break with the world. But to remain a "self" the

²¹¹ "Nothingness is the putting into question of being by being—that is precisely consciousness or for-self," (Sartre, *BN*, 126).

²¹² It may seem as if there is a conflation here between consciousness of the change of some state in the world over time and a change in self-consciousness over time. But for Sartre, self-consciousness coincides with consciousness of some object. A change in object consciousness *is* a change in self-consciousness. See Sartre, *BN*, 10-15.

²¹³ Sartre, *BN*, 63.

²¹⁴ Sartre, *BN*, 63.

²¹⁵ Sartre, *BN*, 59.

“parts” resulting from the break must maintain some relation with each other; or to put it another way, the self comes into relation with itself.

For Sartre, the structure of this relation is temporal. He writes,

It is necessary then that conscious being constitute itself in relation to its past as separated from this past by a nothingness. It must necessarily be conscious of this cleavage in being, but not as a phenomenon which it experiences, rather as a structure of consciousness *which it is...* consciousness continually experiences itself as the nihilation of its past being.²¹⁶

Thus, if it is to be what it is, consciousness must be subject to a relation of temporality that renders it incapable of experiencing itself as coinciding with itself. As Sartre puts it, a human being, “in so far as he is conscious of being, [has] a certain mode of standing opposite his past and his future, as being both this past and this future and as not being them.”²¹⁷ Thus, by virtue of its structure, the self perpetually pushes itself outside or apart from itself.

So far, Sartre’s characterization of the self is a technical sketch based on his need to solve his philosophical problem of freedom. While Augustine’s consideration of temporality was motivated by a sense of being overwhelmed by his lack of identity—a condition he sought to remedy—Sartre approaches the self’s lack of coincidence as a matter of fact—a situation for which no such

²¹⁶ Sartre, *BN*, 64. Emphasis added.

²¹⁷ Sartre, *BN*, 65.

remedy is to be sought because no such remedy is possible. For Sartre, the self *by definition* is “being what it is not and not being what it is.”²¹⁸ In his model, “in order for a *self* to exist, it is necessary that the unity of this being include its own nothingness as the nihilation of its identity.”²¹⁹ Without a break in the heart of being forcing the self apart from itself, the self could not recognize itself as such; nor could it recognize anything else, for that matter.²²⁰ The self’s ability to elude identity is, paradoxically, what makes it what it is. For Sartre, this lack of coincidence is the hallmark of personality; it is what sets humans apart from objects, and as such it is not a disorder to be remedied but a merit to be embraced.

But if this is the case, then we must note that the Questioning Self for Sartre is not a self that can attain an identity. For Sartre, the objective identity of the Questioning Self is not simply unknown to itself, it does not exist. Thus the self is not a question posed in search of a definitive answer; rather it is a question asked simply for the sake of the asking. It is asked because it cannot help but be

²¹⁸ Sartre, *BN*, 28.

²¹⁹ Sartre, *BN*, 125.

²²⁰ Of course this assumes that human selves are structured primarily to recognize themselves. Augustine’s analysis stands as a foil to this assumption. For Augustine the self is structured to, first and foremost, recognize an other— the creator in whose image it was made. Its own identity can only be determined as a secondary consequence of this primary recognition.

asked; but in the asking it takes as its fundamental assumption that “it is always possible with questions of this type to reply, ‘Nothing, or ‘Nobody’ or ‘Never.’”²²¹ Standing in the face of “Nothing” and “Nobody” that can define it from without, the self is left facing only the void at its own core as the hallmark of its definition. What Augustine characterized as an infirmity, the self as a question only to itself, Sartre upholds as the ultimate source of human possibility.

... IN A STATE OF INDETERMINATION

The third facet of the Questioning Self, indeterminacy, plays as integral a role for Sartre as it does for Augustine. For Augustine indeterminacy was the byproduct of desire which simultaneously determined and shattered the self’s identity by drawing it outward towards an object; but the proper object, God, could eventually supply the self with a definition and restore its integrity. For Sartre indeterminacy is the result of the inability of any object, characteristic, intention or desire whatsoever to fully determine the self’s identity. For Sartre, while this may negate the possibility of the self’s integrity, it maintains the

²²¹ Sartre, *BN*, 35.

possibility of something which for him is far more important: the self's ability and obligation to define and redefine itself, i.e. its freedom.

One of the most forceful criticisms of Sartre's insistence on human freedom is that while he may have demonstrated that the structure of consciousness allows the self to evade the constraints of objective identity, surely the more concrete aspects of the self's existence — its occupation, physical characteristics, social situation, geographic location, etc. — impose a severe limit on the self's freedom. Sartre's analysis of the self's structure as a question provides his response to such a criticism. He writes, "...the questioner, by the very fact that he is questioning, posits himself as in a state of indetermination..."²²² For Sartre, the self's ability to question the circumstances of its existence reveals that it in fact transcends them; even characteristics that seem inexorably fixed cannot entirely account for its character. Through the experience of questioning the self can recognize itself as remaining to some extent unconditioned by any circumstance of its existence. As Catalano explains, the self can question any and all of the facts of its existence.²²³ "Am I a student? Do I live in Europe? Do I have cancer?" Even if the answers are in the affirmative, the self

²²² Sartre, *BN*, 37.

²²³ Joseph S. Catalano, *A Commentary on Jean-Paul Sartre's Being and Nothingness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 64.

lives these characteristics only as a “free interpretive task.”²²⁴ That is, one may be a student, but only because he remains in his program. One may live in Europe, but only because he does not relocate; but even for those circumstances over which the self has no control, it may position itself in relation to that circumstance in a number of ways. One may not choose to have cancer, but she does choose the disposition she will have in regards to living with such a disease. Will she seek treatment or not? Because by questioning the conscious self “put[s] himself outside being,”²²⁵ that self is able to have a point of view on the circumstances that define it and then “to make more out of what has already been made of [itself]” by those circumstances. As Linsenbard explains,

whatever situation we are in can never exhaustively determine what we will do or not do because it is we who must interpret the meaning the situation has for us; our qualities or attributes are not, in Sartre's view, self-announcing because it is always up to us to determine what meaning they have for us. Persons, then, differ from objects in that they are not merely composed of certain qualities that make them what they are.²²⁶

There is always a space between what the self “is” and what it takes itself to be that is filled only by the choices the self makes. Thus it is the self’s interpretive relation to the circumstances and characteristics of its existence, not the characteristics themselves, which make it what it is.

²²⁴ Catalano, 64.

²²⁵ Sartre, *BN*, 59.

²²⁶ Linsenbard, 32.

But as long as the self is conscious, this interpretive task is ongoing. To reinforce his insistence on the continuous obligation and responsibility of the self to actively take up its relation to its circumstances, Sartre insists that even the self's own choices cannot be determinative once and for all for what it is. As discussed above, Sartre argues that because of the break in being effected by nothingness, the self's past can never be completely determinative for its future. He writes, "I am not the self which I will be. First I am not that self because time separates me from it. Secondly, I am not that self because what I am is not the foundation of what I will be."²²⁷ The self of the future cannot simply coincide with the self of the past; instead it must be continuously created.

To clarify, Sartre gives the example of a gambler who has resolved not to gamble again. In the face of the gambling tables he finds that yesterday's decision is powerless to control today's actions. "In order for [my resolution] to come to my aid once more, I must remake it *ex-nihilo* and freely.... It stands behind me as a boneless phantom. It depends on me alone to lend it flesh."²²⁸ At the moment of temptation, it is equally possible that he will give in as it is that he will resist. Only the negation of one of these possibilities, produced "ex-nihilo" —

²²⁷ Sartre, *BN*, 68.

²²⁸ Sartre, *BN*, 70.

out of the nothingness of the consciousness in that moment— will determine if he becomes once again a gambler or not. The anguish this former gambler feels at the sight of the tables indicates that the identity or essence that he had decided to create for himself can never be more than a possibility just slightly beyond its reach. As conscious of his past decision as to its identity, this self “sees itself cut off from its essence by nothingness or separated from the future by its very freedom.”²²⁹ For Sartre, any identity that the self has is “characterized by a constantly renewed obligation to remake the *Self* which designates its free being.”²³⁰ In other words, it is always in the process of being determined but never completely so.

To cement his reader’s understanding of the fundamentality of the self’s indeterminacy, and therefore freedom, Sartre takes his analysis up a level. Having shown that the self’s own choices cannot fully determine its identity, he also insists that even the values on which the self bases its choices cannot provide an objective foundation for its identity. He writes,

Values in actuality are demands which lay claim to a foundation. But this foundation can in no way be *being*, for every value which would base its idea nature on its being would thereby cease to be a value and would realize the heteronomy of my will. Value derives its being from exigency

²²⁹ Sartre, *BN*, 73.

²³⁰ Sartre, *BN*, 72.

and not its exigency from its being... my freedom is the unique foundation of my values and... *nothing*, absolutely nothing, justifies me in adopting this or that particular scale of values. As a being by whom values exist, I am unjustifiable... commonplace, everyday values, derive their meaning from an original projection of myself which stands as my choice of myself in the world.²³¹

Traditional views regard values as objective and immutable because they appear in the world as a given. Under such an assumption values seem to provide the regulative factor for the self's decisions and actions. But Sartre argues that even what seem to be the most objective of values are only so because the self chooses to adopt them for itself as such. So at the most fundamental of levels, the self determines its values, the values do not determine the self.²³² And because the self is obligated to continuously reaffirm or negate its previous decisions, even values cannot provide an underlying limit on the self's possibilities of expressing itself in the world.

It is this kind of analysis which allows Sartre to conclude that for human being, "existence precedes essence."²³³ By this Sartre means that the self exists first and defines itself thereafter. The self has no pre-determined or objectively

²³¹ Sartre, *BN*, 76-77.

²³² This view is hardly original to Sartre. We can find a version of it as far back as Protagoras' claim in the fifth century B.C.E. that "Man is the measure of all things;" as well as ancient arguments against it including Socrates' arguments in Plato's *Theaetetus* in the fourth century B.C.E.

²³³ Jean- Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, trans. Carol Macomber (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 22.

given identity. Neither its current circumstances and characteristics, nor own past choices, nor claims to objective values preclude its ability and responsibility to continuously choose the self it will be. The self is perpetually free, and thereby obligated to create and recreate its relation to itself and to its circumstances. But being unfettered by any essence, its freedom to choose is its only obligation.

THE QUESTION IS A BRIDGE SET UP BETWEEN TWO NON-BEINGS

In Sartre's analysis of the Questioning Self we have seen that while the general structure of the self shares some striking similarities to Augustine's, the dynamics which govern this structure are conceived of very differently. Perhaps the best way to describe the overall nature of this difference is to return to the idea of the self's "posture" or "orientation." We noted above that the Questioning Self of Augustine's *Confessions* is a question directed toward an other. This self finds its proper identity only when it turns to be "face to face" with an other who can reply to its perpetual question with an eternal Word. It is an existence moving toward its divinely given essence. For Augustine, the proper posture of the Questioning Self is one in which it points itself toward a divine other and signals the human other to do the same. The posture of Sartre's Questioning Self is quite different. First, it is a question that does not position itself for dialogue. It is not directed primarily at an other. To conceive the self as

such would be to admit for it a heteronomous source of direction. Sartre's Questioning Self is not directed *toward* anything; rather it is a self that directs its perpetual movement away from the other and toward nothing.

Sartre is very clear that we should not make the mistake of assuming that the Questioning Self is fundamentally structured for dialogue. Catalano comments that "Sartre notes that the true nature of questioning is *obscured* because we usually interpret a question as something asked of another person."²³⁴ Sartre writes,

this conception of the question by making of it an intersubjective phenomenon, detaches it from the being to which it adheres and leaves it in the air as pure modality of dialogue. On the contrary, we must consider the question in dialogue to be only a particular species of the genus "question"...²³⁵

When we conceive of a question as being fundamentally directed toward another person, we assume that its primary function is to elicit the revelation from them of some determinate content- of *something*— which the self will use to complete some deficit it has. But for Sartre, the Questioning Self functions, not to reveal something, but to reveal *nothing*. At its core, it is not an interrogation of *a* being, but of Being in general. Its structure is such that its fundamental activity propels

²³⁴ Catalano, 57. Emphasis added.

²³⁵ Sartre, *BN*, 38.

it to distinguish itself *from* determinate content, not elide into it. Although Sartre notes that “yes” and “no” are “equally objective” possibilities for responding to a question, “when I ask... I admit, *on principle* the possibility of a negative reply...”²³⁶ Sartre emphasizes that underlying the possibility of every question is the expectation that there will be a failure of receiving the desired content. As a Questioning Self, the “response” that the self is structured to elicit is the reality of nothingness, an affirmation of the self’s essential lack of content. As such the Questioning Self for Sartre is not one which seeks to communicate itself to an other because, at its core, there is nothing to communicate.

Sartre’s definition of the self as a “nothing” in this way leads to a very idiosyncratic relation between the self and the world—or the self and any other being, for that matter. Sartre recognizes that in order to be consistent, he must not let his definition of consciousness as a “nothing” take on the characteristics of a “something;” that is, he must maintain the *asymmetry* of non-being and being.²³⁷ Non-being and Being cannot be simply equal and opposite. He writes,

“Nothingness can be conceived neither *outside of* being, nor as a complementary,

²³⁶ Sartre, *BN*, 37.

²³⁷ See Sebastian Gardner, *Sartre’s Being and Nothingness: A Reader’s Guide* (London: Continuum Publishing, 2009), 66-68 for a more detailed discussion of Sartre’s critique of Hegel and Heidegger’s conceptions of Nothingness and the need for the asymmetrical definition.

abstract notion, nor as an infinite milieu where being is suspended.”²³⁸ To conceive of nothingness in any of these ways would be either to reduce it to a faculty of judgement and deny its reality or would give it a positivity equal to Being and thereby make it a nonsensical concept. For nothingness to maintain its reality without succumbing to positivity, it must draw its reality from a relation to Being while remaining distinct from it. He explains,

[B]eing has a logical precedence over nothingness... it is from being that nothingness derives concretely its efficacy. This is what we mean when we say that *nothingness haunts being*. That means that being has no need of nothingness in order to be conceived... But on the other hand, nothingness, *which is not*, can have only a borrowed existence, and it gets its being from being... *Non-being exists only on the surface of being.*²³⁹

Non-being, by definition having no substance of its own, must draw its reality from Being. As Linsenbard comments, “Our conscious activity is, importantly, dependent on being, but is not itself being (since it is a 'no-thing' that relates to the being - the world - upon which it depends).”²⁴⁰ When Sartre characterizes the nature of the relationship by saying, “Nothingness lies coiled in the heart of being—like a worm,”²⁴¹ the parasitical image is not incidental. If nothingness “is”

²³⁸ Sartre, *BN*, 56.

²³⁹ Sartre, *BN*, 49.

²⁴⁰ Linsenbard, 39

²⁴¹ Sartre, *BN*, 56.

by negating being, then nothingness *is* at the expense of the Being in opposition to which it draws its definition.²⁴²

This parasitical or oppositional structure underlies and underpins the whole of Sartre's philosophy. Having defined the self as a nothing, he structures it in such a way that it can come to be itself only in contradistinction to that which it *is not*. Unlike for Augustine, the self for Sartre does not define itself by aiming itself at and identifying itself with what it loves; rather it finds definition only in opposition to that which it must negate in order to assert its being. As a Questioning Self, it is by definition a Negating Self. As such, it stands not merely opposite that which it is not, but more accurately, it stands in an innate and irremediable attitude of opposition. Rather than conceiving of the question as being an expression that directs itself toward and for the other, for Sartre, the Questioning Self must, by definition, sound as a statement of opposition which moves itself *away* from that which it questions.

Similarly, the Questioning Self for Sartre is not one that is directed *toward* an "answer" as to its identity. This may seem counterintuitive because Sartre does go to great lengths to describe how, practically speaking, concrete selves try

²⁴² "For negation is a refusal of existence." (Sartre, *BN*, 43).

to achieve a sense of identity. For example, in his analysis of “bad faith” he describes how in assuming a certain role, such as a café waiter, what a self

attempt[s] to realize is a being-in-itself of a café waiter, as if it were not just in [its] power to confer their power and their urgency upon [its] duties and the rights of [its] position, as if it were not [its] free choice to get up each morning at five o’clock or to remain in bed, even if it meant getting fired. As if from the very fact that [it] sustained this role in existence [it] did not transcend it on every side...²⁴³

The self tries to attain an identity by adhering to a well-defined role. It tries to divest its responsibility for its choices by appealing to some given set of constraints which dictate its behavior. He uncovers similar dynamics in his analysis of the self’s attempt to be Godlike²⁴⁴ and in his above-mentioned analysis of values.²⁴⁵ But by these analyses Sartre is actually trying to reveal that such behaviors obscure or neglect the true structure of the self. That is why he calls it *bad* faith or insists that the idea of God is a contradiction. He insists that to conceive of the self properly, one must reject the applicability of the concept of a fixed identity. Being a question, the self’s “being is never *given*, but *interrogated*

²⁴³ Sartre, *BN*, 103.

²⁴⁴ Sartre, *BN*, 140. See Chapter 4 for further development of this theme.

²⁴⁵ “...if I have eliminated God the Father, there has to be someone to invent values... What is more, to say that we invent values means neither more nor less than this: life has no meaning *a priori*. Life itself is nothing until it is lived, it is *we* who give it meaning, and *value is nothing more* that the meaning *we* give it.” (Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, 51. Emphasis added).

since it is always separated from itself..."²⁴⁶ The Questioning Self does not seek an answer from an other because there is no answer besides the one it gives itself—and even that one is never final.

So if the posture of the Sartrean self is not directed toward an other or toward an answer, then it may be fair to conclude that it is directed at nothing. Sartre himself characterizes the question as "a bridge set up between two non-beings."²⁴⁷ It stretches from the non-being of content at the core of the self to the non-being of meaningful content to be given outside the self. It is a question that communicates and refers to nothing. In the final analysis, it moves toward void. Although structured as a bridge, it does not head in any particular direction; there is no fixed point outside of itself in toward which it can be directed.

AUGUSTINIAN RESPONSES: IF THE SELF IS THE QUESTION, THEN WHAT OR WHO IS THE ANSWER (?)

In this chapter I have gone into great detail about the structure and significance of the self as a question; but I would like to conclude with a consideration of the structure and significance of Augustinian and Sartrean possibilities for an "answer." For both Augustine and Sartre, the Questioning Self

²⁴⁶ Sartre, *BN*, 787.

²⁴⁷ Sartre, *BN*, 36.

is an inquiry into what defines, integrates, or identifies the self. And for both, such identity is at some point “identified with” God.²⁴⁸ So it seems, at least in this context, if the self is the question, then perhaps God is the answer. But Sartre’s view of the self resists the possibility of or need for a fixed identity while Augustine’s self pursues it; the same goes for their attitudes toward God. Given the similarities in their observations about the self, why the disparity in their orientations toward God? Perhaps it is because the God Sartre rejects holds a different definition for the self than does the God Augustine pursues. In the following section I will highlight some contemporary “Augustinian” approaches to an “answer” for the Questioning Self that respects Sartre’s insight into the need for resisting an appeal to a final definition without precluding Augustine’s hope for the self’s experience of integrity and unity within itself and with the other.

²⁴⁸ Sartre on the possibility of integration of both aspects of human reality: “Each human reality is... a direct project to metamorphose its own For-itself into an In-itself-For-itself and a project of the appropriation of the world as a totality of being-in-itself, in the form of a fundamental quality. Every human reality is a passion in that it projects losing itself so as to found being and by the same stroke to constitute the In-itself which escapes contingency by beings its own foundation, the *Ens causa sui*, which the religions call God...But the idea of God is contradictory...” (BN, 784).

Augustine: “in You [God], in whom all that is scattered in me is brought into one...” (Augustine, *Confessions*, X.xl.65).

THE ANSWER IS WHAT

In his essay "Questioning God," Graham Ward highlights some key differences between the God Sartre rejects and the one Augustine pursues. Performing what he calls a "genealogy of God" and a "genealogy of questioning," he traces variations in the questions asked to and about God in the medieval, modern, and postmodern contexts and what they reveal about the changing assumptions about the God they engage. In the following passage, he summarizes the modern conception of God and highlights the basis for its critique.

...the distinction I am trying to make here [is] between Augustine's God and the God of logocentrism... The concept of logocentrism is a magnification of modernity's obsession with the purity of the present, the isolation of the moment, the now, the instantaneous, the immediate. As such, the critique of logocentrism takes the form of attention to the mediated, the time lag of representation, that which is unrepresentable... The God of logocentrism's questioning guarantees the possibility of living in, experiencing, being consumed by the eternal now, the daylight forever... The univocity of being, which is the metaphysical condition for the possibility of onto-theology, proffers the purity of this present, eliding the difference between present and presence.... The critique, then, of logocentrism and the questioning of logocentrism's God operates still within the metaphysics of modernity; it requires and maintains those metaphysics, locating aporia (but always and only aporia) within the certainties and certitudes of modernity's knowledge. Its questioning is of (both subjective and objective genitive) these certainties and certitudes. The critique is a further turn in Kantian thinking: where the denial of the univocity of being (which substantiates being as a predicate and makes possible, as Kant so clearly recognized, all three forms of the argument

for the existence of God) makes the establishment of God as a necessary, but regulative, idea.²⁴⁹

The God of logocentrism is a fixed point that is supposed to hold the definition for a creation that never seems to stop moving.²⁵⁰ It is an eternally existent once-and-for-all that is supposed to match up to the needs of the always-not-yet of human experience. For the modern thinker, such a God offers the ideal vantage point from which to gain objective knowledge about the world, but stands at such a distance that adopting his point of view obscures the meaning of the subjective experience of human being in the world.

The paradigm of assumptions and critiques that Ward outlines above is precisely the one we find unfolding in *Being and Nothingness*. This is the God that modernity handed Sartre and it is this God that Sartre rejects as being a fundamentally incoherent idea,²⁵¹ inconsistent with the possibilities for the dynamics of human experience distended in time. Sartre describes God as “a being who is what he is—in that he is all positivity and the foundation of the world—and at the same time a being who is not what he is and is what he is not

²⁴⁹ Ward, 284.

²⁵⁰ Ward, 283.

²⁵¹ Sartre, *BN*, 129, 140, 400.

– in that he is self-consciousness and the necessary foundation of himself...²⁵² It is a God that must be at once totally and eternally present while also being self-conscious, which Sartre has already shown to require a measure of absence or negation. He asserts that this unattainable and incoherent concept “haunts” the self—that is, it functions as a regulative ideal— goading it to abdicate its capacity for freedom by pursuing “totality” or complete and static definition.²⁵³ Such an ideal tempts the self to give up the very capacity that makes it a self in exchange for the aspects of its existence which make it an object. Sartre asserts that his brand of existentialism, which rejects such a God,

is the only theory that endows man with any dignity, and the only one that does not turn him into an object. The effect of any form of materialism is to treat all men—including oneself—as objects, which is to say as a set of pre-determined reactions indistinguishable from the properties and phenomena that constitute, say, a table, or a chair or a stone. Our aim is exactly to establish the human kingdom as a set of values distinct from the material world.²⁵⁴

By setting the standard for meaning and value, God usurps human ability to do so and relegates humans to the realm of objects. Instead of a Who, the self becomes merely a What. For Sartre, rejection of such a God seems well-founded

²⁵² Sartre, *BN*, 140.

²⁵³ “The being of human reality is suffering because it rises in being as perpetually haunted by a totality which it is without being able to be it, precisely because it could not attain the in-itself without losing itself as for-itself,” (Sartre, *BN*, 140).

²⁵⁴ Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, 41.

based on his insightful observations about the inherent lack of objective identity in human existence. Such an inert absolute cannot provide an answer of identity for something as dynamic as the Questioning Self. Moving toward such an ideal would be moving away from being a self.

And yet, Ward's critique of the assertion of a question without answer is trenchant:

such questioning is a "movement" in the continual expansion of aporia itself: promise, hope, the yes hover as never-to-be-realized...regulative ideals. The hope can never be enjoyed, as such, and the aporetic—with its tyrannous demand for infinite responsibility—can only be endured. [Such] questioning seems locked, then, into the logic of Camus' Sisyphus—which would therefore call into question whether... there is any movement at all; and, for all the employment of "responsibility," whether there is anything ethical about this position... What is the ethics of such a questioning where there is no relation, no exchange within which the interrogation functions? There is a yielding perhaps, a kenosis of discourse certainly, but not an entrustment or the deliverance of one's own judgment to the judgment of the Good, the Just, the Beautiful, and the True.²⁵⁵

Although Sartre insists that his is the only philosophy which reveals the self's full capacity and responsibility for its actions, his paradigm eviscerates the concepts of "the Good, the Just, the Beautiful, and the True." There are no

²⁵⁵ Ward, 285-286. Ward is actually applying his comments to Derrida; but accepting Caputo's critique that Ward's interpretation of Derrida neglects a fundamental openness and directedness toward a hope that is given but is yet-to-be-realized, I feel that it better applies to Sartre where continued deferral is assumed but no such given or hope is admitted. See John D. Caputo, "What Do I Love When I Love My God," in *Questioning God*, eds. John D. Caputo and Mark Dooley, and Michael J. Scanlon, (Bloomington: Indiana university Press, 2001), 291-317.

absolutes, only conventions or, even less coherently, the self's individual choices. Why heed his charge to replace bad faith with authenticity if the value of either choice is equally (un)justifiable? Why exchange neglect for responsibility if neither holds promise for an outcome that will ameliorate the human condition? Sartre may justifiably reject the God of logocentrism for being too static an ideal for the human self, but by refusing to provide any alternative standard, he creates a world in which the self has no meaningful or promising direction for its perpetual motion.

THE ANSWER IS WHO

Augustine's God, argues Ward, does not relegate the self to such a quandary. Ward, Kearney, Caputo, Marion, and a host of other contemporary thinkers signal that there may be an "Augustinian"²⁵⁶ approach to the question of identity that may restore an orientation toward the assumption of absolute givens that neither strips the self of its dynamic structure nor leaves it hurtling off into an ethical or moral void.

²⁵⁶ I put Augustinian in quotes here because while these postmodern theorists build their analyses with Augustine's thought, it is based on the examination of certain structural aspects it exhibits rather than beliefs he would necessarily espouse. For a similar approach, see Charles T. Matthews, *Evil and the Augustinian Tradition*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), specifically his discussion on p. 60-62.

To begin, for Augustine, God is the answer that *puts* the self into question. As its creator, God establishes a relation with the self that causes it to seek Him. Ward argues that as an absolute given whose nature stands so far beyond the self's ability to comprehend it, it "installs the desire to understand, to engage in a hermeneutical ontology. To reason is to question, to seek to understand this relation."²⁵⁷ Or as Augustine himself puts it, "Thou hast made us for Thyself and our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee."²⁵⁸ It is important to note that in Augustine's model the question is incited *by* the answer. The question is conceived of as existing only because an answer existed first. Thus the self's dynamic structure is established by a principle which stands before and outside the self.

The assumption of an answer which precedes and is external to the self entails two consequences about how the self undertakes its questioning. The first consequence, stemming from the understanding that the answer precedes the question, is that the question is understood as being called into being by a promise of an answer. It is this promise that provides the motivation to search rather than to wander. In Augustinian terms, to move from *distentio* to *intentio*.

²⁵⁷ Ward, 285.

²⁵⁸ Augustine, *Confessions*, I.i.i.

In his essay, "The God Who May Be," Richard Kearney gives an insightful example of such a dynamic using the story of Moses. Kearney characterizes the revelation of God's name in Moses' commissioning as a "call and a promise." In Kearney's retelling, having heard God's call to lead his people out of slavery, Moses is put in question, responding "Who am I that I should go?" He notes that God responds not with an answer as to Moses' identity, but with a promise that reveals something about His own: "I will be with thee." In other words, God says we are in it together. Kearney explains,

this eschatological promise is granted within an I-Thou relationship (of God with Moses), thereby indicating two sides to the promise, human as well as divine responsibility... Here God commits Himself to a kingdom of justice if his faithful commit themselves to it too... The "I" puts it to the "Thou" that the promise can only be realized if those who receive it do not betray its potential for the future.²⁵⁹

Far from discouraging responsible action, the revelation of a God committed to bringing about justice invites the human respondent to participate in the completion of the task. Moses' past attempts at justice for his people had ended in failure, resulting in self-doubt and prolonged inaction. Now, emboldened by the promise of an Other who could ensure justice Moses is drawn to a new question. "Who am I?"—a question whose answer could only be based on a past

²⁵⁹ Richard Kearney, "The God Who May Be," in *Questioning God*, eds. John D. Caputo and Mark Dooley, and Michael J. Scanlon, (Bloomington: Indiana university Press, 2001),160.

he had been trying to outrun—gives way to a concern for the identity of the other who was calling him. To accept the solicitation offered by such a promise motivates action in a way that its rejection cannot.²⁶⁰ Under this rubric, the promise of an answer leads the question away from the in-itself into which its past threatens to solidify it,²⁶¹ and towards a promise that it can redefine itself positively in the future through cooperation with and on behalf of the other.²⁶²

²⁶⁰ For more about the dynamics of “Promise,” See Caputo, “What Do I Love When I Love My God?” 291-317.

²⁶¹ “The past is the ever growing totality of the in-itself which we are.” Sartre, *BN*, 169.

²⁶² Kearney’s analysis of Exodus 3:14 further details a deliberate move away from the onto-theological identification of God and Being that is rejected in modernity and specifically by Sartre. Kearney notes that when asked his name, God again responds to Moses’ inquiry not with a definite answer, but with the following formula: “I AM THAT I AM... This is my name forever and this is my memorial unto all generations,” (p.154). In the ancient Near East it was believed that possessing a god’s secret name would give one power over the god. Kearney argues that God’s response here demonstrates not a resistance toward being addressed personally, but toward being reduced to an idol—an object to be manipulated. Kearney comments further that in this response, “God does not reveal himself, therefore, as an essence in se but as an I-Self for us... The formulation [IAM] is performative rather than predicative... [The revelation] takes the form of an address that solicits action from the addressee rather than some kind of superdetermination from on high which leaves us ... with no real option of response,”(p.161-162).

Thus, the God who sets the standard for justice and responsibility is also a God who refuses to be completely appropriated by the one who calls on his name. Rather he seeks a dynamic relation of call, response and cooperation for the demands of the present and the future. To hold this type of God as an ideal and move towards it would be to preserve the dynamic character of the self while still holding to an externally given standard of justice and responsibility.

I should note that Kearney offers a trace directly from Augustine’s own analysis of Exodus 3:14 to the onto-theological position. However, he does note a distinction between Augustine’s interpretations of God’s being *in himself* and his being *for us*. It is obvious that although Augustine identifies God with Being itself, his understanding of God’s participation in human experience, his being *for us*, is governed by a much more dynamic concept of interpersonal relationship. My argument here is not that Augustine would have defined God

The second consequence of assuming an answer precedes the question is that the question appears originally as “a question in relation” rather than as a “questioning in aporia.”²⁶³ For Augustine, the relational nature between question and answer is based on the relational nature of the answer itself. The Trinitarian structure of Augustine’s God gives a dimension to the relation between question and answer—between lack of coincidence and identity— that is not present with the God of logocentrism.

In *Confessions* XIII.xxii.32, Augustine discusses the peculiarity of God’s commissioning of his final creation:

You did not add *according to your kind*, as though we should imitate another who has gone the same road before us or live by the authority of some better man...[You said] *let us make man...to our image and likeness*. For when in newness of mind he sees and understands Your truth man does not need any other man to teach him to imitate his kind... You teach him to see the Trinity of Unity or equally the Unity of Trinity.

himself as being any less substantive or unchanging, but that the structure of the self he outlines in the *Confessions* is consistent with a more dynamic understanding of the nature of the self’s being and can reveal possibilities that are closed off in models where the self rejects any external givens.

²⁶³ Ward, 285.

For Augustine, the resemblance of man to God is most closely found in the resemblance of the faculties of his mind to the persons of the Trinity.²⁶⁴ But as Marion comments,

The faculties [of the mind, remembering, understanding, and loving], open a mere place, which becomes a visible and reliable image of the Trinity only insofar as they receive (in the sense of *capacitas*) participation in the Trinitarian communion and, thus, play trinitarily, as if by derivation, among themselves.²⁶⁵

Unlike any other living creature, the human self finds its identity, not in imitation of any visible creature, but in imitation of and participation in the divine character. While all other creatures have a visible form according to which they are defined, man is defined only as an image of an invisible God. There is no form according to which he can understand himself. Marion characterizes this as “the privilege of unknowing,” arguing that the lack of definition is the means whereby man receives his blessing of relationship with God. Unlike plants or animals,

Man does not develop by some essential and internal law, but solely by receiving God’s blessing, a blessing that consists only in being disposed according to the image and resemblance toward God. Man has no proper essence but refers himself directly to an other than himself, an other who,

²⁶⁴ Augustine, “On the Holy Trinity,” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series, Volume III*, ed., Phillip Schaff (New York: Cosimo, Inc., 2007), 14.8.11.

²⁶⁵ Jean-Luc Marion, “Resting, Moving, Loving: The Access to the Self According to Saint Augustine,” *Journal of Religion* 91:1 (2011): 29-30.

more intimate to him than himself (than his lacking essence, plays for him the role of essence by proxy.²⁶⁶

Unable to define himself according to an objective and objectifiable model, the human being finds its definition only by referring and relating to the God who created it.

But what is this essence by proxy? If we showed above that only a God that resists a static definition can properly motivate the human self who seeks the same, then how can a God who has a stable essence satisfy this requirement? It is because while Augustine's Trinitarian God is stable, he is by no means static. As Ward explains,

The difference between the Spirit and the Father/Son relationship, the second or even third difference within the Godhead, entails that the meaning of the relationship, the meaning of the love that is continually given, received, and shared, is held open. It is held open before that which is not-God, that which is created rather than uncreated. Its significance is not endlessly deferred but endlessly deepened.²⁶⁷

The dynamic infinite self-giving and receiving exhibited between the three persons of the Trinity sets the model for the type of identity the self is to seek in seeking its God. The identity and essence of the Augustinian God consists in the dynamic exchange of love between the three persons of the Trinity. A

²⁶⁶ Marion, "Resting, Moving, Loving," 27.

²⁶⁷ Ward, 283.

Questioning Self directed toward this type of answer does not run the risk of closure and objectification.

On the contrary, in such a context, “to [question] is to participate in the unfolding of this divine presence; to participate in the God who in being threefold is himself/herself/whatever in question, endlessly open to response, endlessly exceeding an answer.”²⁶⁸ The God Augustine pursues sets love as the absolute essence of human being. The character of love is such that it not only moves the self beyond itself toward unification with the other it seeks, but also that it also requires the other remain distinct and free even within the relation. As Ward’s comment highlights, the distance between the two sides of the relation is what makes the unity possible. To maintain a dynamic of love is to ensure that neither party becomes a mere object to be appropriated or manipulated by the other. What Augustine’s model holds for us here is an understanding of the lack of definition of the human self as call to define oneself only by participating in the dynamic of love between self and other. Surely to assume and submit to such as given would be consistent with Sartre’s goals as well as Augustine’s longings.

²⁶⁸ Ward, 285.

As demonstrated above, within the Augustinian context, the self's ability to resist static definition is based, not in the self, but in the dynamic character of the other who calls it into being. Thus it appears equally possible to maintain the self's dynamic and subjective character when it is conceived of as a question in relation and not just as a question to itself. Sartre assumes that faith in an external given is synonymous with arresting the motion that gives the self its character as freedom. But it is the kind of faith and the structure of its object that determines whether faith ends in closure or further freedom. Faith in an absolute given does not necessarily arrest motion, but it does give it direction.²⁶⁹

Augustine's model of the Questioning Self illustrates that the assumption of an answer given from outside the self forms a structure in which that direction is fundamentally the direction of a personal other—ensuring that the answer to the Questioning Self remains always who, not what.

²⁶⁹ See Caputo, *Questioning God* for the structure of religious faith as exhibited in Derrida's "religion without religion." He comments, "The operative distinction for Derrida is not between religious faith and philosophical reason but between a more deeply lodged structural faith, more indeterminate and determinable, and the determinate faiths of the concrete messianisms," (p.296). Further, "The difference is not that Augustine has 'entrusted' or 'delivered' himself over to the Good while Derrida is just seeking new adventures... The difference is that Augustine has seized and settled upon a determinate historical name for the object of his faith and hope and love, that he has 'entrusted' or 'delivered' himself over to the proper names that have been transmitted to him by his tradition, while for Derrida faith and hope and love make their way in the night as best they can," (p.311). My point here is that these comments highlight a structure to religious faith in particular that has the possibility of remaining open but being directed toward the Good nonetheless.

CHAPTER 4. THE NEGATING SELF: BEING NOT GOD

The conclusion of the preceding chapter notwithstanding, most explorations of the self begin by asking the question “*What* is a self?” Although seemingly straightforward, the question itself assumes that the self can be best understood by delineating its concrete and objective characteristics or activities. As we have seen, Augustine and Sartre both challenge this assumption. In this chapter we will explore specifically their challenge that the key to understanding human experience does not consist in defining *what* the self *is* but in understanding, at a very fundamental level, *that* the self *is not*. In the preceding chapter we saw this expressed in the identification of an element of void, distance, or nothingness as central to the structure of the Questioning Self. Here we will expand our discussion of this element of “not”-ness or *non*-being that serves as the condition for the self’s activity of negation – an activity that both see as fundamental to creating and shaping human experience as we know it. In this chapter we will explore how for both Sartre and Augustine, to exist as a self is to exist as a Negating Self.

This exploration of the Negating Self in Sartre and Augustine is important first, because it announces itself in their work with such force that to ignore it

would be to miss an essential feature of their models of the self. But secondly, because the juxtaposition of the two understandings of the function of negation in the appearance and affirmation of the self reveals fundamental differences in the possibilities for the quality and structure of the relation between self and other. Because for Sartre negation is the essence of human freedom, and freedom is the essence of the self, negation is determinative for human experience and thus for interpersonal relationships; for Augustine, although the primordial exercise of human freedom took the form of a negation (as do subsequent acts of human freedom as a consequence), this expresses a *deformity* rather than the essential form of freedom.

For both Augustine and Sartre, the negating activity of the self arises as a form of self-assertion. The negation operates on several levels and in several modes: it negates in the mode of rejection or denial, as in the negation of an assertion; it also negates in the mode of inversion, as in a photographic negative which inverts its image; finally, it negates in the sense of nihilation or reducing to nothing, as in neutralizing of the effectiveness of a force. More specifically, the Negating Self enacts a rejection of Being based on the *inversion* of the priority that obtains between Being and its other, Non-being (i.e., the Self). This results in

an *aversion* between self and other. It is because the Negating Self asserts itself at the expense of Being that what was simply Other becomes oppositional.

To understand the relational possibilities for such a Negating Self, we must first understand the nature of the Being it negates, the relationship between the self and such Being, and finally, the difference between placing priority on self-affirmation or self-assertion in the description and evaluation of negation. Following the Negating Self's *inversion*, Augustine's model extends beyond Sartre's to allow for the possibility of a *conversion* in which a particular type of negation will result in the affirmation of both self *and* other. Having examined both models, we will find that where Augustine opens a path toward reconciliation, Sartre leaves us only with the prospect of this opposition.

AUGUSTINE: NEGATION AS A FALL FROM GRACE

Unlike questioning, for Augustine negation is not a necessary structure of the self; it is, however, a possibility engendered by the self's being created from nothing. The negating structure of the self is only actualized in its fall from grace. In its rejection of the Being whose gracious act of creation negated its original state of non-being, the Negating Self appears first as a negation of the other which unintentionally, but then necessarily, effects the negation of the self.

Augustine's work goes further to suggest that by effecting a specific type of negation on the Negating Self that both self and other can be affirmed once more.

FEATURES OF THE FALL

Before we can explore the activity of the Negating Self, it is important to understand what Augustine believes is being negated. The analysis in this section will outline Augustine's understanding of the original state into which the self is created and the relationships he assumes between the self, the givens established in creation, and the ability or freedom of the self to turn away from that original situation. This section outlines the conditions for the possibility of this turn. Similar structures are identified by Sartre as those which underpin human freedom; Augustine, on the other hand, identifies them as the source of the negation which effects the fall from grace which is, in turn, a fall *from* freedom. Once the features of the Fall are identified, the dynamics involved in Augustine's depiction of the Negating Self will be more accessible.

Non-Being Depends on Being

As noted above, we begin by exploring Augustine's understanding of the Being negated by the Negating Self. For Augustine, Being, "in its truest sense...

pertains to a self-subsistent and completely immutable nature."²⁷⁰ Augustine writes,

For that which is changed does not retain its own being; and that which can be changed, although it be not actually changed, is able not to be that which it had been; and hence that which not only is not changed, but also cannot at all be changed, alone falls most truly, without difficulty or hesitation, under the category of being.²⁷¹

For Augustine, immutability is *the* essential feature of Being. Being *is*, only and always. Any possibility of change would denote an “[ability] *not* to be that which it had been,” and that would be to admit Non-being into the essence of Being— a clear contradiction.²⁷² The requirement of self-subsistence, or the ability to retain one’s own being *on one’s own*, serves the primary requirement of immutability; contingency on some other being for existence would also imply the possibility of non-being. Being, then, stands on its own and provides the basis for all other contingent existences which, by definition, are *other than* Being.

Importantly, for Augustine, Being, so defined, is understood neither as an abstract or material principle, but rather is identified with the Christian God himself. He writes,

²⁷⁰ N. Joseph Torchia, *Creatio ex nihilo* and the Theology of St. Augustine: The Anti-Manichaean Polemic and Beyond (New York: P. Lang, 1999), 113.

²⁷¹ Augustine, *On the Holy Trinity*, V.2.3.

²⁷² “Thus to this highest existence, from which all things that are derive their existence, the only contrary nature is the non-existent. Non-existence is obviously contrary to the existent,” (Augustine, *City of God*, XII.ii).

[God] is, however, without doubt, a substance, or, if it be better so to call it, an essence, which the Greeks call οὐσία... And who is there that is, more than He who said to His servant Moses, "I am that I am;" and, "Thus shall thou say unto the children of Israel, He who is hath sent me unto you?" But other things that are called essences or substances admit of accidents, whereby a change, whether great or small, is produced in them. But there can be no accident of this kind in respect to God; and therefore He who is God is the only unchangeable substance or essence, to whom certainly being itself, whence comes the name of essence, most especially and most truly belongs.²⁷³

In a synthesis of classical philosophy and scriptural revelation, Augustine comes to the conclusion that Being can be said of none other than God.

This identification of Being and the Christian God has the significant consequence of allowing Augustine to incorporate one more essential feature into his definition of Being: Good. Augustine defines Good as that

to which we refer all our actions, which we seek for its own sake, not for any ulterior end, and the attainment of which leaves us nothing more to seek for our happiness. For this reason it is called the 'end'; everything else we desire for the sake of this, this we desire for itself alone. This Good... conveys blessedness...²⁷⁴

It is for the sake of happiness or blessedness that humans seek the Good.

Augustine warns, however, that such happiness is not to be sought in finite goods, "For they go their own way and are no more; and they rend the soul with desires that can destroy it, for... in them is no place of repose, because they do not

²⁷³ Augustine, *On The Holy Trinity*, V.2.3.

²⁷⁴ Augustine, *City of God*, VIII.viii.

abide.”²⁷⁵ Conversely, “A being whose felicity springs from his own goodness, instead of from another’s cannot be wretched, because he cannot lose himself. Thus we say that there is only one unchanging Good; and that is the one true and blessed God.”²⁷⁶ Augustine builds on God’s immutability to identify him as the only object of human endeavor which is up to the task of providing for happiness because it does not pass away. Having identified Being with God, and God with Good, Augustine effectively identifies Being with Good.²⁷⁷

This identification imbues Being itself with value; as such, it imparts a measure of value to all other beings whose existence is contingent upon it: “The things he made are good because they were made by him... Therefore, although they are not supreme goods.... still those mutable goods are of great value,

²⁷⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*, IV.x.15.

²⁷⁶ Augustine, *City of God*, XII.i.

²⁷⁷ Augustine’s association of God and Good is obviously not novel. This move of course owes much to his Neoplatonic heritage. Plato makes this type of identification in the *Timaeus* as does Plotinus in the *Enneads*. See Diana Lobel, *The Quest for God and the Good: World Philosophy as a Living Experience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011) for an outline of the association between God and Good in the above mentioned works as well as several other religious and philosophical traditions. See also, Diana Lobel, “Being and the Good: Maimonides on Ontological Beauty,” *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 19, no. 1 (2011): 1–45, for a discussion of classical sources for the association or identification between Being and the Good. For an argument behind the coincidence of Being, Truth, and Good, see Paul Tillich, “The Two Types of Philosophy of Religion,” in *Theology of Culture* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 14ff.

because they can adhere to the immutable Good, and so attain happiness;"²⁷⁸ As

N. Joseph Torchia explains,

God is the fullness of Being in Whom all creation participates for its existence... In this context, "participation"... connotes a relationship of dependence, whereby created things derive their being from God. Such dependence is complete and thoroughgoing, since creatures are brought into being by God from absolutely nothing. In the Augustinian scheme, then, God provides the ultimate metaphysical standard by which the reality of all creation is measured.²⁷⁹

For Augustine, other than God's Being, there is nothing from which anything can draw existence. He writes, "But apart from You there was no other thing existent to make them of... Therefore it was of nothing that you made heaven and earth."²⁸⁰ Therefore, drawing existence from Goodness itself, "whatever exists in any mode is good: for it is from Him who does not in this or that mode exist but *is* absolutely."²⁸¹ Torchia further comments,

Creatures exist insofar as they were brought into being by God, and tend toward non-being insofar as they differ from their Creator. Likewise, God imparted goodness to creatures, but only in a manner consistent with their limited capacity to share in His perfection. For Augustine, then, the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* not only establishes the ultimate cause of reality; it also defines the character of created reality as good, orderly, and harmonious.²⁸²

²⁷⁸ Augustine, *City of God*, XII.1.

²⁷⁹ Torchia, 112.

²⁸⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, XII.vii.7.

²⁸¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, XIII.xxxi.46.

²⁸² Torchia, 236.

Thus, having been imparted a measure of God's own goodness in creation, the human self, as well as the rest of existence has an innate and established value. For Augustine, creation is given as good. Alternatively, *the goodness of creation is a given.*

Furthermore, Augustine asserts that "Before we were created we didn't deserve any good, and that's why it's a grace by which we were created-because we didn't deserve any good."²⁸³ For Augustine, existence itself appears originally in a state of grace. The self's very existence is an unearned gift of being imparted to it by an other; *the entire created order encountered by the self is not only a given, but a gift.*²⁸⁴ And being a gift, it is entirely possible for the self to accept or reject such a state. It is in humanity's fall from this state of grace, variously understood as an act of rejection, inversion, and nihilation, that the Negating Self first appears.

²⁸³ Augustine, *Sermo XXVI.12*: CC xli, 356-357: as cited in Torchia, 239.

²⁸⁴ "In ontological terms, creation itself constitutes a grace or unmerited gift of an existence that we do not deserve." Torchia, 239.

Good, given, gift, grace. If it seems as if I am playing fast and loose with the interchangeability of these terms, it is because I am. Because for Augustine, they were in fact interchangeable. The goods established by God in creation—determinate objects, free wills, and their relationships— were given, in the sense of a gift and in the sense of established fact. Both senses indicate decidedly that the world comes from a source outside of and other than the self; the identification with Good seeks to emphasize that this can be understood as a desirable condition, rather than one which necessarily produces angst.

Failure is a Clue to Understanding Freedom

The above analysis draws a parallel between Being/Non-Being and creator/creation. In her article “Augustine and Grace *Ex Nihilo*,” Susannah Ticciati finds that Augustine's work also draws an “implicit analogy” between creator/creation and grace/free choice.²⁸⁵ Although the self is gifted with the goodness of creation, it maintains the possibility of rejecting what it has been given. Exploring this possibility, we find that we have reached the central issue at stake in the appearance of the Negating Self: freedom. As David C. Schindler notes, many interpretations of Augustine’s notion of free will suggest that “Augustine would have anticipated by more than a thousand years Jean-Paul Sartre’s assertion, ‘My freedom... is the very stuff of my being.’”²⁸⁶ Schindler himself, however, argues that due precisely to differences in their understandings in the relationship between Being and Good, the conception of freedom in each thinker’s model is radically different. Consequently, although observations they make about the characteristics of the Negating Self are similar, the implications they draw from these observations are not.

²⁸⁵ Susannah Ticciati, “Augustine and Grace *Ex Nihilo*: The Logic of Augustine’s Response to the Monks of Hadrumetum and Marseilles,” *Augustinian Studies* 41:2 (2010), 403.

²⁸⁶ David C. Schindler, “Freedom Beyond Our Choosing: Augustine on the Will and Its Objects,” in *Augustine and Politics*, ed. John Doody, Kevin L. Hughes, and Kim Paffenroth (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005), 69.

Schindler notes that in the traditional modern view, as in that exemplified by Sartre, to have a free will is to have “the freedom to choose in a way that is not determined by anything outside my control... the will... is not determined by any external factors. Only the will can determine itself to choose.”²⁸⁷ “The will is, in other words, the autonomous power of choice, and thus ultimately accountable only to itself.”²⁸⁸ And while many find support for such a definition in Augustine’s work,²⁸⁹ Schindler notes that it is an incomplete rendering of Augustine’s understanding of the structure and function of the will; it is in direct conflict with “Augustine’s consistent affirmation of the will’s having an intrinsic nature that inclines it—prior to any choice—to seek fulfillment in what it believes to be good.”²⁹⁰

According to Augustine, the direction of the will is always intentional ²⁹¹—that is, it is always already acting in relation to something outside itself. As he puts it in his famous metaphor,

A body tends by its weight toward the place proper to it... Fire tends upwards, stone downwards... my weight is my love: wherever I go, my love is what brings me there. By Your Gift we are on fire and borne

²⁸⁷ Thomas Williams as cited in Schindler, 69.

²⁸⁸ Schindler, 68.

²⁸⁹ See Schindler 67-70 for several examples.

²⁹⁰ Schindler, 70.

²⁹¹ Schindler, 76.

upwards... there our good will shall place us so that we shall desire nothing but to remain there forever.²⁹²

Or more directly,

In fact, [emotions] all are essentially an act of will. For what is desire or joy but an act of will in agreement with what we wish for? And what is fear or grief but an act of will in disagreement with what we reject?... in general, a man's will is attracted or repelled in accordance with the varied character of different objects which are pursued or shunned... For this reason, a man who lives by God's standards must be a lover of the good...²⁹³

The direction of the will's choice and mode of its expression are determined by the pull or repulsion of its object.

There are two implications of understanding the relationship between the will and its object in this way. The first is that this necessary bond between the will and the object of its desire is the basis for understanding choice as rational. The perceived good of the object gives the will the reason for its choice—*before* the decision to pursue the object is made. This structure is in direct contradiction to a model of the will in which freedom entails no necessary relationship, or indifference, to its object before it makes its choice.²⁹⁴ "If choice is free precisely

²⁹² Augustine, *Confessions*, XIII.ix.10.

²⁹³ Augustine, *City of God*, XIV.6.

²⁹⁴ See Michael Hanby, "Augustine and Descartes: An Overlooked Story in the History of Modern Origins," *Modern Theology*, 19:4(2003): 455-482 for a discussion of the very un-Augustinian disjunction between will and desire in stoic theories of the agency which made their way through the Pelagian controversy and found their way into Descartes and the modern notion of the self. For a related critique, see the discussion of Merleau-Ponty's critique

insofar as it is not determined by something outside of itself, then it finds its freedom only in independence from reason."²⁹⁵ If there is no necessary relationship between the will and its object, then freedom becomes completely indeterminate and choices must be understood as being arbitrary. Under such a construct, to preserve the spontaneity of the will one renders it with the same amount of agency as a choice left up to a flip of a coin. In such a system reason "becomes rationalistic or mechanistic, that is, something which bears no intrinsic relation to freedom."²⁹⁶ In contrast, Augustine's understanding of the will as having a necessary relation to its object preserves an integrity between the will and reason and, more generally, between the self and the world in which it makes its choices.²⁹⁷

The second implication is based on the fact that for Augustine, the intentional nature or structure of the will is not only such that it is directed at

of the disjunction in Sartre's idea of freedom between actions and consequences in Chapter 10 of Jon Stewart, *Idealism and Existentialism: Hegel and Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Philosophy* (London; New York: Continuum, 2010), 205-207.

²⁹⁵ Schindler, 71.

²⁹⁶ Schindler, 71. To further clarify, Schindler's comment that the operation of the will here bears "no intrinsic relation to freedom," is because, under this construct, one's actions would not be an expression of their own desires—a condition that we typically identify with freedom.

²⁹⁷ For further explication of the relationship between Augustine's understanding of the relationship between a good will and reason, see Mathewes, "Augustinian Anthropology," 204-206.

some object other than itself, but also that this object is taken to be a “good.”²⁹⁸ As

Schindler explains,

to say that something is a “good” is to say that it is an *end*: that wherein the will’s activity comes to rest. For Augustine, we enjoy a good precisely because it presents itself as an end... But if this is the case, then unless there exists some good that is good in an absolute sense, that is, good in itself, as an ultimate end, there can be no goods even in a relative sense.²⁹⁹

Importantly, according to Augustine’s understanding, the good toward which the will is directed is not one which it merely chooses. All objects of the will are subject to an order established by an ultimate Good.³⁰⁰ Furthermore, for the will to be good, that is, to function properly, it must evaluate and value its objects in their proper proportion and for their proper purpose—the ultimate purpose, as mentioned above, being beatitude or enduring happiness. Schindler summarizes

Augustine’s understanding of the will’s freedom as follows:

First, as human beings we cannot live without willing and therefore loving... Second, it is impossible to will without seeking happiness... third, we cannot therefore will without binding ourselves to something outside of ourselves... Fourth, to the extent to which we bind ourselves to what is “lower” than us (i.e. purely material things), we compromise our

²⁹⁸ For a precursor of this line of thought see Socrates’ speech in Plato’s *Symposium*.

²⁹⁹ Schindler, 73

³⁰⁰ “The goods which command our awe must also function in some sense as standards for us... My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose.” (Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 20, 27.)

freedom, thus pledging ourselves to a “voluntary abandonment of highest being, and toil among inferior beings which is not voluntary.”³⁰¹

A free will is one that conforms to the given order. To try to create one’s own order is by definition to disorder and therefore to entangle the will, not free it.³⁰²

But if the will is structured in this way, can we still understand it as really being “free”? What is at stake here is the structure of the relationship between the self’s freedom and a determinate source of value founded outside the self. “If the will always acts under some representation of some good, we may say that each of its acts is not the *ex nihilo* creation of values, but always an act of consent to something that precedes it.”³⁰³ The question as it is traditionally framed leads to an impasse: in order to be free, the self must reject any external basis for its choices; but in order to be good, the self must conform its choices to the order given by God. For Augustine, however, this framing betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of the relationship between the will and the Good as well as a faulty definition of freedom.

³⁰¹ Schindler, 79.

³⁰² According to Augustine, “The fact is that man was created right, on the condition that he should live by the standard of his creator, not by his own, carrying out not his own will, but his creator’s. Falsehood consists in not living in the way for which he was created” (*City of God*, XIV.4).

³⁰³ Schindler, 81.

Augustine gives us an intriguing example of the relationship he assumes in his argument for the existence of Good from the experience of its lack. Exploring some of the assumptions underlying Augustine's argument we will find in his observations of human failure the basis for an alternative understanding of freedom. In a move that strikes me as counterintuitive, Augustine asserts that the human understanding of perversion, and consequently privation, itself serves to establish the reality of Goodness. Rather than arguing from what *is* to something else that is, Augustine, like Sartre, argues from what *is not* to what is.³⁰⁴ Unlike Sartre, however, Augustine asserts that the human experience of lack confirms the existence of wholeness. He argues,

any perversion does harm to nature, which means that it is contrary to nature. Therefore it is not by nature but by a perversion that the rebellious creation differs from the good, which adheres to God; yet even this perversion shows how great and honorable is the nature itself. For if we are right to condemn the perversion, that shows without doubt that the nature is honourable, since what justifies the condemnation of the perversion is that the perversion disgraces a nature which deserves

³⁰⁴ While one may argue that Augustine can only identify, for example, blindness, as a privation because he has also already experienced sight, it is not the empirical experience of both states that is at stake in this argument. The argument itself can be seen as circular, interpreting the data based on its assumptions about their meaning. But it is precisely the assumptions rather than the validity of the argument in which I am interested. The assumptions that allow him to make the argument betray an orientation that is specifically not value-neutral; and this is not due to utilitarian or practical concerns, but to moral ones.

honour. We call blindness a fault in the eyes, and that shows that it is of the nature of the eyes to see.³⁰⁵

In this argument what we find is an underlying attitude of consent and an assumption of a larger context for what he observes. Rather than interpreting experiences of privation as the brute fact, Augustine interprets them specifically as a perversion from a good. And this good is not only intended by God, but also obtains by inhering in God. Augustine's adherence to the idea of an original ordering of the creation toward the Good leads him to interpret experiences of failure as indicators of the possibility of fulfillment. Consequently, if the will, created like everything else, is originally ordered towards the Good, and its inherent function is to bind the self to the object of its desire, then the fulfillment of its freedom, rather than simply the indifferent power to choose, would be the ability to bind oneself to the Good.

Schindler suggests this very notion of consent as the way forward through the original impasse. He notes that the word comes from the Latin *con-sentire*, to perceive *with* an other.³⁰⁶ The key here is a reorganization of the relation between the will and what is external to it. Rather than a structure in which the will stands in a state of neutrality to the object before the choice, and consent is

³⁰⁵ Augustine, *City of God*, XII.1.

³⁰⁶ Schindler, 80.

admittance based on a choice independent of either desire or intellect, consent here makes room for understanding dependence as inherent to the structure of the will.

“To consent to the calling of God or to refuse it belongs to our own will: which, so far from conflicting with the text *What hast thou which thou hast not received?*, does even confirm it. For the soul cannot receive and possess the gift there spoken of but by consenting. *What* the soul is to possess, *what* it is to receive, pertains to God: the receiving and possessing necessarily to him who receives and possesses.”³⁰⁷ As this passage confirms, consent is something one *gives*, i.e., it is an act that originates from the consentor; and yet the very same act is somehow *received* from God, and therefore originates from a source beyond the consentor... “consent is a gift.”^{308, 309}

In Augustine’s view, consent is not something that the will does alone, but is essentially a “co-act,” that is a single act that is constituted by two irreducibly distinct “agencies,” namely, the good’s activity of determination and the will’s spontaneous act of allowing itself to be determined. While these activities are different from one another, they are nevertheless inseparable.³¹⁰

Independence, detachment, and indifference have no place in such an understanding of freedom. What Schindler highlights is that, for Augustine, if a free will is to achieve its purpose at all, that being to bind the self to the object of

³⁰⁷ Augustine, *De spiritu et litterata*, as cited in Schindler, 80.

³⁰⁸ Schindler, 80-81.

³⁰⁹ “According to this view, ‘will power’ is a gift. The will’s own impetus arises, not first from the will itself, but from the good to which the will consents: ‘for the strength of our will to anything is proportionate to the certainty of our knowledge of its goodness, and our ardor of our delight in it (Augustine, *De peccatorum meritis et remissione*, 2.26),’” (Schindler, 83). For the fallen will, even its ability to cling to the good comes from a strength imparted by the good, and not simply from the self. Consent or will power are gifts because they are given to self, not sourced from within it.

³¹⁰ Schindler, 82.

its desire, it must consent to the radical integration of the activity of an other into its own work.

Ticciati's work also argues for dependence as being a fundamental factor in Augustine's understanding of a free will; but what is highlighted here is that, rather than an obstacle to it, the other becomes the context which enables the self to enact its freedom. According to her analysis, rather than one force acting on another from without, Augustine's understanding of the relation between God's grace and the self's free will expresses an

asymmetric, but complementary, relation of absolute dependence between human and divine agency... God is not a finite cause which controls the human being from without, taking away its freedom, but an "infinite cause" which brings about not only the human will but also its entire context. There is nothing outside divine agency, and therefore nothing for God to impose himself on from without. God's work is not oppressive but life-giving, bringing life into existence in the first place.³¹¹

Her analysis of the difference between the logic of the Augustinian structure and the traditional modern view is insightful and worth quoting at length:

[Augustine shows that] a grace which pervades every last corner of a human being's life is precisely a grace which allows for a fullest celebration of free choice. What he achieves by doing so is the articulation of a logic that is specific to divine agency... [in contrast to] a creaturely logic. Finite agents jostle together, fighting for and finding space alongside one another, sometimes finding ways to work together in mutually enhancing ways, and sometimes pulling in opposite directions. But, however they choose to interact there will always be the possibility

³¹¹ Ticciati, 410-411.

of conflict, or of domination of one by the other. For they operate relatively independently of one another within the same space. If it is thought, in keeping with such a dynamic, that in order to interact with human beings God must enter the playing field and jostle for his own space alongside them, making sure he does not become too dominant, leaving his fellow players free to do their bit, then has not God been pared down to human size? Is God not being treated as a creature? Augustine certainly thought so, arguing for a very different logic according to which it is nonsense to speak of God being too dominant, because God's activity is to give life to the human being. Conversely, a human being cannot be too dependent on God, since this dependence is its life-line. Thus, whereas in the creaturely sphere absolute dependence and liberty are incompatible, in relation to God they go together. The two logics are non-interchangeable.

Just as God gives the self its very being, he gives the will its entire context and structure for acting; freedom here is the fulfilment of accepting what was originally given rather than attempting to generate one's own good *ex nihilo*—something only God can do anyway.

In the traditional discussion of the tension in Augustine's work, grace is often understood as an act of God's agency which violates the self's freedom to accept or reject the Good he offers. Any direction of the will by something other than the self is automatically seen as coercion. Schindler and Ticciati,³¹² however,

³¹² Both Schindler and Ticciati note that Augustine's arguments for the scope and function of grace are not entirely consistent across his works. There are contradictions and variations in emphasis on the freedom of human will or irresistibility of God's agency depending on the particular problem at hand at times negating in one work gains he had made in another. Both offer attempts at remedying these logical inconsistencies by highlighting his alternative view of freedom. But it is not so much the logical consistency of Augustine's system with which I am concerned as with this particular feature of its structure:

help uncover an Augustinian paradigm in which the other is a vehicle for the self to reach its goal rather than a roadblock. Rather than defining freedom in such a way as to necessitate opposition between the self and anything external to it, Augustine recognizes that the self can only be understood to make rational choices if those choices are anchored within the context of a system that will lead to its fulfillment. Having a determinate goal is not in conflict with freedom, but is what gives freedom its character. In contrast to a view in which determination implies closure and requires rejection and opposition, the elaboration of consent and context opens the possibility of determination leading to common ground.

Nothing Causes the Fall

One of the most trenchant objections to Augustine's assertions that an entirely good God causes an entirely good creation to appear out of nothing is that it leaves no room for the cause of evil. If a God, whose being is identified entirely with positivity, produces a creation of definite goods, including the human will, then what causes such a will to turn away from such goodness? Augustine's reply: Nothing. God causes good, but nothing causes evil. Nothing causes the Fall.

what is consistent across all his works is the understanding of the will as ordered to an externally established good.

There are two points of emphasis in Augustine's answer. The first is that *nothing* causes the Fall. The will's ability to turn from the source of its good is due to its origin in nothing. For, as he puts it, "only a nature created out of nothing could have been distorted by a fault. Consequently, although the will derives its existence, as a nature, from its creation by God, its falling away from its true being is due to its creation out of nothing."³¹³ Non-being, being the only possible contrary to God,³¹⁴ is also contrary to Good; for, "evil has no being of its own but is only an absence of good, so that it simply is not."³¹⁵ The non-being that is an inherent part of the self's composition bleeds its character into creation through the activity of the will in its choice to negate rather than adhere to the Good from which it draws being.

The second point of emphasis in Augustine's response is that nothing *causes* the Fall; that is, the self's choice to turn away from its highest good is fundamentally inexplicable. As such it has no reason and no cause. The inexplicability comes from the fact that this turning is, as such, a dislocation from reasons or telos. As discussed above, a good will is one which works to bind

³¹³ Augustine, *City of God*, XIV.13.

³¹⁴ "Thus to this highest existence, from which all things that are derive their existence, the only contrary nature is the non-existent. Non-existence is obviously contrary to the existent," (Augustine, *City of God*, XII.ii).

³¹⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*, III.vii.12.

itself to the good which attracts it. An evil will, on the contrary, is a *failure* to move toward its good. Far from being a robustly determined expression of agency, the choice to sin is specifically the result of an *underdetermined* will. It is the activity of a will which does not allow its good to be its cause. Augustine argues,

There is then no efficient natural or (if we may so call it) 'essential' cause of evil choice, since the evil of mutable spirits arises from the evil choice itself, and that evil diminishes or corrupts the goodness of nature. And this evil choice consists solely in falling away from God and deserting him, a defection whose cause is deficient, in the sense of being wanting—for there is no cause.³¹⁶

For Augustine, the self's turning away from God is a *perversion from Being* and, as such, results in a *privation of being*. While the self has its source in God, the act of negation has no comprehensible source or cause. It is, precisely, a negation of its cause. Charles T. Matthews' comments further delineate the relation between incomprehensibility and the negation:

Augustine's faith that the world, as God created it, is good allows him to make two basic claims about our present state of disintegration—one about its cause and one about its cure. First, the introduction of evil into a wholly good creation is fundamentally a negative act—ontologically privational and hence intellectually incomprehensible. That such an act is, strictly speaking, inexplicable need not, however, render it incredible; rather, it tells us something about the nature of wicked acts themselves. They are, at heart, purely negative, a nay-saying to the world, and they

³¹⁶ Augustine, *City of God*, XII.9.

are, thereby, ultimately unthinkable. Such acts are done not simply out of bad reasons, but rather out of no reasons at all.³¹⁷

Mathewes' comments further highlight that within a scheme in which existence itself is identified with Good, any move to undermine its integrity is not only a move of negation, it is exactly what we typically identify as evil or wickedness. It is at the same time without reason or cause because it is at its heart the rejection of the sovereignty of Cause.

Augustine's assertion that the human experience of negation and opposition is due to a defect in the will stemming from nothingness is significant. His model offers a basis for the reversal of the modernist identification of freedom and negation. Rather than a positive act of freedom, Augustine would agree with the assertion that "The choice of evil is a *lack* of the spontaneity that receptive adherence to the good requires... sin is a *result* of freedom without being the *expression* of freedom."³¹⁸ That is to say acts and attitudes of negation, specifically those that undermine the existence or beatitude of the other are, by definition, moves which entail an abdication of freedom rather than a realization of it.

³¹⁷ Mathewes, "Augustinian Anthropology," 204.

³¹⁸ Schindler, 87-88. Emphasis added on "lack."

THE MODES OF NEGATION

Having outlined the context into which Augustine understands the self to be created and from which it falls, we are now in a better position to explore the appearance and operation of the Negating Self in that fall. It is here that we uncover the dynamics of how the originally graced self becomes the self we encounter in common human experience. In his explication of the Fall, Mathews aptly comments that “Sin is the perverse manifestation of our godlike faculty of freedom, the *ex nihilo* that stays *nihilum*.”³¹⁹ In this section we will explore the dynamics of the Negating Self which effect this hallmark of “staying *nihilum*.” The three modes of negation—rejection, inversion, and nihilation—are all featured in Augustine’s explication of the appearance of evil in human experience. While the dynamics can each be identified separately, they are all integral aspects of the same move away from Being and the Good. Augustine’s characterization of each as part of his analysis of the fallen self reveals not only the mechanics of negation, but also the fundamental disintegration in human experience which comes as consequences of identifying freedom with negation.

³¹⁹ Mathewes, “Augustinian Anthropology,” 205.

Rejection: Dis-integration from the Other

For Augustine, the Negating Self appears not originally with the self's creation, but with its rejection or turning away from the goodness of the order into which it was originally created. Augustine writes, that in their Fall, human selves set themselves in opposition to God's sovereignty, but that this is "not by nature, but by their perversion... They are his enemies because of their will to resist him."³²⁰ He explains further that "it is a perverse kind of exaltation to abandon the basis on which the mind should be firmly fixed... when [a man] deserts that changeless Good in which...he ought to have found his satisfaction."³²¹ To make explicit an idea that was only obliquely indicated above, what Augustine characterizes as perversion, we can also characterize as negation. Perversion is, by one common definition, "the alteration of something from its original course, meaning, or state to a distortion or corruption of what was first intended."³²² In this definition, as well as in Augustine's own descriptions of the self's activities of resisting, abandoning, and deserting, we find both an assertion of the original goodness of the self's existence through God's Being and its choice to turn away from that Being and its established good.

³²⁰ Augustine, *City of God*, XII.3.

³²¹ Augustine, *City of God*, XIV.13.

³²² <https://www.google.com/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=definition%20perversion>.

“For when the will leaves the higher and turns to the lower, it becomes bad not because the thing to which it turns is bad, but because the turning itself is perverse.”³²³

In what he identifies as humanity’s Fall, Augustine locates a movement of the will which seeks to dislodge itself from the context which not only preserves its own good, but also the good of the entire created order. He exclaims to God,

You have made all things good, and that there are no substances not made by you. And because all things You have made are not equal, they have a goodness [over and above] as a totality: because they are good individually, and they are very good altogether, for our God has made all things very good.³²⁴

The self’s highest good can only be realized in maintaining the common good. In its rejection of the priority established by the supremacy of God’s own Being, the Negating Self has “fallen away from that Supreme Good which is common to all, which brings felicity, and [it has] devoted [itself] to [its] own ends. [It has] chosen... the spirit of faction instead of unity in love.”³²⁵ As Burns comments, the movement away from God, is a movement which “serves only to measure the distance of the creature's fall into an imagined independence and away from...

³²³ Augustine, *City of God*, XII.6.

³²⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, VII.xii.18.

³²⁵ Augustine, *City of God*, XII.1. Here Augustine is speaking specifically of angels, but the same applies to humans or all rational created beings.

the Good common to all.”³²⁶ Importantly here, the independence the self seeks in the distance created by the will’s movement is imagined. It is a misguided move toward independence that does not obtain. To “be” at all is to participate in the Being of God imparted to all. The created order is a whole; distance cannot create independence, but only a tear in the fabric of creation that moves to pull it apart. For, as Augustine sees it, “man is social by nature and quarrelsome by perversion;”³²⁷ thus, the rejection of the Good established by God necessarily devolves into a rejection of the good of one’s fellow creature and the disintegration of the goodness of the relation that obtains between them all. More simply put, the negation of the divine other necessarily devolves into a negation of the human other as well.

Inversion: Self-Assertion

The above section highlighted how Augustine’s concept of perversion could be understood as expressing the Negating Self’s first mode of operation: rejection; this section will detail how his analysis of human pride expresses its second mode: inversion. According to Augustine, pride is the

³²⁶ J. Patout Burns, “Augustine on the Origin and Progress of Evil,” *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, Vol. 16 (1) (Spring, 1988): 25.

³²⁷ Augustine, *City of God*, XII.28.

the start of the evil will[.] For 'pride is the start of every kind of sin.'³²⁸
And what is pride but a perverse kind of exaltation? For it is a perverse
kind of exaltation to abandon the basis on which the mind should be
firmly fixed, and to become, as it were, based on oneself, and so remain.³²⁹

Above I cited part of this passage to highlight the dynamic of rejection present in Augustine's characterization of the Fall; by expanding the citation here we find that Augustine's understanding of the Fall also includes another inherent dimension: the Being *rejected* by the Negating Self is also *replaced* by the Negating Self. In what Augustine identifies as pride, we find not simply an overestimation of self-worth, but rather a fundamental reordering of priorities whereby the self not only rejects the order set by God, but asserts itself as the source of its own order.

There are two examples which will help illustrate the relationship between negation and inversion that Augustine's analysis of pride exemplifies. The first is a mathematical inverse: $\left(\frac{1}{\theta}\right)^{-1} = \frac{\theta}{1}$. What we see here is that when we raise a ratio of part to whole to a negative power, the relation becomes inverted.

³²⁸ Augustine's characterization of pride as the "start" of the evil will should not be taken to indicate a view that sin has an efficient cause or source. As Babcock notes, For Augustine, "pride does not 'cause' the first evil will, but simply describes its *character*... for Augustine, pride is not the 'cause' of the first evil will, but rather its *content*, taking oneself rather than God as the center and principle of one's existence." William S. Babcock, "Augustine on Sin and Moral Agency," *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, 16:1 (Spring, 1988): 52, fn. 16 (*emphasis added*).

³²⁹ Augustine, *City of God*, XIV.13.

The part now serves as the indicator of the whole. Or more aptly, the individual element takes the place of what served as the shared or common factor. What was itself relative becomes the basis for the relation.³³⁰

For Augustine, this is exactly the inversion that pride effects; he writes, "...in pride [they] made themselves their own ground..."³³¹ Pushing the example of the equation a step further, we see that $\frac{\theta}{1} = \Theta$; that is the self has taken the place of God. The self, created from nothing, has no power that is truly its own other than negation.³³² In usurping God's priority it is, precisely, raising itself by a negative power.

Augustine continues his comments from the above passage saying, "... By aiming at more, a man is diminished, when he elects to be self-sufficient and defects from the one who is really sufficient for him."³³³ In pride the self seeks to be the source of its own good; it is an act of self-assertion which seeks to insert itself into the other's place in such a way that the other is effectively eclipsed.

³³⁰ As we will see in the second half of this chapter, this inverted form of relation between self and other is precisely the one which Sartre understands as being most fundamental: "I am both one of the terms of the relation and the relation itself." (BN, 794)

³³¹ Augustine, *City of God*, XIV.13.

³³² "For what do you have that you did not receive?" I Corinthians 4:7. This verse repeatedly cited by Augustine in his arguments on grace (See for example, *On Grace and Free Will*, 6.15 and *On Reprimand and Grace*, 9.21 in *Augustine: On the Free Choice of the Will, On Grace and Free Choice, and Other Writings*, trans. & ed. Peter King (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

³³³ Augustine, *City of God*, XIV.13.

Pride, by inciting the self to consider itself as the greater part of the relation, destroys the very basis of the relation.³³⁴

The second illustration of negation in the mode of inversion is that of a photographic negative. Such an image inverts the original relation between areas of light and dark. What is black in the original image is white in the inversion. Areas originally prominent recede into obscurity, and vice-versa. The negative image results because the medium which receives the image, counterintuitively, registers light as dark and dark as light. Thus the value assigned to light and dark in the image is inverted.

It seems that Augustine would accept this as an apt illustration of the dynamic undertaken by the Negating Self. Augustine's own characterization of pride continues in the same section as the above citation saying, "This then is the original evil: man regards himself as his own light, and turns away from that light which would make man himself a light if he would set his heart on it."³³⁵ Again we find that pride's characteristic feature consists in the self's setting itself

³³⁴ It may be worth noting that the dynamic outlined above maps directly onto the process for the creation of the Cartesian self discussed in Chapter 1, Section "Cartesian Detours." From an Augustinian perspective, the primary motivating factor in the creation of the modern self is an attitude of pride.

³³⁵ Augustine, *City of God*, XIV.13.

in the place of God—taking itself to be its own source of value rather than depending on an other to determine the scale.

Augustine’s final assessment of the inverting dynamic of pride can be summarized as follows:

For sin only happens by an act of will; and our will is for our own welfare, or for the avoidance of misfortune. And hence the falsehood: we commit sin to promote our welfare, and it results instead in our misfortune; or we sin to increase our welfare, and the result is rather to increase our misfortune. What is the reason for this, except that well-being can only come to man from God, not from himself? And he forsakes God by sinning, and he sins by living by his own standard.³³⁶

The entire aim of the inversion is a promotion of the self. But as noted above, it operates on a scale of displaced values. It is an attempt at self-affirmation—the promotion of its welfare—that ends up leading to its misfortune. So rather than affirmation it ends up being merely an act of self-assertion. The affirmation is never accomplished; nor can it be because the source of the self’s positivity has been replaced and eclipsed by a self that cannot sustain itself on its own. And having replaced and eclipsed the other who was present in the original relation, the Negating Self finds itself alone. Augustine’s *Confessions* encapsulates this result of pride with this vivid description: “I was separated from you by my own

³³⁶ Augustine, *City of God*, XIV.4.

swollenness, as though my cheeks had swelled out and closed up my eyes."³³⁷

And even more concisely summarizing the result of the Negating Self's rejecting and inverting dynamics he writes, "...the punishment for the pride of my soul: I departed further from you and you left me to myself..."³³⁸

Falling To Nothing: Self-Negation

The final mode of the negation enacted by the Negating Self is nihilation, or, here, self-negation. In this section I want to highlight or make explicit a few details that have already been implied in the analysis above. The first point is rather straightforward: for Augustine, the negative consequences of the Fall from Being are not just relational, they are ontological. Augustine makes his stance clear in the following passage:

only a nature created out of nothing could have been distorted by a fault. Consequently, although the will derives its existence, as a nature, from its creation by God, its falling away from its true being is due to its creation out of nothing. Yet man did not fall away to the extent of losing all being; but when he had turned towards himself, his being was less real than when he adhered to him who exists in a supreme degree. *And so, to abandon God and to exist in oneself, that is to please oneself, is not immediately to lose all being; but it is to come nearer to nothingness.*³³⁹

For Augustine, the self exists only by making a transition from nothing to something; from non-being to being. Mutability is essential to it. As such it is

³³⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, VII.vii.11.

³³⁸ Augustine, *Confessions*, II.ii.2.

³³⁹ Augustine, *City of God*, XIV.13. *Emphasis added.*

vulnerable to return to the nothingness out of which it came.³⁴⁰ Deviating from direction in which it was created to focus, the self negates its *raison d'être* and a portion of that "*être*" itself. As Augustine sees it, in its rejection of the priority of God's Being, the self effects a negation in its own being as well. Created good, it has been infiltrated by evil; having been called into being by Being, it has turned away and moves back toward Non-being. To be clear, Augustine's assertion that the self is created *ex nihilo* does not indicate that nothingness or negation is constitutive of its being. Rather, creation *ex nihilo* is precisely the condition for the possibility of its *non-being*. For Augustine, the self's "true being" is that given to it by God. Augustine's assertion that the self becomes "less real" when it falls is an indication that the negating activity of the self is precisely a *disintegration* of the being integrated in God's creation.

And as we have seen above, the disintegration enacted by the Negating Self is comprehensive. In every mode of negation we find a move that originates from the self alone, seeks to assert the self alone, and finally leaves the self alone. Instead of working with and through the other to maintain the integrity of all of

³⁴⁰ "For although God fashioned man from the dust of the earth, the earth itself and all earthly matter are derived from nothing at all; and when man was made, God gave to his body a soul which was created out of nothing." (Augustine, *City of God*, XIV.11)

creation, the activity of the Negating Self is an assertion of self that results in disintegration of the self and its relation to the other.

AUGUSTINE'S AFFIRMATION OF NEGATION

Because Augustine does not see negation as being the original or fundamental mode of the self's existence, he seeks to uncover a paradigm under which the Negating Self can recover its original mode of existence. Rather than one in which the Negating Self's acts of self-assertion result in the negation of self and other, Augustine presents a process of *self*-negation which results in the affirmation of both self and other. For Augustine, there is a conversion that corrects the inversion created by pride and promotes cohesion rather than disintegration. Taking a cue from the description of his own experience, we see that for Augustine, the key to such conversion is in the exhortation to "put... on the Lord Jesus Christ."³⁴¹ Augustine would agree wholeheartedly with Sartre's assessment that, in the mode of negation, "The passion of man is the reverse of that of Christ, for man loses himself as man in order that God may be born."³⁴²

³⁴¹ "I snatched it up and... in silence read the passage upon which my eyes first fell...I had no wish to read further and no need." Augustine, *Confessions*, VIII.xii.29. See David K. Naugle, "St. Augustine's Concept of Disordered Love and its Contemporary Application," paper given at Southwest Commission on Religious Studies Theology and Philosophy of Religion Group, March 12, 1993, p.15.

³⁴² Sartre, *BN*, 784.

But it is precisely in Christ's humility that Augustine sees the pattern according to which humanity may regain its original status.

Throughout *Confessions* Book VII, leading up to his spiritual conversion in Book VIII, Augustine compares what he had learned about the true nature of existence from the "books of the Platonists" to what they had failed to teach him.

Now that I had read the books of the Platonists and had been set by them toward a search for truth that was incorporeal... I talked away as if I knew a great deal; but if I had not sought the way to you in Christ our Savior, I would have come not to instruction but to destruction. For I had begun to wish to appear wise, and this indeed was the fullness of my punishment; and I... was badly puffed up with my knowledge. Where was that charity which builds us upon the foundation of humility, which is Christ Jesus? Or when would these books have taught me that?³⁴³

While Neoplatonic writings taught him to look inward to find an incorporeal Good which surpassed all others,³⁴⁴ the teaching of fundamental identity between God and self also instilled in him a sense of pride and self-sufficiency.³⁴⁵

The description of his inner struggle in Book VIII reveals that he sought to achieve the continence he desired through an assertion of his own will, denying

³⁴³ Augustine, *Confessions*, VII.xx.26.

³⁴⁴ See the discussion of Augustine and Plotinus in Chapter 2.

³⁴⁵ Starnes highlights Augustine's juxtaposition of Platonism and Christianity as a juxtaposition of pride and humility. "Augustine insists from the first that while the Platonists do have the true idea of God, this idea, taken by itself, merely serves human pride... This is the point of the chapter's repeated antiphony between the things he read in these books... and the things he did not read there... He places this antithesis before us at the very beginning of his discussion and we must recognize it from the outset if we are to understand the distinction which he draws between Platonism and Christianity, between pride and humility," (Starnes, 183-184).

(or negating) the force of the temptations of the corporeal goods which drew and dispersed his deepest affections. But he finds that self-assertion cannot accomplish his goal.

Alternatively, in the teachings of Christianity he finds that

*the Son, being in the form of the Father thought it not robbery to be equal with God because by nature he was God... He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant... He humbled Himself becoming obedient unto death... for which cause God also hath exalted Him from the dead and given Him a name which is above all names...that every tongue should confess that the Lord Jesus is in the glory of God the Father."*³⁴⁶

Commenting on the example of Christ, Augustine writes that in his pride, he "did not know what lesson His embracing of our weakness was to teach," but found that Christ,

towering above the highest parts of ... creation, lifts up to himself those who were cast down. He built for himself here a lowly house of our clay, that by it He might bring down from themselves and bring up to Himself those who were being made subject, healing the swollenness of their pride and fostering their love; so that their self-confidence might grow no further but rather diminish; seeing the deity at their feet, humbled by the assumption of our coat of human nature: to the end that weary at last they might cast themselves down upon his humanity and rise again in its rising.³⁴⁷

Christ surrenders his claim to self-sufficiency as God. Instead he becomes human and subjects himself to humiliation for the sake of healing others. As a result he

³⁴⁶ Philippians 2:6-11 as cited by Augustine in *Confessions* VII.ix.14.

³⁴⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, VII.xviii.24.

regains his status as deity as well the affirmation of his deity by both his Father as well as all creation. Furthermore, he is able to restore humanity to its original glory. By surrendering self *for* other Christ reclaims the integrity of both self *and* other.

In light of Christ's example, Augustine highlights the following challenge to a prideful stance:

Why do you stand on yourself and so not stand at all? Cast yourself upon [Christ] and be not afraid. He will not draw away and let you fall. Cast yourself without fear. He will receive you and heal you.³⁴⁸

There are four key aspects to the response that Christ's example engenders for Augustine. The first is the realization that asserting or maintaining self-sufficiency is not the most effective approach to fulfillment. Christ's humility serves as a foil for the fallen self's *self*-confidence. Christ takes the form of a servant, a vocation in which one's entire purpose is to fulfil someone else's desires. Thus in the call to "put on Christ," the self is called to allow an other to be the source of its fulfilment and affirmation rather than being its own source of self-actualization. Thus the self must agree to receive as the substance of its identity something of which it is in no way the source. Augustine wants to emphasize that a converted self has no basis to, "*so glory as if he had not received...*

³⁴⁸ Augustine, *Confessions*, VIII.xi.27.

*for what has he that he has not received?"*³⁴⁹ Not only is this a call to humility but a challenge to embrace dependence rather than independence as fundamental mode of self-fulfillment.

This brings us to the second aspect of the response, which is receptivity. In Christ's promise to heal and receive him Augustine finds the echo of the Father's acceptance of the Son's sacrifice, as is evidenced by His raising Christ from the dead and incorporating Him into His own glory. As the Father received, so will the Son; and because there is that assurance of reception, Augustine calls his reader to be emboldened to follow suit as well. But the flip side of being received by Christ is, of course, receiving Christ. To "put on Christ" is to accept Christ's actions as his own. Up until his conversion Augustine has found it impossible to achieve the integrity of will he so desperately desired.³⁵⁰ But finally he finds that if he *casts* himself down, he will "rise again in Christ's rising." Augustine's analysis emphasizes that one *must give* to be received and one *must receive* to be healed.

And so we come to the third aspect of Augustine's emphasis on the call to "put on Christ": healing. According to Augustine's commentary, the ultimate

³⁴⁹ Augustine, *Confessions*, VII.xxi.27.

³⁵⁰ See Augustine, *Confessions*, VIII.viii.20-ix.21.

result of Christ's gesture of humility is healing— first for himself and then for the rest of humanity. Having been "obedient unto death," he receives the ultimate healing—being "exalted from the dead." And through the example of this humility he is able to "heal the swollenness of...pride" that Augustine has identified as the fundamental source of the disintegration in human relationships. In pride, self-promotion serves as the basis of the self's projects; but Christ's self-negating actions "foster love," in which the promotion of the other's well-being becomes the self's *raison d'être*, thereby re-integrating the fundamental projects of both self and other. Thus there is healing not only for the individual, but also a restoration of the ideal for the relation between self and other.

But there is one more essential aspect to the model of conversion that Augustine presents: affirmation. Were self-sacrifice the final end to which Augustine's converted self is called, we would still wind up with a model in which the self is ultimately negated or nihilated rather than affirmed. But according to Augustine's example, through his sacrifice Christ ultimately achieves not only healing, but also affirmation. He receives from the Father "a name which is above all names" and the confession of every creature that "Jesus is in the glory of God the Father." The nature and quality of his being are

declared by all others to be good and worthy of praise. Furthermore, he regains the place he had previously surrendered. Augustine's point is clear: it is by self-sacrifice, not self-assertion, that the self ultimately achieves the affirmation it so desperately seeks.

There are two important aspects of the affirmation ultimately achieved by this converted self that I would like to take a moment to highlight. The first is that it can only be achieved by receiving. The self negates itself as the ultimate source of value but receives its value back from an other.³⁵¹ This dynamic reinforces Augustine's assertion that the self cannot achieve its affirmation solely on the basis of its own activity. It must depend on the participation of an other to accomplish its ultimate goal.

Secondly, at the heart of the desire for affirmation is a concern with being good rather than merely being. In the mode of self-assertion, the self maintains itself as its own good. In other words, it takes its own existence to be its ultimate end.³⁵² It negates everything else in order to establish its own being. Thus the self negates the possibility of a common basis of evaluation and destroys the basis

³⁵¹ This dynamic is presented in detail in a lecture by Jean-Luc Marion, "God and the Ambivalence of Being" given at the Institute for Philosophy and Religion at Boston University on April 23, 2015.

³⁵² See Schindler, "to say that something is a "good" is to say that it is an *end*: that wherein the will's activity comes to rest." (p.73).

upon which the concept of “good” is built. While asserting itself as its own good seems to be a form of an affirmation of its existence, ultimately it can be no more than mere confirmation. Alternatively, Augustine’s model proposes a process whereby that common basis given in creation can be restored as well as the possibility of affirmation. In the mode of negation the self may receive verification that it is,³⁵³ but by accepting affirmation it regains the benediction given in its original creation that it is *good*.³⁵⁴

So in the Augustinian alternative to the pride which characterizes the fallen Negating Self, we find a paradigm in which self-surrender, reception, and cohesion replace self-assertion, negation, and disintegration as the means to achieving wholeness. What Augustine models here is that willingness to accept another’s fundamental project as one’s own is the key to “healing” — which here serves as the image *par excellence* of bringing back into to unity, wholeness, and health that which has begun to decay or disintegrate. As Sweeny notes, the

³⁵³ Cf. “I think, therefore I am,” the formulation resulting from the Cartesian cogito which negates everything other than its own activity. See discussion in Chapter 1. See also, Sartre, *BN*, “What the cogito reveals to us here is just factual necessity... The Cartesian cogito only makes an affirmation of the absolute truth of a fact—that of my existence.”p.376.

³⁵⁴ Genesis 1:31.

acceptance of any gift is the acknowledgement of debt.³⁵⁵ And in Marion's words, the one who receives must "sacrifice his autarchy in order to receive it."³⁵⁶ In Augustine's converted self we find a reversal of the dynamic inaugurated by the self's original negation which allowed nothingness from which it came to infiltrate every aspect of creation. The Negating Self rejects anything else as being the source of its good. In the mode of receptivity the converted self acknowledges the existence of a disintegrative force in its being that cannot be healed on one's own, but only reversed by negating itself, affirming the other, and accepting its affirmation from a source other than itself. As a result both self and other are restored to a dynamic of mutual dependence but also mutual affirmation.

SARTRE: NEGATION AS A FALL FROM GRACELESSNESS

As we saw above, for Augustine, while negation is a possible and actual mode of the self's expression, it is not a *necessary* structure of the self. For Sartre however, negation is not only necessary, it is *the* defining feature of selfhood. To be a self is to be free and, as outlined in Chapter 3, for Sartre freedom is

³⁵⁵ Eileen C. Sweeny, "Anselm and the Phenomenology of the Gift in Marcel, Sartre, and Marion," in *Saint Anselm of Canterbury and His Legacy*, ed. Giles E. M. Gaspar and Ian Logan (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 393.

³⁵⁶ Marion, *Being Given*, 112.

expressed precisely as negation. Consequently, to be a self is to be a Negating Self. As Sartre puts it, the self “is the unique foundation of nothingness at the heart of being.”³⁵⁷

This characterization of the self as a source of non-being is, like Augustine’s, a direct result of the understanding of Being which underlies it. But for Sartre, although Being is necessary for the existence of the self, it is not its source. As McLachlan notes, “unlike traditional theology, Sartre cannot maintain that the for-itself is created ex nihilo by a willful, though unnecessary, free act on the part of the in-itself.”³⁵⁸ Rather, Being is the brute, senseless and inert existence which the self, by definition, *is not*.³⁵⁹ As Sartre puts it, Being is

the inherence in itself without the least distance... an immanence which cannot realize itself, an affirmation which cannot affirm itself, an activity which cannot act because it is glued to itself. Everything happens as if, in order to free the affirmation of self from the heart of being, there is necessary a decompression of being... being is in itself...being is what it is... the being of the *for-itself* is defined, on the contrary, as... not being what it is.³⁶⁰

The self appears specifically and only by defining itself in opposition to Being.

³⁵⁷ Sartre, *BN*, 126.

³⁵⁸ James McLachlan, “The Theological Character of Sartre’s Atheology in *Being and Nothingness*,” *Epochei* 5:1–2 (1997):87.

³⁵⁹ For an excellent discussion of the dimension of the non-being of the self in relation to its embodiment and materiality (consciousness as both being and *not* being the body), see Hazel Barnes, “Sartre as Materialist,” in *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, ed. Paul Aurthur Schlipp (Lasalle: Open Court, 1981), 661–84.

2. *Ibid.*

³⁶⁰ Sartre, *BN*, 27–28.

Sartre specifically describes the emergence of the self as a “fall of the in-itself towards the self, the fall by which the for-itself is constituted.”³⁶¹ Rather than its source, inert Being is that from which the self has to fall away in order to create the distance which characterizes it as a self. While Being is *a* given *for* the self, it is not given *to* the self and it is by no means a *gift*. It is simply the self’s other. Although the metaphor of “fall” is shared between Augustine and Sartre, for Augustine the increased distance from Being is understood as initiating the disintegration of the self; for Sartre it indicates the very creation of the self. For the Sartrean self, Being can be negated, but it is not given and it cannot be received. Rather than a fall from grace, for Sartre, the appearance of the self is quite literally a fall from gracelessness.

The upshot of such an understanding is that reception of an other, of any sort and to any extent, is excluded as a fundamental means of affirming the self. Conversely, the negation of the other is the self’s only mode of self-affirmation. In the following sections we will see in more detail how Sartre understands Being, why he can only conceive of the self as its negation, and how this construct necessarily precludes any principle of cohesion for human relation.

³⁶¹ Sartre, *BN*, 126.

FEATURES OF THE FALL

While Augustine's concern was to explain the origin of evil in human experience, Sartre's project is to explain human experience, as such.³⁶² As a phenomenologist he is concerned with explicating the structures of consciousness that allow it to link human reality with a concrete, objective world while accounting for the seemingly contradictory assertion that it remains completely free from the constraints imposed by that world. He wants to establish that while the resistance we encounter in the world is real, so is our freedom. In order to do so, he describes the fall from Being in such a way that, although consciousness depends on Being, Being is nonetheless denied priority in the constitution of the self. As Linsenbard notes,

Under the influence of Descartes, Sartre emphasizes that what is most distinctive about persons is that they are autonomous, which is to say they are uniquely capable of withdrawing from any situation with which they are presented and may always question it, doubt it, reject it, and, most importantly, change it.³⁶³

³⁶² "In offering a *phenomenological* study, Sartre is attempting to describe the central structures of *lived experience* (*le vécu*); in this sense the entire book is a structural analysis of the phenomenon of human experiencing, a phenomenon which is always already an implicit 'self-experiencing', since for Sartre, as we will see, our conscious awareness of ourselves as free is always present, at least implicitly. In an important sense, Sartre is seeking to uncover the nature of lived experience," (Linsenbard, 34).

³⁶³ Linsenbard, 29.

It is only by creating distance from what *is* that the self affirms and enacts its nature as a self. For Sartre, what *is* serves only to provide the occasion to affirm what *is not*.

Non-Being Depends on Being

In order to establish the distinctive character of conscious being Sartre begins by contrasting it directly with non-conscious being, or what he calls being-in-itself. This type of being, he posits, is "Uncreated, without reason for being, without any connection to another being, being-in-itself is *de trop* from eternity."³⁶⁴ Further, as McLachlan explains, for Sartre

Being-in-itself... does not depend causally on anything else. There is not supposed to be a metaphysical first cause. Being-in-itself is without essence. It is... simply there, overflowing, superfluous, absurd... Being-in-itself is a violation of the principle of sufficient reason. The in-itself is solid or massif, "filled with itself," "opaque to itself." It has no "inner" and "outer" and no reference to what it is not... It is completely positive. There is nothing negative about it. There are no distinctions within it.³⁶⁵

Whereas for Augustine Being, in its strictest sense, is identified with a God who is an absolute subject, for Sartre, Being is identified strictly with the domain of objects. Significantly he highlights such being as "without reason," "without any connection," and "*de trop*." As opposed to understandings of Being which have purpose built in to all forms of existence, Sartre's assertions that being-in-itself is

³⁶⁴ Sartre, *BN*, 29.

³⁶⁵ McLachlan, 75- 76. See also Sartre, *BN*, 27-29.

uncreated and without reason goes to the heart of his assertions that only human consciousness is responsible for contributing meaning or purpose to the world. Any being that is other than human consciousness is consequently, by definition, *de trop*.³⁶⁶ That is, it is just there. It can make no connections because, being completely positive, it contains no distances which it can bridge; further, without connection to anything other than itself it cannot have or create value. Without being-for-itself, being-in-itself cannot even be considered *a* good, much less *Good*.

Having defined Being in this way, it may seem that he might argue that being-in-itself can have no existence without being-for-itself. But that would leave him in a position of idealism which would undermine his project. As McLachlan comments, "The notions of the in-itself as a transphenomenal being that underlies all phenomena, and the for-itself as consciousness which is the negation of being, are important to Sartre's entire endeavor."³⁶⁷ Characterizing Being as *de trop*, or brute fact, accomplishes two things. First, characterizing being as *just* there support his assertion that it is *in fact* there, independent of consciousness. Consequently he can assert, "Consciousness is consciousness of something." The second consequence is expressed in the continuation of his

³⁶⁶ *De trop* literally translates as "too much," but has connotations of something superfluous, gratuitous, unwanted, unvalued, or just in the way.

³⁶⁷ McLachlan, 77

comment, "consciousness is born supported by a being which is not itself... Absolute subjectivity can be established only in the face of something to be revealed."³⁶⁸ By designating Being in a realm independent from consciousness he can establish a real relationship between consciousness and the world it experiences. The character of consciousness is to reveal being. It can only come about because there is already something which it can reveal. Thus being-for-itself depends on being-in-itself in order to be what it is.

And yet notably, it would not be correct to say that consciousness depends on being-in-itself for its being; strictly speaking, consciousness does not have or is not a being.³⁶⁹ As noted above, it is the negation of Being. According to Sartre, the appearance of consciousness is

correlative with a nihilating act on the part of being. This perpetual act by which the in-itself degenerates into presence to itself we shall call an ontological act... it is an absolute event which comes to being by means of being and which, without having being, is perpetually sustained by being.³⁷⁰

As Sebastian Gardener explains,

³⁶⁸ Sartre, *BN*, 23.

³⁶⁹ Aquila raises concerns about possible contradictions or ambiguities in Sartre's characterization of consciousness as a non-being or nothingness and its relation to being-in-itself and attempts a clarification and reconciliation through an analysis of the distinction between objects and states of affairs. See Richard E. Aquila, "Two Problems of Being and Nonbeing in Sartre's Being and Nothingness," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 38:2 (Dec., 1977): 167-186.

³⁷⁰ Sartre, *BN*, 126.

Human being is, Sartre therefore implies, a “fallen”, negated form of being-in-itself – it is as if it had once been a thing, but had undergone a kind of metaphysical destruction, so that it now exists on the earth in the form of consciousness as a kind of ghost or shadow, robbed of being... being-for-itself is tied to being-in-itself by virtue of having been created out of it through having undergone nihilation.³⁷¹

Consciousness is intimately related to Being, but it does not receive being from it.

According to Sartre’s description, “The for-itself is the in-itself losing itself as in-itself in order to found itself as consciousness.”³⁷² Consciousness appears as consciousness precisely through a nihilation of the total positivity of Being.

Consciousness is the “fall of the in-itself toward the self” which creates “a hole in being.”³⁷³ Whereas for Augustine Being calls the self into being by bringing it out of nothingness, for Sartre, the self appears by thrusting a nothingness into the heart of Being.

The distance created by the disintegration or dis-integration of Being is what allows the self to perform its function as that which reveals Being. While nothingness is foreign to Being, it is intrinsic to the existence of the self. Sartre writes,

In order for the totality of being to order itself around us... it is necessary that negation rise up, not as a thing among other things but as the rubric of the category which presides over the arrangement and redistribution

³⁷¹ Gardner, 68.

³⁷² Sartre, *BN*, 130.

³⁷³ Sartre, *BN*, 126.

of great masses of being in things. Thus the rise of man in the midst of the being which 'invests' him causes a world to be discovered. But the essential and primordial moment of this rise is the negation.³⁷⁴

That is, in order for there to be meaning or relationships between *things*, a negation must occur that separates the "masses of being" from one another into meaningful complexes.³⁷⁵ According to Sartre, "Man is the being through whom [this] nothingness comes into the world."³⁷⁶ It is precisely by being other than Being that consciousness can create these gaps.

By explicitly excluding conscious being from his definition of the being of objects, not only does Sartre establish the reality of the world and define a concrete relationship between the world and consciousness, but he also attempts to accomplish a third goal: to insulate existence as a self from existence as an object. An object can only be what it is; alternatively, the self is *by definition* "not being what it is."³⁷⁷ That is, the self is free to be other than the set of objective characteristics it reveals to itself about itself.

By a double movement of nihilation [the self] nihilates the thing questioned in relation to himself by placing it in a *neutral* state, between being and non-being—and then he nihilates himself in relation to the

³⁷⁴ Sartre, *BN*, 59.

³⁷⁵ "Recall that, on Sartre's view, consciousness is a relation, rather than a thing. It is that which reveals and articulates positive being through negation," (David Detmer, *Sartre Explained: From Bad Faith to Authenticity* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 2008), 103).

³⁷⁶ Sartre, *BN*, 59.

³⁷⁷ Sartre, *BN*, 28.

thing questioned by wrenching himself from being in order to be able to bring out of himself the possibility of a non-being.³⁷⁸

Because the self can distance itself from objective being, it can distance itself even from facts about its own being. The self is characterized precisely by the ability to neutralize what is and then negate it until it is not. According to Sartre, "I am exercising my freedom fully when I, who am myself a nothingness and a void, make of everything else that exists a nothingness."³⁷⁹

And so, for Sartre, negation is not just *a* function of selfness, it is *the* function, the essential structure and meaning of what it is to be a self. Having identified Being with the realm of inert, relationless objectivity, and pictured the "creation" of the self as the breakdown of that integrity, he can assert the following: "*The structure at the basis of intentionality and of selfness is the negation... thus its first relation with being-in-itself is negation.*"³⁸⁰ If Being is identified strictly with the domain of objects, it is to highlight the negation of that Being as the exclusive domain of subjects. So when Sartre characterizes the for-itself or the self as being dependent upon or "sustained by" Being, it is only in the sense that

³⁷⁸ Sartre, *BN*, 58.

³⁷⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, "Cartesian Freedom," in *Literary and Philosophical Essays*, trans. Annette Michaelson (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 190.

³⁸⁰ Sartre, *BN*, 179. Emphasis added.

Being provides the matter or occasion upon which the self enacts itself as a rejection.³⁸¹ He writes,

In the internal negation the for-itself collapses on what it denies. The qualities denied are precisely those to which the for-itself is most present; it is from them that it derives its negative force and perpetually renews it. In this sense it is necessary to see the denied qualities as a constitutive factor of the being of the for itself... In short the term-of-origin of the internal negation is the in-itself, the thing which is there, and outside of it there is nothing except an emptiness which is distinguished from the thing only by a pure negation for which this thing furnishes the very content.³⁸²

For Sartre, although the self draws its existence from Being, it never receives Being. "The For-itself does not have being because its being is always at a distance... in itself the For-itself is not being, for it makes itself be explicitly for-itself as not being being."³⁸³ Sartre is clear. To be a self is to define oneself not in terms of what one is, but strictly in terms of what one is not. The self can only appear as a self by enacting a dynamic of rejection or opposition. To be a self at all is to be a Negating Self.

³⁸¹ To be sure, there is some ambiguity in *Being and Nothingness* as to whether consciousness is actually able to negate Being; as a nothingness it would seem to be incapable of enacting any force on Being. As noted above, Sartre indicates that negation is the "first relation" between the self and being-in-itself and that it creates a "hole in being;" but he also asserts that "Being is equally beyond negation as beyond affirmation" (*BN*, 27). But regardless of whether he sees the effects of negation as extending beyond the bounds of consciousness itself, a dynamic we will explore in detail below, Sartre is unwavering in his assertion that the self is "congenitally oriented" (McLachlan, 75) toward negation.

³⁸² Sartre, *BN*, 245.

³⁸³ Sartre, *BN*, 179.

One significant consequence of such an understanding of the relationship between Being and the self is the exclusion of receptivity as a fundamental mode of human being in the world. As Sweeny notes, "For [an Augustinian thinker,] the primordial way in which we enter our own drama is as 'gifted,' while for Sartre the individual can only appear by rejecting any attempt to understand him/herself as receiver because such acceptance is incompatible with freedom."³⁸⁴ Sartre sheds some light on this dynamic in his commentary on the significance of Cartesian doubt in the context of the traditional Christian concept of Being:

It is as a nothingness and insofar as he is involved in Nothingness, Evil, and Error, that man escapes God. For God, Who is infinite fullness of being, can neither conceive nor govern nothingness. He has placed that which is positive within me. He is the author who is responsible for everything in me which is... If I retain freedom of indifference, I do so in relation to what I do not know or what I know imperfectly, in relation to fragmentary mutilated and obscure ideas. I, who am a nothingness, can say *no* to all these nothingnesses. I am able *not* to decide to act or affirm. **Since the order of truths exists outside of me, that which will define me as an autonomy is not creative invention but refusal.** It is by refusing to the point of not being able to refuse any more that we are free. Thus methodological doubt becomes the very model of the free act."³⁸⁵

In his own thought, Sartre replaces this traditional notion of God with being-in-itself and the same relationships obtain. Anything given, that is, any objective

³⁸⁴ Sweeny, 386.

³⁸⁵ Sartre, "*Cartesian Freedom*," 189. **Bold** emphasis added.

being that is revealed by consciousness is by definition not consciousness. The only thing properly attributable to the self is the ability to reject what is given.

“The *gift*,” he asserts, “is a primitive form of destruction.”³⁸⁶ For Sartre, to give is an attempt to dominate the other; consequently, to receive, in any capacity, is to allow an element of objectivity to enter into what should be pure subjectivity. It is to allow determinism to enter into freedom. For Sartre, to be a self

is to *choose oneself*; nothing comes to it either from outside or from within which it *can receive or accept*. Without any help whatsoever, it is entirely abandoned to the intolerable necessity of making itself be--- down to the slightest detail. Thus freedom is not *a being*; it is *the being* of man³⁸⁷

[H]uman being cannot receive its ends... either from outside or from a so-called inner “nature.” It chooses them...It is therefore the positing of my ultimate ends which characterizes my being and is identical with the sudden thrust of freedom which is mine. And this thrust is an *existence*; it has nothing to do with a property of a being which would be engendered conjointly with an idea.³⁸⁸

Sartre is adamant: to allow anything other than the self to give it its purpose or define its ends, its good, is to abandon the freedom which he sees as its very *raison d’etre*.

³⁸⁶ Sartre, *BN*, 758.

³⁸⁷ Sartre, *BN*, 568-569.

³⁸⁸ Sarte, *BN*, 572.

In contrast to Augustine, who sees human freedom as obtaining when the self's will and loves are aligned to an external Good, Sartre maintains that there is no "good" other than the self. Its mere existence as consciousness, as that which reveals being but cannot take part in it, is the only measure of value. As he puts it, "value haunts freedom... value... is not *posited* by the for-itself; it is consubstantial with it...the for-itself... does not exist *in the face of* value..."³⁸⁹ That is to say, there is nothing outside the self or other than the self which can serve as a standard of Good. Sartre describes the appearance of such a self as a fall from Being; but it is also entirely apt to characterize it as a fall from gracelessness.

Gabriel Marcel comments, "I do not believe that in the whole history of human thought, grace, even in its most secularized forms, has ever been denied with such audacity or such impudence."³⁹⁰ The point being that Sartre's model is absolutely thoroughgoing in its depiction of human reality as an existence whose function is to reject what is given and what is other rather than to accept it as part of what gives the self its definition and value. Sartre's rejection of the idea of a creator God is part and parcel of such thinking. As Sweeny comments, "Sartre's conclusion, that to be wholly created, to have everything given, is to be absorbed

³⁸⁹ Sartre, *BN*, 145.

³⁹⁰ Gabriel Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existentialism*, trans. Manya Harari (New York: Citadel Press, 2002), 79.

into the creator.”³⁹¹ In order to maintain the integrity of the self as a free subject, Sartre goes to the opposite extreme: he asserts that to have anything given, anything received, is to forsake freedom.

But without giving and receiving, there is no sharing. Consequently, for Sartre, freedom does not only require a measure of separation between self and other; by demanding the continuous negation of structures which attempt to bridge the gap, it necessitates isolation. Thus, in Sartre’s model of the Negating Self we again see a pattern of relating to the other that originates from the self alone, that seeks to assert the self alone, and finally, leaves the self alone. Of course he differs from Augustine in that he sees this dynamic as resulting from what he believes is the *proper* functioning of human freedom.

Failure is Evidence of Freedom

Having defined consciousness as that which *reveals* Being but does not *have* Being, Sartre goes on to argue that it is precisely this idea of lack which can verify his claims about the self as a negation. Again, Sartre’s goal here is twofold: first to reinforce his argument that negation, and consequently the self’s relation to the world, is not purely subjective, i.e. that the world we experience is real.

³⁹¹ Sweeny, 389.

Second, he aims to affirm the reality of radical human freedom.³⁹² Oddly, like Augustine, Sartre argues that we can understand what is from our experience of what is not. Also like Augustine, Sartre's builds his argument on the understanding that intentionality is a fundamental structure of the self. But rather than a will which seeks to attain its object, Sartre bases his analysis on a nihilating consciousness which appears in opposition to its object.³⁹³ Sartre begins his argument with desire, moves to the reality of the in-itself, and ends at failure as the evidence of human freedom.

For Sartre, as for Augustine, desire appears as the human experience which reveals the fundamentality of intentionality to the self and consequently the reality of the experienced world. He begins by asserting, "The existence of desire as a human fact is sufficient to prove that human reality is a lack."³⁹⁴ He explains, "Desire *is* a lack of being,"³⁹⁵ because "A being which is what it is... summons nothing to itself in order to complete itself."³⁹⁶ But a being which

³⁹² "Sartre wishes to avoid the two extremes of idealism and Cartesian realism. Thus he shows that idealism is avoided because lack and value are shown to be not merely 'subjective,' and realism is avoided because lack and value are shown not to be realities existing independently of man." (Catalano, 103).

³⁹³ "[The for-itself] can establish itself only in terms of the in-itself and against the in-itself." (BN, 134)

³⁹⁴ Sartre, BN, 135.

³⁹⁵ Sartre, BN, 137. Emphasis added.

³⁹⁶ Sartre, BN, 136.

desires exhibits both lack and an understanding of the object which it lacks. As

Sartre puts it,

If desire is able to be desire to itself [i.e. to be experienced *as* desire]... it must by nature be an escape from itself toward the desired object. In other words, it must be a lack... created by the surpassing which it is not... Thus it bears witness to the existence of lack in the being of human reality.³⁹⁷

Desire indicates that consciousness inherently refers to something other than itself. Because consciousness “lacks” being, it therefore cannot produce the in-itself or being it reveals. The fact that something is revealed indicates that consciousness operates in view of something other than itself and over which it has no power to actually create or negate.³⁹⁸ Thus Sartre accomplishes his first task of avoiding idealism.

Sartre also builds on the fundamental intentionality revealed by desire to reveal the freedom of the self. His first step in this direction is to identify this “other thing” at which the intentional self aims: Being, or being-in-itself.³⁹⁹ For Sartre, desire is simply the ontic phenomenon which denotes the ontological truth about the self: the self is a lack which aims at being a totality. Sartre states this explicitly:

³⁹⁷ Sartre, *BN*, 137.

³⁹⁸ “Being is equally beyond negation as beyond affirmation,” (*BN*, 27).

³⁹⁹ As Linsenbard notes (p.39), Sartre makes this move following in the footsteps of Heidegger.

Human reality is a perpetual surpassing toward a coincidence with itself which is never given... the being which is the foundation only of its nothingness surpasses itself toward the being which is the foundation of its being. But the being which human reality surpasses itself is not a transcendent God... it is only human reality itself as totality.⁴⁰⁰

For Sartre, desire for any particular object is simply one form of expressing the human desire for object-ness, the state of being a being-in-itself. Desire is simply propulsion toward “the being to which I might reunite myself in order to be what I am.”⁴⁰¹

But unlike Augustine’s conclusion that desire entails the possibility of fulfillment, Sartre asserts that desire denotes specifically the impossibility of fulfillment. As Catalano notes, for Sartre, “the for-itself immediately reveals itself from all aspects as a lack, as identified neither with being-in-itself nor with itself as consciousness.”⁴⁰² Desire specifically denotes an intentional structure which requires that the self be constantly out of sync with itself. Catalano explains further the dynamic Sartre is trying to establish:

I can never be a fixed, unchanging positive entity. But I want to be one. Furthermore, this “desire” should not be interpreted psychologically, according to Sartre, but rather ontologically. The for-itself exists only as a nihilation of the in-itself. In its very being it is oriented toward the in-itself. It pursues the in-itself, structuring it into a world, but it does so only by rushing past it in undertaking its next free action. So “the for-

⁴⁰⁰ Sartre, *BN*, 139.

⁴⁰¹ Sartre, *BN*, 132.

⁴⁰² Catalano, 103.

itself is both a flight and a pursuit; it flees the in-itself and at the same time pursues it" (BN, 472).⁴⁰³

Desire indicates a need for completion. But completion, in Sartre's view, is only characteristic of objects which cannot undertake any free action. Consciousness aims at objectivity only to, in the process of undertaking its free action, recognize that it is not itself an object. And so it aims itself again and the process continues.

Sartre's next move is even more radical. Although Sartre identifies desire as being exemplary of the relation between the self and an object, the function of this desire is not, as it is for Augustine, to enjoin unification with its object; rather it simply directs the perpetual activity of missing its mark. And so, concludes Sartre,

The for-itself in its being is failure because it is the foundation only of itself as nothingness. In truth this failure is its very being, but it has meaning only if the for-itself apprehends itself in the presence of the being which it has failed to be; that is of the being which would be the foundation of its being and not only of its nothingness... by nature the cogito refers to the lacking and to the lacked, for the cogito is haunted by being...⁴⁰⁴

If, for Sartre, the human self can be accurately be described as "being" anything, it would be "failure." But the fact that the self perpetually falls short of achieving totality is its glory, not its shame. Sartre declares, "Human-reality is free because

⁴⁰³ Catalano, 104.

⁴⁰⁴ Sartre, *BN*, 139.

it *is not* enough."⁴⁰⁵ Failure is not, as it is for Augustine, a clue that points elsewhere, but is itself the expression of freedom.

Where Augustine finds the *underdetermination* of the will to unite the self to its object as being symptomatic of a lack of freedom, Sartre sees the inability to achieve totality as humanity's saving grace. It is what Christina Howells describes as Sartre's own version of "salvation through defeat." She explains,

Sartre objects ultimately to what he sees as the surreptitious 'recuperative' aim... of those mysticisms which place absolute reality in an undifferentiated unity beyond contradiction.... [Such a dialectic] nullifies the reality of choice and responsibility in a world which Sartre insists is riven... Stated in its most abstract, philosophical form, Sartre thinks the [unity] involves the kind of identification of Being and Nothing which invites us to say an indiscriminate 'yes' to historical experience by envisaging it from an inconceivable perspective beyond the 'point de vue humain'... In a sense, subjectivity has been redefined as the will to negate [the force of things]. This power to negate is of course for Sartre the condition of our being able to engage in praxis and contribute to the course of history.... negation remains the specific quality distinguishing man from nature, human processes from natural processes.⁴⁰⁶

The human ability to evade totality is precisely what Sartre sees as hard evidence that determinism is definitively excluded from the character of human experience. The self's character as a Negating Self ensures recognition of the gap between what *is* and what *is acceptable* for the world in which human beings

⁴⁰⁵ Sartre, *BN*, 568.

⁴⁰⁶ Christina Howells, "Sartre and Negative Theology," *The Modern Language Review*, 76:3 (Jul., 1981): 553-554.

undertake their experience. Rather than seeing failure as a partial success⁴⁰⁷ or an “indiscriminate ‘yes’” to the conditions that history has delivered to the present, Sartre celebrates the self’s freedom to definitively declare itself to be a “No” to any facticity it encounters as detrimental.

But just as determinism is excluded from human reality, so is the possibility of the experience of integrity. For Sartre, “To be free is not to be able to do what one wants but to want what one can.”⁴⁰⁸ Sartre assumes that the world is fundamentally set up in a way to frustrate rather than fulfill the very human desire which reveals it. For Sartre, being a self holds with it not just the ability to say no, but the requirement to say it *along with* the *inability* to say yes. As Marcel notes, for Sartre, “to receive is incompatible with being free; indeed, a being who is free is bound to deny to himself that he has received anything.”⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁷ “The relationship between subjectivity and history is the central theme of ‘L’Universel singulier’. Kierkegaard represents for Sartre the possibility of real human failure which he examines in two related perspectives: in the context of historical alienation and in the light of his ontology of consciousness. In Sartre’s discussion of Kierkegaard... human failure is seen as an indictment of a society alienated to utilitarian ends, and therefore as a reaffirmation of man as an end in himself. On another level, the reality of failure is adduced as evidence of the reality of subjectivity. Hegel’s system, Sartre argues, can only cope with failure or error by interpreting it as partial success or partial truth within the context of a developing history. But what we learn from Kierkegaard is that failure is a subjective reality which cannot be explained away as an objective ‘positive relative’. It is through human failure that human subjectivity proves inassimilable to *le savoir objectif*. In this sense, and in this sense alone, subjectivity can be seen as an absolute...” (Howells, 554).

⁴⁰⁸ Sartre, “Cartesian Freedom,” 184.

⁴⁰⁹ Marcel as cited in Sweeny, 389.

As a lack, the self seeks that which would make it complete, but as a failure it cannot receive it. To do so would be to allow something other than itself to contribute to its character as a self. To receive *something* would be a violation of its character as *nothing*.⁴¹⁰ Instead Sartre requires that freedom be preserved at all costs, even at the expense of a world in which the experience of integrity is possible.

This rejection of integrity extends to the relation between the self and human other as well. If the first feature of the Sartrean Fall from gracelessness is the appearance of the self as a rupture in senseless Being, its second feature is the conflict that must necessarily obtain between self and Other. Having first described the appearance of the self as “the fall of the in-itself towards the self,”⁴¹¹ Sartre also asserts that the self’s “original fall is the existence of the Other.”⁴¹² Although Sartre exhorts each self to celebrate human freedom, even as he characterizes it as failure, he simultaneously asserts that such respect for the freedom of the other is impossible. He writes,

respect for the Other’s freedom is an empty word; even if we could assume the project of respecting this freedom, each attitude which we

⁴¹⁰ Sartre says explicitly, “it is not the role of consciousness either to give being to itself or to receive it from others.” *BN*, 129.

⁴¹¹ Sartre, *BN*, 126.

⁴¹² Sartre, *BN*, 352.

adopted with respect to the Other would be a violation of that freedom which we claimed to respect... We are already thrown in the world in the face of the Other; our upsurge is a free limitation of his freedom and nothing... can change this original situation. Whatever our acts may be, in fact, we must accomplish them in a world where there are already others and I am *de trop* in relation to others... It is before the Other that I am *guilty*. I am guilty first when beneath the Other's look I experience my alienation.... Again I am guilty when in turn I look at the Other, because by the very fact of my own self-assertion I constitute him as an object and as an instrument.⁴¹³

For Sartre, human selves only ever interact by imposing external limits on each other's freedom. In the abstract, this is because consciousness can only direct itself at an object; thus the only way selves understand each other is by applying concepts to each other which, by definition, are finite and objective definitions. Thus, conscious selves must reduce the transcendent free other to the status of an object. In a more practical sense, the self's existence and action in the world imposes limits on what the other is free to accomplish. Because being a self requires the rejection of externally imposed limits, the necessary result is conflict. Maintaining the integrity of the other's freedom as the self tries to enact its own freedom is fundamentally impossible; and the integrity of the relation between self and other is likewise impossible.

I should note that in an omitted portion of the above cited passage Sartre describes the self's alienation as a "fall from grace." But the term "grace" there

⁴¹³ Sartre, *BN*, 531.

indicates, not a condition of moral innocence or spiritual or psychological integrity, but rather a state in which the human self never experiences objectification.⁴¹⁴ But since the self only and always exists in a social state, for Sartre, there is never a time in which human reality ever experiences such grace. Because, for Sartre, humans only and always exist in a situation where there are others whom they must necessarily objectify, he characterizes the human situation as being one of *original sin* and *original fall*. For Sartre there is no possibility of a situation in which the self can experience both freedom and integrity either in its relation to itself or in its relationships with others. But for Sartre, human freedom is the fact and so is the conflict it necessitates. Again, there is no state of grace; only a fall from gracelessness to gracelessness.

Nothing Causes the Fall

Having affirmed that freedom is a brute fact of human experience, it should come as no surprise that Sartre also indicates that nothing causes the Fall. As it was with Augustine, this phrase is subject to two points of emphasis. Again, the first is that *nothing* cause the Fall. Sartre structures his ideas and

⁴¹⁴ For an insightful discussion of how Sartre can reject the assertion of moral guilt and while promoting the idea ontological guilt, see Jasper Hopkins, "Theological Language and the Nature of Man in Jean-Paul Sartre's Philosophy," in *Philosophical Criticisms: Essays and Reviews* (Minneapolis: Arthur J. Banning Press, 1994), 116-118.

language in such a way so as to specifically resist the tendency to understand the self as being *something*. And so he characterizes the self as *nothing*. But Sartre's characterization of the self as a nothingness should be taken as literal and not just literary. It is fundamental to how he understands human experience. As

Linsenbard explains,

Our sense of self, in Sartre's view, is not to be understood as a 'pure positivity' in the sense that Plato and Kant understood it, for example, as positively identified as wholly rational, or as Hume understood it as positively identified as sensible. Our sense of self is rather to be understood as a *negativity* because we are at a distance from ourselves since our conscious awareness drives a gap between us and the world.⁴¹⁵

All of this is to say that nothingness makes possible the fall from fixity to freedom. But to push the point even further, Sartre's identification of the self as nothingness is not just an analogy either. For him, it is the *ontological* character of the self as a *non-being* that allows it to exist in the world with the ability to resist objectification, recognize states of affairs, and consequently create meaning.

The first point to explore here is Sartre's emphasis on the non-substantial, non-essential, unstable character of the self. He writes,

⁴¹⁵ Linsenbard, 40.

Consciousness has no “inside”. It is just this being beyond itself, this absolute flight, this refusal to be substance which makes it a consciousness.⁴¹⁶

For Sartre, the experience of being a self, as marked by desire for example, reveals first the inability to possess Being in any stable manner. When he writes that consciousness is a “refusal to be substance” he is asserting the impossibility or incompatibility of such possession with the type of consciousness which characterizes a self. Consciousness has no “within” because, due to its intentional structure, that which it desires to possess consistently lies outside of itself. This refusal of object-ness is not a matter of personal choice but is the very meaning and structure of what it is to be conscious, or alternatively, to have human experience. The consciousness which characterizes a self is not a thing and cannot be a thing because its very function is to be the dynamic reflection by which things are revealed.

By extension, Sartre’s insistence on the ontological nullity of the self is also a means of explicating how the self has the radical ability to distinguish between what is and what can be. As Sartre puts it,

Human reality is before all else its own nothingness. What it denies or nihilates *in relation to* itself as for-itself can only be *itself*... hence the self as

⁴¹⁶ Sartre, “Intentionality: A Fundamental idea of Husserl’s Phenomenology,” in *The Phenomenology Reader*, ed. Dermot Moran & Timothy Mooney (London: Routledge, 2002), 383.

being-in-itself is what human reality lacks and what makes its meaning...What the for itself lacks is the self--- or itself as in-itself.⁴¹⁷

And again,

I am exercising my freedom fully when I, who am myself a nothingness and a void, make of everything else that exists a nothingness.⁴¹⁸

Sartre does not see the self as a thing which performs negation in the world as an act of judgement; at the most basic ontological level, he understands the self to be “essentially” non-being, nothing, void, and lack; and only as such can it operate to reveal being and only as such can the existence of negative judgements themselves be explicable in a world of positive objects. When Sartre writes that “I who am myself a nothingness...make of everything else that exists a nothingness,” he is asserting that the self’s fundamental dislocation from Being allows it to suspend the character of being-in-itself from the objects or states of affairs of which it becomes conscious; thus it is able to recognize its freedom to change them or at least to redefine the character of its relationship to them. And this is what he means when he says that the self’s lack of being is what “makes its meaning.”

⁴¹⁷ Sartre, *BN*, 138.

⁴¹⁸ Sartre, “Cartesian Freedom,” 190.

Like Augustine, Sartre identifies nothingness at the heart of human experience. But rather than the factor which nullifies its consummation, it is the feature which makes experience, as such, possible in the first place. For Augustine, the nothingness out of which human being is created bleeds into its created nature and, as it were, destabilizes it, preventing it from fully possessing the being it was created to possess. Were nothingness not a factor in human ontology, for Augustine we would be like God; for Sartre we would be like rocks. For Sartre, the nothingness at the heart of human experience indicates that Being is precisely that which we should *not* aim to possess. For Augustine nothingness mars the character of human being as it was created into the world; for Sartre nothingness marks the human power to create the character of the world. Even more succinctly, for Augustine nothingness mars the character of human being while for Sartre it marks it.

One very significant consequence of such a distinction can be captured by examining the second formulation of the proposition at hand: Nothing *causes* the Fall. For Sartre, as for Augustine, this goes to the inexplicability of the "Fall" of the self away from Being. But for Sartre, the irrationality of human experience is even more thoroughgoing than it is for Augustine. Rather than an apology for the irrationality of evil, Sartre puts forward an assertion of the irrationality of

human existence per se. McLachlan draws an explicit line between the two formulations of inexplicability:

The fallenness of the for-itself has an almost theological character. How the perfection of wholly positive being-in-itself could have generated the negative being-for-itself remains a mystery, somewhat like the mystery... in traditional theology's version of creation's fall from grace. ... in the traditional Augustinian theodicy the fall represents an *ex nihilo* creation of evil by perfect creatures. Somehow "unqualifiedly good (though finite) creatures" were capable of evil that God did not create in them, otherwise we could blame God who gave them their imperfect nature... In the same sense there is no reason and no explanation for the *ex nihilo* creation or emanation of the for-itself from the in-itself. Sartre would argue, simply, that we are presented with the brute fact of the existence of these two categories of being, the one dependent on the other.⁴¹⁹

For Sartre, the appearance of human consciousness in the world is as brute a fact as the existence of the world itself. The self is as *de trop* as anything else. As Sartre puts it, "it is true that in our own apprehension of ourselves, we appear to ourselves as having the character of an unjustifiable fact."⁴²⁰ Building on the observation that being-for-itself cannot be its own foundation⁴²¹ and that it functions as a negation of being-in-itself, Sartre asserts that contingency, contradiction, inexplicability, and consequently absurdity, are not merely contingent aspects of human experience but are inherent in the structure of human being.

⁴¹⁹ McLachlan, 79.

⁴²⁰ Sartre, *BN*, 128.

⁴²¹ "...it is not the role of consciousness... to give being to itself..." (Sartre, *BN*, 129).

By extension, the choices and values made as an expression of such human being are equally unjustifiable and, ultimately, absurd. As we have previously noted, Sartre is adamant that,

my freedom is the unique foundation of values and ... nothing, absolutely nothing, justifies me in adopting this or that particular value, or this or that particular scale of values. As a being by whom values exist, I am unjustifiable. My freedom is anguished at being the foundation of values while itself without foundation.⁴²²

So while Sartre asserts, on the one hand, that there is no transcendent basis upon which to ground any value, he, on the other hand, devotes over 700 pages of *Being and Nothingness* to arguing that freedom reveals itself as the ultimate value we should all adopt. He exhorts his reader rhetorically in the penultimate paragraph of the work:

...will freedom, by the very fact that it apprehends itself as a freedom in relation to itself, be able to put an end to the reign of this value? In particular is it possible for freedom to take itself for a value as the source of all value, or must it necessarily be defined in relation to a transcendent value which haunts it? And in case it could will itself as its own possible and its determining value, [this would mean that it would be a "being"] which chooses as its ideal of being, being-what-it-is-not and not-being-what-it-is.

Sartre insists not only that we recognize the absurdity of the freedom he has defined but also that we claim the absurdity as our *raison d'être*.

⁴²² Sartre, *BN*, 76.

Following Sartre's lead, there are others who argue that the contention of absurdity should not daunt us in the adoption of our values and choices. It should not render us hopeless. Rather, they propose that

it is unclear why knowing that our values have no objective foundation must make us accept that our lives are absurd. Subjectivists may well choose to be 'proud subjectivists' or 'subjectivists with no guilt feelings' who are pleased with, rather than ashamed by, their subjectivism."⁴²³

But it seems to me that, given the structure of the self Sartre is proposing, this is much like an ostrich sticking its head in the sand. At the very least, Sartre recognizes that anguish is the natural response to the realization that the objectivity the self is structured to pursue is fundamentally impossible; but, given the structure of the self Sartre himself has outlined, the exhortation to ignore this anguish strikes me as fundamentally inhuman, and by extension inhumane. Even when Sartre indicates that the recognition of the impossibility of achieving objectivity typically leads to anguish, he implies that this is only because we have not fully relinquished the idea that objectivity is humanity's final aim. He implies that once we recognize that objectivity is fundamentally

⁴²³ Iddo Landau, "Foundationless Freedom and Meaninglessness of Life in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*," *Sartre Studies International*, 18:1 (2012): 6. Landau argues that Sartre contradicts himself because he is not actually a "proud subjectivist" but rather that he feels that anguish is a necessary part of the realization of foundationless freedom; but I believe Landau to be misreading Sartre in his interpretation.

impossible, we will be free to redirect our energies to more fruitful pursuits⁴²⁴ and transform our anguish over our personal freedom into an infinite resolve to assert this personal freedom. More than just relinquishing the ideal of a shared goal, Sartre seems to urge that we relinquish even the regret that such a goal is impossible.⁴²⁵ It is difficult to see how a coherent *apology for the universal* preservation of human freedom can be drawn from such an absurdist *vision of* human freedom.

While, as a phenomenologist, metaphysical claims are out of Sartre's purview,⁴²⁶ it seems he is making one nonetheless. He forces us to conclude the fundamental absurdity of experience by claiming that because this is how things currently appear, this is the way they have to be. "Sartre thinks that we cannot argue with the conclusion that contradiction is at the heart of being-for-itself because the regressive analysis has shown that it is the only way of explaining

⁴²⁴ See Sartre, *BN*, 797.

⁴²⁵ "...a condition of membership [in a group] is the voluntary foregoing of spontaneous self-assertion in favor of a unity-in sameness... to pledge to this praxis apparently means that one voluntarily gives up the control to their own life and well-being to the Other, in service to the future of a humanity free from interiorized material scarcity...As such, this surrender of one's life to an Other for a cause seems to be the antithesis of the freedom advanced by Sartre as the ontology of humanity and the absolute goal of all human praxis." Edward Grippe, "The Hell of Our Choosing: Sartre's Ethics and the Impossibility of Interpersonal Conversion," in *Ethics and Phenomenology*, ed. Mark Sanders and Jeremy Wisneski (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 134.

⁴²⁶ Sartre himself says as much in his conclusion to *Being and Nothingness*. See p.785ff.

what the phenomenological method has shown, namely the reality of non-being." ⁴²⁷ But his conclusion is based on very specific definitions of Being, freedom as the fall from Being, and a material world devoid of intrinsic value or order. ⁴²⁸

Augustine made similar observations about the way nothingness functions to bring absurdity into human experience; but because he has defined freedom differently, he is not forced to assume that contradictory experience is inherent to human being. Both Augustine and Sartre observe and analyze the internal and external conflict that is rampant in the world; in an attempt to mitigate absurdity, Augustine makes recourse to a divine other beyond the world. But to a large extent, if you eliminate a transcendent source of order from Augustine's model of human dynamics, what you wind up with is Sartre's.

THE MODES OF NEGATION

Having completed our extensive discussion of Sartre's understanding of the Being negated by the self in the Sartrean Fall from gracelessness, we can now undertake a more detailed examination at the Sartrean dynamics of negation.

Here, as in Augustine's thought, we find the self operating in the same modes of

⁴²⁷ McLachlan, 77.

⁴²⁸ For a detailed description of Sartre's somewhat unique form of materialism as distinct from its Marxists and reductive counterparts, see Barnes, "Sartre as Materialist," cited above.

rejection, inversion, and nihilation; however, the significance and progression of such dynamics are to a large extent inverted because the relation between freedom and determination is so differently defined. It is as if the Sartrean vision of the relation between self and other is itself a negation or inversion of the Augustinian vision. What is primarily in the foreground for the one seems to recede and fade back into near invisibility for the other.

Falling to Nothing: Self-Assertion

Whereas falling to nothing marks the loss of self for Augustine, for Sartre it marks its birth. Sartre writes “The For-itself *rising into being* as the nihilation of the In-itself, constitutes itself simultaneously in all the possible dimensions of nihilation.”⁴²⁹ And so, for Sartre we start with nihilation as the inaugural mode of the Negating Self. For Sartre, the appearance of the Negating Self is the appearance of the self as such. Sartre describes the fall from Being to selfhood saying, “everything happens as if, in order to free the affirmation *of* self from the heart of being, there is a necessary decompression of being.”⁴³⁰ He paints a vivid image of a self whose very nascence is the result of its own efforts to push away Being and wrench itself free from entrapment within its dense walls. And

⁴²⁹ Sartre, *BN*, 195. Emphasis added.

⁴³⁰ Sartre, *BN*, 27-28.

because he pictures nihilation and nascence as going hand in hand, we find a self whose very appearance results fundamentally from an act of *self*-assertion. Rather than a self whose appearance is a result of the reception of Being, the Sartrean self does not first appear and then strive to affirm or achieve the purpose of its existence; it appears *per se* in the mode of self-assertion over and against the other.⁴³¹

A corollary result of the Negating Self's nascence in the mode of nihilation is that it exists fundamentally to be its own foundation. Sartre writes, "The for-itself is the in-itself losing itself as in-itself in order to *found itself* as consciousness."⁴³² As consciousness, the self is not a thing, but is a no-thing. As such, it exists only by constantly defining and redefining itself in relation to that of which it is conscious as not being. Further, it is precisely this ability to continuously defy and transcend definition that maintains it in existence as a self. For Sartre, an accurate understanding of selfhood must entail the recognition of the fact that, not only is nihilation the only means of creating a self, but also that

⁴³¹ Catalano comments that "the for-itself can nihilate because it is brute existence as already nihilated." (p. 68) Nothingness can only be promulgated by a being into whom nothingness has already crept in. We see here a similar dynamic to that of Augustine wherein negation of the other comes as a result of the self's allowing nothingness to infiltrate its created substance. But in Sartre we find that nihilation is itself the substance of the self's creation and so negation is its fundamental mode of relation.

⁴³² Sartre, *BN*, 130. Emphasis added.

it is the self alone which does this creating. Rae comments on this dynamic saying,

By adopting a pre-reflective fundamental project that has freedom as its end, the converted consciousness reflectively recognizes that it must “use” its freedom to constantly choose itself. The result is that consciousness undergoes a process of continuous reflective self-creation. Perpetually reflectively re-creating itself allows consciousness to continuously reflectively express its freedom without actually reflectively understanding itself to be anything or, in fact, actually becoming anything. For Sartre, consciousness’s reflective refusal of the pursuit of being and its continuous acts of reflective self-creation are at the foundation of authentic being.⁴³³

For Sartre, the authentic self is the Negating Self which nihilates in order to create itself by itself. It is the only form of the self that ever existed or can exist.

Sartre writes, “The appearance of nothingness as that which is *made-to-be* complicates the existential structure by causing the appearance of the ontological mirage of the Self.”⁴³⁴ He notes that while the self often experiences itself as a given, this is nothing more than a mirage caused by the self’s ability to reflect on itself at a distance. It is only in recognizing negation as the essential dynamic of the self and nihilation as a fundamental mode of existence that it will ever gain traction on its ability and responsibility to make itself into what it chooses to be.

As Sartre puts it, “Freedom is precisely the nothingness which is *made-to-be* at the

⁴³³ Gavin Rae, “Sartre & the Other: Conflict, Conversion, Language, & the We,” *Sartre Studies International*, 15:2 (2009): 66

⁴³⁴ Sartre, *BN*, 195.

heart of man and which forces human reality to *make itself* instead of *to be*.”⁴³⁵ An authentic self asserts itself on the other and on itself to become a self which refuses to *be*.

The Sartrean model of the self hinges on the human ability to redefine and recreate the circumstances of its existence, to nullify to some extent the “coefficient of adversity” presented by even the most concrete obstacles. In the chapter of *Being and Nothingness* entitled “Concrete Relations with Others,” Sartre describes certain types of human interactions in which either the self or the other denies or is denied this faculty. In contrast he puts forth a paradigm in which human reality expresses and maintains its freedom through the more concrete aspects of its existence. Notably, he calls this paradigm grace:

In *grace* the body appears as a psychic being in situation. It reveals above all its transcendence as a transcendence-transcended; it is in act and is understood in terms of the situation and of the end pursued. Each movement therefore is apprehended in a perceptive process which in the present is based on the future. For this reason the graceful act has on the one hand the precision of a finely perfected machine and on the other hand the perfect unpredictability of the psychic... It is this moving image of necessity and freedom ... which, strictly speaking, constitutes grace... In grace the body is the instrument which manifests freedom... Grace therefore forms an objective image of a being which would be the foundation of itself in order to -----.”⁴³⁶

⁴³⁵ Sartre, *BN*, 568.

⁴³⁶ Sartre, *BN*, 519-520.

For Sartre, the ideal situation for the self is one in which all its faculties, physical and psychic, cooperate to express its drive to move past what it is toward what is not yet. It is not the goal or its achievement which makes the move graceful—the “-----” following the “in order to” is not filled in, and for Sartre it does not ever need to be; rather, it is the self’s moving of itself with a structure of an “in order to” which expresses the ideal. The situation of grace is simply one in which the self is able to express itself for the sake of enacting itself. There is no concept of good, or even of function, since function requires a particular end. The mode of nihilating self-assertion in which the self falls from Being is the mode in which Sartre sees it should always exist.

Inversion: Dis-integration of the Other

The second mode in which the Sartrean Negating Self operates is inversion. In this case, however, the self enacts this inversion on the human rather than the divine other. As Hopkins puts it, “Born innocent, Sartrean man becomes fallen through the presence of the Other, not through the project-to-be-God.”⁴³⁷ Rather than pride, Sartre identifies the fundamental human flaw as the self’s objectification of and by the other. And yet in this analysis, where we find

⁴³⁷ Hopkins, “Theological Language and the Nature of Man in JP Sartre’s Philosophy,” in *Philosophical Criticisms: Essays and Reviews* (Minneapolis: Arthur J. Banning Press, 1994), 116.

Sartre's version of "original sin," he identifies the same dynamic as that detailed by Augustine: the Negating Self performs an inversion which consists in a fundamental reordering of priorities whereby the self not only rejects the order established by the other, but asserts itself as the source of its own order.

In the section, "The Existence of Others," Sartre gives one of the most vivid descriptions of how the self is oriented in the world and the dynamic that results from its perception of an other. To begin, the self is the center around which its world is ordered. But when the other enters into experience,

suddenly an object has appeared which has stolen the world from me. Everything is in place; everything still exists for me. But everything is traversed by an invisible flight and fixed in the direction of a new object. The appearance of the Other corresponds therefore to a fixed sliding of the whole universe, to a decentralization of the world which undermines the centralization which I am simultaneously effecting.⁴³⁸

And this self which I am— this I am in a world which the Other has made alien to me, for the Other's look embraces my being and correlatively the walls, the door, the keyhole. All these instrumental-things, in the midst of which I am, now turn toward the Other a face which on principle escapes me. Thus I am my *Ego* for the Other in the midst of a world which flows toward the Other.⁴³⁹

The mere appearance of the other on the scene of the self's existence indicates another center around which the world can be and is organized. The very fact of

⁴³⁸ Sartre, *BN*, 343.

⁴³⁹ Sartre, *BN*, 350.

his existence consists, *exactly like that of the self*, in a brute act of self-assertion. As such, the other is by definition a challenge to the self's vision of the world.

Furthermore, the other is a challenge to the self's vision of itself in the world. With the appearance of the other, the self becomes itself an object in this other's world and is defined not by its own freely determined projects, but by the freedom of the other. According to Sartre,

If there is an Other, whatever or whoever he may be, whatever may be his relations with me, and without his acting on me in any way except by the pure upsurge of his being—then I have an outside, I have a *nature*. My original fall is the existence of the Other.... Strictly speaking, it is not that I perceive myself losing my freedom in order to become a *thing*, but my nature is— over there, outside my lived freedom—as a given attribute of this being which I am for the Other.⁴⁴⁰

The other need not actually challenge, threaten, or engage the self in any way. Simply by being its own point of view on the world, the other incorporates the self into its understanding of the world and, as such, necessarily treats the self as an object. The other gives the self an identity that is beyond the self's control. In other words, the other alienates the self from itself.

But the other is just another self.⁴⁴¹ The activity of decentering is just as much characteristic of the self as it is of the other. Thus Sartre sets up a dynamic

⁴⁴⁰ Sartre, *BN*, 352.

⁴⁴¹ "Everything which may be said of me in my relations with the Other applies to him as well. While I attempt to free myself from the hold of the Other, the Other is trying to free

for human reality in which the only option for interaction is to be locked in a tug-of-war over the status of determining the direction toward which the objects of the world will be aligned. Since for Sartre freedom is the mark of selfhood, objectification, which is the violation or nullification of that freedom, is a self's ultimate transgression. It is nonetheless unavoidable. Sartre writes,

Thus, I am guilty not on the basis of having transgressed some moral or social rule, but simply on the basis of any self-assertion whatsoever vis-à-vis another. I am guilty when I turn and look at the other, because by the very fact of my own self-assertion I constitute him as an object and as an instrument, and I cause him to experience that same alienation which he must now assume. Thus original sin is my upsurge in a world where there are others; and whatever may be my further relations with others, these relations will be only variations on the original theme of my guilt.⁴⁴²

It is a function of the self's very existence as a self to decenter the world from around the other, thereby reducing the other to the status of an object. But because the self can only assert its freedom by neutralizing that of the other, it has no choice but to objectify her. As Hopkins explains,

...since the human being cannot develop apart from social self-assertion, man is ontologically, or originally, fallen. He is perhaps "always already fallen" in the elliptical sense that his natural development as a human being will inescapably give rise at some point to assertion of himself over against the Other. This fact leads Sartre to maintain that man is guilty in his very being because through no fault of his own he is necessarily

himself from mine. While I seek to enslave the Other, the Other seeks to enslave me. We are by no means dealing with unilateral relations with an object-in-itself, but with reciprocal and moving relations." (Sartre, *BN*, 474-475).

⁴⁴² Sartre, *BN*, 531.

involved in transforming the being of the Other, and is thereby involved in treating the Other as an object. By means of the foregoing distinction Sartre is able to advocate both the relative moral innocence of [the self and its]... fundamental ontological guilt.⁴⁴³

All this is to say that, because of its fundamental existence as an act of self-assertion, the self is fundamentally incapable of affirming the existence of the other. Thus for Sartre the self is “originally fallen” or “guilty” in the sense that every existing self has no other option than to engage the other in a manner that attempts to usurp its subjectivity and violate its status as a center of freedom. “Thus,” says Sartre, “my project of recovering myself is fundamentally a project of absorbing the Other.”⁴⁴⁴

So again we find that for Sartre the self appears originally as a Negating Self. The text’s own glossary definition of “nihilate”, which is the translation of the Sartre’s central verb *neantir*, states that “To nihilate is to encase with a shell of non-being.”⁴⁴⁵ We see this dynamic clearly in Sartre’s explanation of how the self responds to the other. The other necessarily appears to the self as a being who integrates the self into the world as an object which points towards the other as center; thus the self’s only response is to try to dis-integrate itself from the world

⁴⁴³ Hopkins, 118.

⁴⁴⁴ Sartre, *BN*, 475.

⁴⁴⁵ Sartre, *BN*, 804.

the other has created by asserting itself as a subject and drawing the world back toward itself. In so doing, the self objectifies the other and wrenches from it the world into which it has integrated itself as subject and center. The self negates the subjectivity of the other by draining the world away from its sphere of influence and dis-integrating the complexes of meaning the other has established. It thereby encircles the other in nothingness and neutralizes its power to determine the meaning of the self, the world, and ultimately even its own self as subject.

Sartre's analysis of human love provides an even more concrete description of the dis-integration that the self's inverting negation imposes on the other. Whereas we typically think of love as an activity which affirms an other, Sartre finds that even this human endeavor is fundamentally a move to dis-integrate the other from his freedom and objectify him. As noted above, Sartre sees any act of giving or generosity as a "primitive act of destruction."⁴⁴⁶ And as Hopkins notes, "The plain man judges himself to be guilty for his hatreds. Sartre shows him that he is also guilty, ontologically guilty, for his generousities and his loves."⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴⁶ See Sartre, *BN*, 758.

⁴⁴⁷ Hopkins, 120.

Sartre begins his discussion of love with the question, "Why does the lover want to be *loved*?"⁴⁴⁸ This seems like an odd way of approaching a human dynamic which is typically understood as being directed primarily toward the other. But for Sartre, "love is in essence the project of making oneself be loved."⁴⁴⁹ Hopkins notes that "Though Sartre discusses love in a generic sense, he has in mind the love of affection and sexual desire that binds two people."⁴⁵⁰ Because he takes this particular form of his love as his paradigm, we find self-fulfillment as the guiding principle behind his analysis. To be sure, an examination of a lover's desire for reciprocity is a valid aspect of the dynamic, but the fact that Sartre defines love *exclusively* in terms of the self's desire to be loved, reveals that the Sartrean self is incapable of centering on anything other than itself. Rather than being its own end, the other loved is merely a vehicle by which to boomerang love's concern for the well-being of its object away from the other and back towards the self.

Sartrean love inverts the relation between the loving self and the loved other. Sartre seems to understand that love functions to make of its object an

⁴⁴⁸ Sartre, *BN*, 478.

⁴⁴⁹ Sartre, *BN*, 488.

⁴⁵⁰ Hopkins, 119.

object-transcendence, an absolute center of reference around which all the instrumental-things of the world are ordered as pure means... as the absolute limit of freedom—i.e. as the absolute source of all values—[the object of love] is protected against any eventual devalorization.⁴⁵¹

But he only discusses the dynamic in the inverted sense of *being* loved. For Sartre the aim of the self's love is to "escape the *look* of the beloved... no longer be seen on the ground of the world as a 'this' among 'thises,' but the world must be revealed *in terms of me*."⁴⁵² Rather than loving for the sake of making the other its end, Sartre asserts that the self only undertakes the project of love because

if the Other loves me then I become the *unsurpassable*, which means that I must be the absolute end. In this sense I am saved from *instrumentality*. My existence in the midst of the world becomes the exact correlate of my transcendence-for-myself since my independence is absolutely safeguarded.⁴⁵³

Sartrean love preserves the self as the center of the world.

But the lover accomplishes this not by dominating the other, but only by alienating the other from his or her freedom, that is by effecting a dis-integration of what makes the other a center of value, or a self.⁴⁵⁴ Were the self to succeed in

⁴⁵¹ Sartre, *BN*, 481.

⁴⁵² Sartre, *BN*, 481. Emphasis added.

⁴⁵³ Sartre, *BN*, 481.

⁴⁵⁴ "...the man who wants to be loved does not desire the enslavement of the beloved... if the beloved is transformed into an automaton, the lover finds himself alone... Thus the lover does not desire to possess the beloved as one possesses a thing; he demands a special type of appropriation. He wants to possess a freedom as freedom... [But] the lover cannot be satisfied with that superior form of freedom which is a free and voluntary engagement...he wants to be loved by a freedom but demands that this freedom as freedom should no longer be free... he

seducing and fascinating the other into loving him, he would be loved by an other who is no longer able to pursue its own project of self-assertion. Instead, the other pursues the self as its project. For Sartre, this is the ultimate violation because authentic human reality is always and only a project of *self*-assertion.

It is only fitting that Sartre ends up thematizing this dynamic in terms of masochism—an activity in which the lover receives gratification in being dominated and objectified by the beloved. As Sartre explains, in order for the lover’s goal to be accomplished, the other must maintain its freedom, but as a “freedom, which I must capture by making itself recognize itself as nothingness in the face of the plentitude of my absolute being.”⁴⁵⁵ The more he allows himself to be treated as an object,

the more he will be submerged by the consciousness of his subjectivity... Even the masochist who pays a woman to whip him is treating her as an instrument... Thus the masochist ultimately treats the Other as an object... in order to make himself scorned, insulted, reduced to a humiliating position, [is] obliged to... act upon [her] just in so far as [she] experiences [herself] as an object for him. Thus in every way the masochist’s objectivity escapes him, and... he finds the Other’s objectivity, which... frees his own subjectivity.⁴⁵⁶

wants to be the object in which the other’s freedom consents to lose itself... By this very fact, what he demands is a limiting, a gluing down of the other’s freedom by itself.” (Sartre, *BN*, 478-480).

⁴⁵⁵ Sartre, *BN*, 485.

⁴⁵⁶ Sartre, *BN*, 493.

As Sartre's analysis reveals, there is no way for the other to maintain the freedom required for love when the other is loved only as an instrument of the self's own self-assertion and self-gratification.

Because Sartre inverts the directionality of love, he turns it into a dis-integrative dynamic rather than an integrative one. As Boni explains, for Sartre,

The aim of love is to be loved. Therefore, the ideal of love is doomed to failure. Both the one who loves and the one who is loved attempt to become the object of fascination, both attempt to beguile and seduce the Other's freedom and subjectivity. The only reason that the project of love continues is that the one who loves does not realize, or else, in bad faith, chooses not to realize, that the one who is loved is engaged in the same project.⁴⁵⁷

For Sartre, love results in situation in which "I am guilty toward the Other, because I furnish him with the occasion of being guilty."⁴⁵⁸ In this paradigm, love demands that the beloved other objectifies first himself and then, in turn, objectifies the lover. There is no possibility of mutually affirmed subjectivity and freedom; only objectification and subjugation.

Because it exists fundamentally in a process of self-assertion, the Sartrean self resists the self-affirmation of the other and even inverts its own attempts to affirm the other. We are left with a self whose ultimate aim is necessarily not just

⁴⁵⁷ Sylvain Boni, *The Self and the Other in the Ontologies of Sartre and Buber* (Washington D.C.: University Press of America, 1982), 74.

⁴⁵⁸ Sartre, *BN*, 492.

dis-integration *from* the other, but dis-integration *of* the other. Logically, it is a form of negation which also leads practically to the disintegration and nihilation of the other.

Rejection: Total-Negation

Whereas for Augustine rejection was the mode in which the Negating Self began its fall from Being, for Sartre it is the end to which the self ultimately falls. Where for the Augustinian self the rejection was of the order established by God, for the Sartrean self, the rejection is more thoroughgoing: it is a rejection of the possibility of underlying value and order in general. According to Sartre,

Everything happens therefore as if the in-itself and the for-itself were presented in a state of disintegration in relation to an ideal synthesis. Not that the synthesis has ever taken place but on the contrary precisely because it is always indicated and always impossible.⁴⁵⁹

This passage from the Conclusion in *Being and Nothingness* emphasizes that coherence and integrity are present as a fundamental ideal for human experience, but one that cannot be achieved nonetheless. What is at stake in this understanding of negation is not an abstract ontological claim, but rather is the practical conclusion of the ontology Sartre has conceived. Given the opposition he has set up between Non-Being/Being, Freedom/Determinism, and Self/Other,

⁴⁵⁹ Sartre, *BN*, 792.

a Sartrean self must reject any hope of fundamental coherence or integrity underpinning its experience in the world. That is, a Sartrean self must reject the possibility of totality.

McLachlan summarizes this conclusion nicely:

Sartre's placement of negation and consciousness outside of being is also the basis of his interpretation of the meaning of human freedom. The creation of the radical differentiation of the for-itself from being guarantees the absurdity of the human condition because it ensures the frustration of the creation of any permanent meaning. All human projects which symbolize the desire to be God are doomed to failure because of the impossibility of movement and development within being itself. The creation of totality with the Other is impossible even though this creation of totality is the basis of human desire and of what consciousness sees as the meaning of being.⁴⁶⁰

Thus the Sartrean self not only exists in a *mode* in which stable meaning and value are not achievable, but that no alternative mode of existence is possible. As Catalano comments on Sartre's model, "things can be said to have value...only as viewed in relation to an end or totality."⁴⁶¹ But since this is impossible for Sartre, "The human reality is, therefore, by its very nature an unhappy consciousness. It is perpetually invested with the ghost of totality that it can never be but that it must attempt to be."⁴⁶²

⁴⁶⁰ McLachlan, 94-95.

⁴⁶¹ Catalano, 105.

⁴⁶² Catalano, 104-105.

The practical significance of such a rejection is the impossibility of a shared or common good between self and other. As Sartre's critique of Heidegger's concept of *being-with* reveals, the fundamental stance toward the other is one of confrontation, not cooperation. Sartre writes that the

empirical image which may best symbolize Heidegger's intuition is not that of a conflict but rather a *crew*. The original relation of the Other and my consciousness is not *you* and *me*; it is *we*... It is the mute existence in common of one member of the crew with his fellows, that existence which the rhythm of the oars... will render sensible to the rowers and which *will be made manifest* to them by the common goal to be attained... [But] the ontological co-existence which appears as the structure of [human reality] can in no way serve as the foundation to an ontic being-with...⁴⁶³

For Heidegger *being-with* appears as a fundamental structure of human reality, constitutive for making a self what it is. But on Sartre's view, the impossibility of totality necessitates that human reality exists as a set of relations which behave as "A passage which is not completed, a short circuit."⁴⁶⁴ Sartre radically rejects this notion of humanity as a "crew" which shares a common goal. There is nothing fundamentally common since the self appears primarily as *for-itself*; its being for-others is only derivative of its "fallen" state. For Sartre, "My being with... can be considered only as a pure exigency found in *my* being; it does not constitute the slightest proof of the Other's existence, not the slightest bridge between me and

⁴⁶³ Sartre, *BN*, 332-334.

⁴⁶⁴ Sartre, *BN*, 793.

the other.”⁴⁶⁵ Sartre insists that the other’s appearance is merely a contingent fact of the self’s existence and in no way affirms the necessity of the other’s existence for the self’s own integrity.

Sartre’s critique of Heidegger betrays the fundamental impossibility of a shared human project. Being-with-others is a contingent fact of existence, but not part of its fundamental structure. Since there is no bridge between self and other, there is nothing to yoke their individually determined values and projects. Further, there is no “third” or outside or absolute viewpoint from which competing projects can be mediated or ultimately evaluated.

The appeal to another viewpoint invokes the idea that there is a vantage point that encompasses the totality of being. The viewpoint would be outside the totality. However, this is impossible because such a totality would not be a totality and would suppose a higher totality, or a part of the totality, and hence, be unable to achieve the absolute viewpoint.⁴⁶⁶

Consequently, there is no ontological basis for the formation of a sense of community in which both self and other can be mutually affirmed. Instead, conflict, incoherence, and finally, absurdity are the only “shared” ends human selves can hope to achieve.

⁴⁶⁵ Sartre, *BN*, 335.

⁴⁶⁶ McLachlan, 86.

SARTRE'S AFFIRMATION OF NEGATION

What we find after examining the Negating Self in Sartre is that, while Augustine strives to negate the negation of the self effected in the Fall from Grace, Sartre affirms negation and the Fall from Gracelessness as the essence of selfhood. For Sartre, freedom is the hallmark of consciousness and negation is the structure of freedom. Where Augustine seeks a remedy for the loss of integrity that results from the fall, Sartre finds nothing to remedy. Being is *de trop* and so is consciousness. Its existence as the negation and nihilation of Being is a fact that can no more be explained or modified than the existence of Being itself. Human reality is as it is and the best thing we can do is accept it as such.

Consequently it is no surprise that the Sartrean self can exist only in a mode of assertion rather than affirmation. Assertion requires only that one declares that something exists; affirmation requires that one declare that this existence is good. Because the Sartrean universe is one devoid of common good or intrinsic value, no such declarations can be made. And because the Sartrean self is fundamentally incapable of affirmation, it must accept conflict with the other as its primary mode of interrelation.

In Sartre's world the self exists only and always in the mode of a Negating Self and in a relation of self *vs.* other. In the concluding section of this chapter we

will examine some contemporary responses to this Sartrean vision which conceive, in a more integrative fashion, of a free self being one whose primary mode of existence is one in which the self becomes and affirms itself *via* the other.

AUGUSTINIAN RESPONSES: FREEDOM AS THE SELF *VIA* THE OTHER

In his article, “Notes on Love and Death in Augustine and Heidegger,” Thomas Carlson undertakes an interpretation of Heideggerian love that, “While evoking Augustine’s understanding of love... also departs from Augustine[;]... because the love we are given to envisage... has a decidedly temporal and worldly condition; it is a mortal love for the mortal.”⁴⁶⁷ He specifies that, by exploring Heidegger’s analysis of a “logic of the heart... as over against the logic of calculating reason,”⁴⁶⁸ the article aims “to wonder aloud”⁴⁶⁹ as to a postmodern response to “modern humanity’s... self assertion”⁴⁷⁰ in the forms of materialism and objectification. Carlson works with Heidegger’s concept of “being-with” to uncover a paradigm we can use to hold in tandem both the Sartrean insights into the radically self-centered and individualizing dynamics of freedom and the

⁴⁶⁷ Thomas Carlson, “Notes on Love and Death in Augustine and Heidegger,” *Medieval Mystical Theology* 21:1 (July 2012): 23.

⁴⁶⁸ Carlson, 10.

⁴⁶⁹ Carlson, 10.

⁴⁷⁰ Carlson, 9.

Augustinian insistence that freedom, correctly expressed, is fundamentally integrative.

Carlson's argument begins from a juxtaposition of Augustine's and Heidegger's conceptions of love first against "the calculating reason of modern metaphysics," and then against each other. The following passage summarizes both what he finds in common and what he isolates as the key difference between the two thinkers' conceptions of love:

Augustine will contrast genuine love for the human, then, with this [form of] love that gives non-being to the beloved by subjecting the beloved to one's own aims... By contrast to forms of love that consume the other and aim to secure the self on its own terms, genuine love gives me to myself (as lover) only in giving me over to the existence of the other, who comes to herself, in turn, only in being likewise exposed. Solicitude will operate in much the same fashion—with the important difference that in Heidegger the other's existence entails the irreducible insecurity of her temporal Being-in-the-world, whereas in Augustine the other's existence is traced back to the ultimate security of an eternal God beyond the world.⁴⁷¹

Carlson's analysis gives an account of Heideggerian solicitude as being the revised version of Augustinian love which overcomes the objectifying desire for totality while forming a bond that promotes the integrity of both self and other. The manner of relation, which the article characterizes as "faith in the other," works by seeking to preserve the other's ability to exist authentically, being open

⁴⁷¹ Carlson, 20-21.

to threat and promise of the vicissitudes of temporality, and thereby ultimately giving the self over to its own authentic existence.

The dynamic Carlson is trying to reveal in Heidegger's work is set in direct opposition to "forms of love that consume the other and aim to secure the self on its own terms." He identifies these as the forms resulting directly from the objectifying rationality typical of modern humanity.⁴⁷² The dynamic of Sartrean "love" outlined above—in which the self seeks to make itself the other's center and objectifies both self and other in the process—lines up squarely as an expression of such a rationality. In contrast, the purported Heideggerian dynamic begins from the premise that authentic love supports the beloved's freedom to remain its own center. Carlson cites Heidegger's description of this as a faith "in everything that is your story;" that is, faith

in the happening of [the beloved's] story, her history... which means... not a fixed ideal (or, we might say, idol) that he has erected and would have her conform to, but the singular story that remains distinctively hers...⁴⁷³

The lover accepts whatever it is that the beloved will become for herself instead of requiring conformity to an imposed ideal of his choosing. This form of love is

⁴⁷² Carlson, 10-11.

⁴⁷³ Carlson, 29.

committed to the beloved for *her own* sake. That is, it accepts and remains open to whatever the beloved will become or whatever will become of the beloved.

Carlson identifies in such a dynamic the type of Heideggerian solicitude which, as care for the other, is not

one that leaps in for, and dominates, the other by disposing of her concern for her, effectively depriving her thus of her own existence as care, [but] one that leaps ahead of her, not to take over her concern but in order to let the other be—giving to her, note, what the giver never actually has, and what the receiver likewise will never possess, even as it remains distinctively hers: that is, her existence as care.

Heidegger's work characterizes human existence as care [Sorge] and identifies solicitude [Fürsorge] as the relation which allows care for another to enter into one's own self-project. It is "This care of any one Dasein for other Dasein, without which Dasein simply is not itself."⁴⁷⁴ But importantly, solicitude cares for the other without taking over the other's responsibility for its own existence. Although it incorporates the other into its own self-project, it does not eclipse the other by taking over its place. The other remains distinctly responsible for forging her own existence, even as the self is concerned to promote and preserve that existence. Carlson notes that in contrast to "modern humanity's rational-

⁴⁷⁴ Carlson, 19.

technological self-assertion,"⁴⁷⁵ which operates according to a logic of fabrication, objectification, mastery, and substitution, this manner of relation respects the irreplaceable nature of each self. It recognizes and preserves each self's ownmost responsibility of shaping its own existence, or in Sartrean terms, its transcendent freedom.

The key to such a relation, on Carlson's reading, is that it is grounded in a decidedly temporal horizon that forges a shared aspect to experience.

[Faith in] the singular story that remains distinctively hers... exposes beloved and lover alike, then, to the inevitable but unforeseen crises and struggles... that futurity necessarily entails. Not as ideal, either achieved or to come, but as the open temporality of story's happening, or as history, the beloved is received and kept (and hence never possessed).⁴⁷⁶

Solicitude operates in a way that simultaneously recognizes that the beloved's identity is not and cannot be fixed, allows the other to maintain care for her existence as her own responsibility, and yet incorporates concern for the unfolding of the other's existence into one's own care. The temporal character of human life necessarily entails hope for a bright future and the threat of the end of experience as such. Solicitude, which operates as faith in the unknown and unforeseeable story of the other, exposes both self and other, lover and beloved,

⁴⁷⁵ Carlson, 11.

⁴⁷⁶ Carlson, 29.

to that promise and threat. Because the world appears originally as a shared we-world for Heidegger, there need not be a tug-of-war between the visions of self and other; the world can be aligned to a common project of both. Therefore through the commitment to a shared story, the hope that individualizes one applies fundamentally to both; and a threat to the beloved is now a threat to the lover himself. But because he not only accepts, but also takes joy in the beloved's ongoing freedom, the lover is willing to risk himself for the sake of sharing in the expression of that freedom.

Oddly, the shared aspect of existence in solicitude is also what maintains the self's individuality. The dynamic which began by maintaining the freedom of the beloved also continues to ensure the freedom of the lover. According to Carlson's reading of Heidegger, love gives oneself to his own-most existence by being, in each case, singular. As Heidegger puts it, "love *as such* does not exist;"⁴⁷⁷ that is, love *is* only in so far as it is given by a particular self to a particular other. Further,

... it must... be learned anew in each moment—and it thereby gives me in singular fashion to myself through a relation with the other for whom there can be no substitute. Binding or holding me to the (mortal) beloved in her singularity, one irreducibly outside, whom I cannot manage or

⁴⁷⁷ Carlson, 24.

possess, love gives me thereby to my own-most, and innermost, existence.⁴⁷⁸

Loving is an activity that must be taken up continuously, a choice that must be made over in each moment. It is an enactment of freedom which places the self before a singular other in the position of performing a singular act that no one besides the self can undertake. Thus it gives the self over to its own authentic existence.⁴⁷⁹

This individualizing dynamic is typically associated in Heidegger's work with being-toward-death; and further, it is typically associated with isolation and autarchy. However, Carlson argues that the proper understanding of the relation Heidegger wants to uncover is that being-towards-death awakens the self to resoluteness in which the self engages its fundamental structure of being-with in a more authentic way.⁴⁸⁰ As Carlson comments, within this paradigm,

Our Being, thought in terms of existence, is the function of care and its attentiveness; the existent comes to itself only in standing out from itself;

⁴⁷⁸ Carlson, 24.

⁴⁷⁹ For another account of how love individualizes or gives the self over to itself, see Marion's analysis *In the Self's Place*, 83-84. Also noted in Chapter 3 in the context of desire.

⁴⁸⁰ "Resoluteness brings the Self right into its concerned Being-alongside what is ready-to-hand, and pushes it into solicitous Being with Others. In the light of the 'for-the-sake-of-which' of one's self-chosen potentiality-for-Being, resolute Dasein frees itself for its world. Dasein's resoluteness towards itself is what first makes it possible to let the Others who are with it 'be' in their ownmost potentiality-for-Being and to co-disclose this potentiality in the solicitude that leaps forth and liberates... Only by authentically Being-their-Selves in resoluteness can people authentically be with one another..." (Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 344 as cited in Carlson, 28)

and effectiveness... derives not from possession, from what we have, but from our capability for giving.⁴⁸¹

It would seem that the self's acute awareness of its impending passing pushes it to make the best use of its time; coming to understand that existence as a mortal being entails the inability to possess anything permanently, the self redefines itself in terms of what it can give. Understanding that its existence is always at risk, it can choose to risk it for the sake of the other and not just the self. Thus self-sacrifice rather than self-assertion comes to light as the authentic means of enacting one's freedom. And so, concludes Carlson, "If existence means coming to oneself in departing from oneself, one of its best other names may well be love."⁴⁸²

According to what Carlson has outlined, solicitude offers a paradigm in which temporality offers an opportunity to bind self and other into the integrative relation of lover and beloved. For Sartre, temporality forces the original rupture of the self's integrity.⁴⁸³ Irresistibly propelled into its future, the Sartrean self is compelled to seek the totality it has foregone; but it can only maintain its freedom by negating such totality. Consistent with such an ontology,

⁴⁸¹ Carlson, 29.

⁴⁸² Carlson, 24.

⁴⁸³ Sartre, *BN*, 65, 196, 201.

Sartrean love evolves as a dynamic in which the self's search for integrity and affirmation in relation with the other ends in an objectification which frustrates its ability to reach its very goal. But in solicitude the self does not seek to love the other as a complete and totalized entity; it rejects such objectification. Instead it finds joy in temporality, in the unfinished story that sustains the other in her freedom. Instead of creating a distance that wrenches the self away from itself, temporality provides the opportunity to return the self authentically to itself by investing itself into the futurity of the other. Where in Sartre's paradigm temporality forces the self to seek itself without finding, in solicitude temporality allows the self to risk itself in the other and receive its identity back in the process.

As evidenced in many of the citations above, Carlson is intent on noting that the care undertaken in solicitude gives the self to the other and the other to herself in a manner that denies possession of Being as an ideal or goal.

My 'authenticity' [Eigentlichkeit], that which is most or distinctively my own in the sense of the inescapable and non-transferrable, proves here to be not, in fact, a possession, and still less a self-possession, but a gift given in or as relation with the other; my existence is most 'my own' when I find it—which is to say when I receive it—in the love that gives me to

myself in giving me over to one whom I love, one I never own or possess,
thus holding both together and apart my self and my beloved.⁴⁸⁴

In direct opposition to modes of love or care that can relate to the other only as an object to be mastered for one's own purposes, Carlson argues that Heideggerian solicitude is based primarily on a free and continuous giving of oneself to the other.⁴⁸⁵

While it may be difficult for some to read Heidegger as Carlson does,⁴⁸⁶ it is more difficult *not* to read Marion here in Carlson's analysis. Carlson's multiple appeals to a model in which possession is relinquished as the goal of human relation or existence resonates with strong echoes of Marion's interpretation of the parable of the Prodigal Son in *God Without Being*.⁴⁸⁷ There Marion illustrates and argues that Being is not something to be possessed. Carrying on a postmodern critique of traditional onto-theological conceptions of God, he argues that it is only because we have a mistaken understanding of Being itself as

⁴⁸⁴ Carlson, 24.

⁴⁸⁵ It may be helpful to think here of an orientation toward the other as given in Gabriel Marcel's concept of *disponibilité*.

⁴⁸⁶ As Carlson himself notes, "To read in Heidegger as I do the suggestion of such a condition for love in mortality may seem misguided to interpreters like Marion (or likewise Emmanuel Levinas, or, in similar ways, Robert Harrison) insofar as my Being-toward-death is said to be non-relational [unbezüglich], giving me to myself (through 'anticipatory resoluteness' [vorlaufende Entschlossenheit]) in my 'authenticity' — and hence, these interpreters would contend, in the isolation or even the 'autarchy' of a purported self-possession" (Carlson, 23). See also the analysis of Heidegger in Chapter 1.

⁴⁸⁷ Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being: Hors-Text*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 95ff.

static and immanently present to itself that our attempts at possessing it end in the disintegration of both self and other. Alternatively, argues Marion, Being finds its identity in, or is itself, a dynamic of self-distancing through self-gifting that brings it back into unity. Accordingly, the self cannot truly enjoy the riches of human experience in the mode of possession, but rather only through the dynamic giving and receiving of gifts which refer the receiver to the giver. In other words, the only way to possess one's own being is to give it away and then receive it back through the other.⁴⁸⁸ These gifts, finite tokens though they may be, are to be accepted as mere occasions for strengthening the relation between other and self which transcend such fixity. To treat the tokens, or the giving parties, as self-standing entities to be possessed is to negate the originally binding and integrating function of their exchange.

⁴⁸⁸ Marion also presented this line of thought in a lecture entitled "God and the Ambivalence of Being" at the Institute for Philosophy and Religion at Boston University on April 23, 2015. On this occasion he began from an Augustinian account of the insubstantiality of the present and traditional philosophy's tendency to reduce presence to the present. As a result, we have been led to believe that existence, even divine existence, operates in the mode of persisting in being in such a way as to maintain itself in an extended present and immanent presence to itself. In contrast to such conceptions of Being, he includes an interpretation of Philippians 2:6 in which he highlights Christ's example as one who did not try to possess Being (he did not consider equality with God something to be grasped) but rather manifests divinity itself through his dying; that is Being itself is accomplished only by self-loss and self-giving, not by self-possession. The takeaway from his argument: a better understanding of human being may be gained if patterned after this understanding of divine being rather than traditional onto-theological conceptions. Marion makes similar use of Philippians 2:6 in *In the Self's Place*, p. 300ff.

Carlson's reading of Heidegger is consistent with the pattern outlined by Marion and grounded, for both Heidegger and Marion, in interpretations of Augustine. Carlson contends that the difference between Augustine and Heidegger

has less to do with abandoning the question of love and more to do with abandoning the security of Augustine's theological horizon in favor of a thinking that would understand love's intention to be the other in her essential insecurity—which means, among other things, in her mortality.⁴⁸⁹

... thus Heidegger would have us acknowledge sorrow as a condition, and not a contradiction, of love's possible happiness.⁴⁹⁰

But if this is the case, then it seems to me Carlson is mistaken in his identification of not only what sets Heidegger and Augustine apart, but what makes their identification possible in the first place.

To begin, Augustine does not say that loss contradicts love's possible happiness, but only that it should order it in a certain way. Carlson cites Augustine bemoaning the loss of his friend saying that "every soul is wretched... that is bound in friendship of mortal things;"⁴⁹¹ but he fails to note that the problem is not in loving something mortal, but in "loving a mortal man *as if he*

⁴⁸⁹ Carlson, 22.

⁴⁹⁰ Carlson, 19.

⁴⁹¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, IV.6 as cited in Carlson, 21.

were never to die."⁴⁹² Augustine is not indicating that the possibility of loss negates the possibility of love, but only that, in the human context, such love cannot become absolute. A self which receives itself in identifying with or loving the other risks losing itself when the other is lost. If the loss of the other is not also to result in the loss of the self, then there must be some factor which can help the self remain open to its own futurity even if the beloved's futurity has lapsed. Augustine's analysis of the incompatibility of loss with love's happiness is precisely a warning against the idealizing or idolizing of the other that Carlson finds repeated in Heidegger. It is a reminder of human temporality that likewise protects the self from the objectification of becoming a slave to the thing loved.

Carlson contends that Heideggerian solicitude is able to maintain the freedom and authentic existence of both self and other precisely because it is open to mourning; it gives up the goals of security and stability in exchange for communion in the present now. But it seems to me that the key to the dynamic is not accepting the possibility of loss but rather relinquishing the desire for possession. In solicitude, even as Carlson describes it, the self does not take up care for the other *because* of the other's impending death, but *in spite* of it. After

⁴⁹² *Confessions*, IV.viii.13. Emphasis mine.

all, solicitude, being like the “genuine love” Augustine describes, is concerned with helping the other to *be* herself; willing the *non-being* of the beloved is precisely what such love strives against.⁴⁹³ Consciousness of death can function to uncover the impossibility of possession but it cannot serve as a condition for love; love cannot be love without desiring the continued being of the beloved. Rather it is in the recognition that possession of the other is neither possible nor desirable that the fear of loss which threatens love’s happiness is extinguished. Augustine is keenly aware of humanity’s “essential insecurity” as finite, mortal, and temporal creatures. He directs his readers to precisely this aspect of human existence in order to uncover the futility of loves informed, or rather *deformed*, by the goal of such possession.

Next, Carlson discounts Augustine’s “theological horizon” as necessary for the function of genuine love. He criticizes the Augustinian affirmation of temporality for not sufficiently embracing human mutability because it seeks its

⁴⁹³ Carlson notes a Heideggerian characterization of “authentic love” as having “a basic tendency toward the *dilectum ut sit* [being loved so that the beloved may be]. Thus, love is the will toward the being [or the “to be”] of the loved one [*Liebe ist also Wille zum Sein des Geliebten*].” (Carlson, 20).

ultimate joy in an eternal God.⁴⁹⁴ However, his own account of solicitude is open to the same criticism. Carlson comments that

The presence of the beloved thus takes time, and that time alone sustains, even as it is sustained by, our worldly places of living—and dying. For the waiting, and the guarding, thanks to which alone the beloved stays present is but the forward movement, joyful and anxious, of a possibility that must be able at any moment to become, suddenly, sorrowfully, but no less joyfully, remembrance.

But to allow remembrance as a means of maintaining or ensuring the continued joy of solicitude is to allow some means or hope of stability to act as a brace *against* the inevitable loss given in temporality. The fact that such stability is based in the horizon of past lived experience does not mean that it embraces the mutability entailed by temporality any more thoroughly than the hope of eternally loving an immutable God. If temporality is affirmed by finding joy in a relationship which occurred in the past, then it is at least no less of an affirmation, if not more so, to find joy in the hope of a relationship that will take place in the future. In fact, I would argue that such a joy, while rejecting death as its condition, nonetheless accepts temporality as such. More so than remembrance, the hope of relation in eternity maintains its “forward movement”

⁴⁹⁴ “the affirmation of temporal mutability... in Augustine... affirms in the end not mutability as such but only the mutable creature’s steady adherence through love to the God who himself remains immutable; the paradigm of such constancy... is that in so adhering constantly to God [the self] comes as close as is possible for a creature to the immutability and eternity that belong properly to God alone.” (Carlson, 15-16).

by projecting its relationship into a continuous future rather than being satisfied to look back into a closed off past.

Further, while it may seem that remembrance is sufficient to effect such movement by extending the self's love of and relationship with the other beyond death, remembrance does not qualify as a solicitudinous form of being-with because there is no longer an actual other with whom to be; there is in fact nothing left to guard or to wait for and no possibility of such. Contrary to his assertion, a "history... kept,"⁴⁹⁵ as Carlson characterizes it, is in fact a mode of possession. It is no more than relating oneself to a fixed idea of what the beloved was. What could hold more of a threat of idealization or idolatry than that? The self who carries out solicitude in such remembrance does in fact accept death and mourning as a condition of love, but even by Carlson's own definitions, this cannot provide for a genuine, or at least robust, constitution of love.

The "theological horizon" Carlson dismisses as unnecessary for the proper functioning of love is precisely the structure that allows for a model in which the self can be found through the other without necessitating the objectification of either. It is precisely the rejection of death as a condition of love that creates a

⁴⁹⁵ "...joy is linked to... a shared faith... in... the singular story that remains distinctively hers—...as the open temporality of story's happening, or as history, the beloved is received and kept (and hence never possessed)." (Carlson, 29).

paradigm in which temporality and genuine love can be reconciled. Augustine's exhortation to love the other "in God," rather than in himself,⁴⁹⁶ functions according to a structure in which the love of some third and common factor, i.e. Being itself, serves to deliver the self and other to their authentic existences. Such a structure is one in which the finite other cannot on its own be the self's ultimate source of identity or affirmation. Only the appropriation of Being itself can provide that. No matter how authentically one takes up the human other as his cause, to do so absolutely would end, exactly as Sartre observes, in the self's own objectification. Analogously, to love the other "in God" is to recognize that for the self to seek to be the other's center of identity is to objectify the other. Relativizing love in terms of an absolute third constitutes the self in such a way so as to force each to remain open to his and her own authenticity without futilely seeking to be an absolute center.

By providing a place for absolute Being, the "theological horizon" holds in tandem and tension the hope for the consummation of absolute Being with the recognition that such consummation is not part of the current structure of human experience. It transposes the self's concern firmly into the realm of the existential

⁴⁹⁶ The actual quote says "in Thee." See Augustine, *Confessions*, IV.ix.14, Cited in Carlson, 22.

precisely by providing an understanding of its shared basis in the ontological. Such an understanding recognizes the dissipation of mortality as part of human experience, but rejects it as its defining factor. Therefore, Augustine's exhortation to love the other "in God" exemplifies a structure wherein faith in permanent Being is preserved but access to it is limited to the contingent being consistent with human experience. It extends the range of means of establishing the self's being and expressing its freedom to include the human other without limiting it to the human other. Self-risk for the sake of the other is entailed but also hedged against. It is not a call to bypass the contingent other in the search for the absolute—Augustine does not discount loving the mortal other in favor of loving the immortal God; rather such a call entails a recognition that the only access the self has to enact its love of absolute Being is through the concerned care for the contingent beings which exhibit some of its character.⁴⁹⁷ Thus the self is motivated to practically promote the being of the other as she expends her temporality in pursuing absolute Being; it is an existence which aims to defy death, not embrace it. Within a theological horizon one can embrace the temporality of human existence while rejecting the necessity of the disintegration

⁴⁹⁷ See Augustine's commentary on I John 4:20: "...for he that loveth not his brother whom he seeth, how can he love God whom he seeth not?" in *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, IX.x-xi.

imposed by mortality.⁴⁹⁸ Thus it respects the distance between beings and Being while providing a fruitful path along which to traverse it.

Finally, by providing a factor that transcends the temporal existence of both self and other, the “theological horizon” protects the binary relationship between self and other from becoming absolutized in such a way so as to exclude a third. That is, the possibility of loving “in God” provides a means toward making the concernful relation of love universal. While Heidegger’s assumption of an ontologically shared aspect to human reality is key in the function of solicitude, here, love is not limited by the contingency of a common history, or “shared story,” but by a shared ground in the goodness of Being itself. The theological horizon does not serve to diminish the importance of temporality in human experience, but only to place it in its proper context.

....

While the last chapter ended with a reformulation of the concept of God internalized in the modern mindset, this chapter focused on a reformulation of the understanding of freedom established therein. If, like Sartre, we understand freedom as an autonomous power to choose, and to choose only oneself,

⁴⁹⁸ As James Wetzel puts it, Augustine’s “words look forward to a resurrection not a burial.” (James Wetzel, “Crisis Mentalities: Augustine after Descartes,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 74:1 (2000): 115).

indifferent to any common or absolute Good, we must accept it as a fall from gracelessness to gracelessness. Self-assertion appears as the ultimate good and the other's existence cannot factor favorably in my world.

In the Sartrean model, Being itself is understood as a state of self-possession so secure that it eliminates the least room or distance for reflection, change, or loss; so it makes sense that a self which exists as conscious, temporal, and mortal should be understood as Being's other, a non-being which appears to be a fundamental rejection of such Being. Within such a structure the other can only come into view as an obstacle to self-actualization rather than as an opportunity for such. Such a self has no choice but to exist as a Negating Self—a self-defeating dynamic which both seeks and rejects the complete security of its own being in totality. Alternatively, if Being is understood as an ongoing dynamic in which self-giving and receiving rather than self-possession serve as the hallmark, then the self's impetus toward Being need not be conceived as a necessarily failed attempt at totality; rather it can be seen as a move toward an re-integration of self via integration with the other.

As the quintessential expression of the self's being, freedom in the first model must be enacted as negation: rejection, inversion, and nihilation of any objective element in its identity. But freedom in the second model would be most

appropriately enacted through self-sacrifice. If being in its most essential form means self-giving and receiving, then the being of the other is implied in the being of the self. And the being of the self can only be established by risking itself to promote the being of the other.

While Being is a given in both the Sartrean and Augustinian models, in the latter it is graced rather than graceless; that is, it is a common Good to be received by all— a gift rather than simply *de trop*, or in the way. An autarchic worldview cannot account for this. It cannot see Being as a gift or as Good and so can only see the other as an obstacle. Being cannot be received, so it cannot be shared. Genuine love is impossible because freedom in an autarchic context consists in rejecting the other's being to assert one's own. But because for Augustine both self and other share an ontological ground, and this ground expresses a dynamic relation rather than a static object, the affirmation of the other's being can result in the affirmation of the self's being as well. They are mutually inclusive rather than mutually exclusive. So love—which seeks to integrate the experience of self and other—rather than negation, becomes possible as a mode of enacting one's freedom.

It is precisely because Augustine's world is built with such an integrative structure that postmodern theorists ranging from Heidegger to Derrida to

Caputo to Marion can find in him resources to argue against the autonomy of the self as conceived within the modern mindset. While some may be able to make due without Augustine's "theological horizon," it seems that some sort of "*faith in the other*" is necessary to construct a model of self which resists objectification and negation as a necessary structure of human relation. As evidenced by the Sartrean model, confidence in the self is not nearly enough.

CHAPTER 5.
THE (UN)SEEN SELF: BEING IN CONFLICT

For both Augustine and Sartre, the event of being seen by an other stands as a definitive moment in the self's development. The presumed autonomy and autarchy of the Sartrean self notwithstanding, *both* thinkers reveal that without the other, the self cannot be itself; the other's look provides the self with a perspective without which an accurate and robust self-knowledge would be impossible. As with the other structures of the self that we have explored, while Augustine and Sartre's phenomenologies of being seen contain marked similarities, their overarching ontological assumptions result in radically divergent attitudes and expectations as to the constitution of the self and potential relationship between self and other that can result from such an event.

The analysis of this chapter builds on the conceptions of the "Fall" detailed for each thinker in Chapter 4 to explore the possibilities for self-knowledge when fallen selves are seen by fallen others. For both thinkers the Fall initiates a situation in which the self becomes out of sync with itself. In Augustine's thought the will becomes divided and in Sartre's the in-itself constantly eludes the ever-seeking for-itself. Dichotomies in the being of the self create a divergence between how the self knows itself and how it is known by

others. While the fallen self has immediate access to its own will and intentions, the other can only have knowledge of these mediated by the self's outward physical expressions. But the dichotomies initiated by the Fall also create the possibility of divergence between what the self knows of itself and what the self expresses of itself. As a consequence, the self is in an odd situation where being seen by the other does not entail being known by the other but is nonetheless a condition of fully knowing itself. Within the contexts of the Falls they detail, what the self sees immediately of itself is often hidden from the other, while what the other sees immediately of the self is often hidden from the self; consequently, for both Augustine and Sartre, to exist as a self is to exist as an (Un)Seen Self.

The analysis of this chapter will make use of the constructs of "Shame," "Bad Faith," and "A Place of Unlikeness," which notably appear in both thinkers' account of being seen. These will serve as our guiding principles in exploring the implications of existing as an (Un)Seen Self for both Augustine and Sartre. While the second is a specifically Sartrean term and the third specifically Augustinian,⁴⁹⁹ "Shame" holds a significant place for both thinkers as the

⁴⁹⁹ While the phrase itself seems to have originated in Plato's *Statesman*, it is specifically Augustinian in the context of this comparison; that is, Sartre does not use this terminology

primary response of the fallen self to being seen. It is particularly in their discussions of shame that the difference in their fundamental attitudes toward the necessity of the other for the constitution of the self is revealed. While for Augustine shame under the look of the other is a response to having a divided will and being subject to temptation, for Sartre it is fundamentally a response to needing the other.

The conflict within the self expresses itself in bad faith and precipitates conflict between self and other. "Bad faith" is a term technically used by Sartre to indicate actions and intentions the self uses to evade the responsibility endowed to it by its freedom; but in this broader context it describes the misguided tactics the fallen self uses in relation with the other to try to cope with and combat the possibility of discrepancy between its intentions and its expressions. Such tactics are discussed and condemned by both Augustine and Sartre.

"A Place of Unlikeness," a phrase used by Augustine to describe a newfound understanding of his nature as a creature of God, applies here more broadly to the process of seeing oneself through the other's eyes. The analyses under this heading detail the dynamics by which in Augustine's model being

himself. For a trace of the phrase's use, see Margaret W. Ferguson, "St. Augustine's Region of Unlikeness: The Crossing of Exile and Language," *The Georgia Review*, 29:4 (Winter 1975): 845-847.

seen offers hope for a reintegration of the dichotomous aspects of the self resulting from the fall, but in Sartre's it functions as a thorn in the side of a self who deludedly attempts to become completely self-sourced but continues to find that he is not.

Ultimately, the chapter engages in a discussion of the possible ethics of responsibility that can obtain if the necessary role that the other plays in the constitution of the self is received or resented. The chapter ends with some alternative "Augustinian" models present in the work of Emmanuel Levinas and Merold Westphal exploring the responsibility of the self to the other without whom selfhood would be impossible. In these models, subjectivity is a matter of the self's ability to receive meaning rather than produce it and ethics is initiated and enabled by the other rather than by the self.

AUGUSTINE: BEING SEEN AS BEING FOR(E)GIVEN

The descriptions in Augustine's work of being seen by an other include both accounts he gives of his personal experience in the *Confessions*, and his interpretations of Genesis 3 in *City of God* and *On Genesis against the Manichees*. Beginning from the experience of shame and the significance he assigns it and then moving to the deception made possible by the Fall, Augustine's work seems to point toward the possibility of a restoration of the situation in which a

complete and honest image of the self is available to both the self and the other. But this self-image can be achieved only by cooperation with and adoption of the vision of the self as seen by a compassionate other.

SHAME: A BEING SEEN

The title of this section tries to connote the multivalent character of the phenomenon of shame as presented in Augustine's work. While this title most obviously implies that shame is a fundamental aspect of a being which can be seen, and that the event of being seen results in shame, it is also phrased to communicate that shame is only *a* being seen; that is, it is not the only or complete response to or consequence of such an event. While it is a necessary moment in the experience of the fallen self, for Augustine it is most effective as a springboard for seeing oneself in a new way, or more aptly, for seeing the possibility of becoming a renewed self.

Augustine's most robust accounts of shame occur in the context of his analyses of Genesis 3. Although shame can occur in many situations, for Augustine, the most profound or quintessential experience of shame occurs with

the potential observation of the lustful response of the sexual organs.⁵⁰⁰ This, argues Augustine, is because their involuntary movement makes obvious that the will has lost its capacity to fully and appropriately direct the body and, more essentially, to fully and appropriately direct itself. He writes,

this lust, of which we at present speak, is the more shameful on this account, because the soul is therein neither master of itself, so as not to lust at all, nor of the body, so as to keep the members under the control of the will; for if they were thus ruled, there should be no shame. But now the soul is ashamed that the body, which by nature is inferior and subject to it, should resist its authority. For in the resistance experienced by the soul in the other emotions there is less shame, because the resistance is from itself, and thus, when it is conquered by itself, itself is the conqueror.⁵⁰¹

James Wetzel comments that, according to Augustine's personal accounts, shame is "the shame of having to feel temptation."⁵⁰² It seems that this is an apt description of Augustine's assessment of shame in general. According to Augustine's understanding, before the Fall, the will operated with the primary purpose of cleaving to the Good with an integrity that extended from itself to all

⁵⁰⁰ "A man would be less put out by a crowd of spectators watching him visiting his anger unjustly upon another man than by one person observing him when he is having lawful intercourse with his wife." (*City of God*, XIV.19)

⁵⁰¹ Augustine, *City of God*, XIV.23. See also XIV.19.

⁵⁰² James Wetzel, *Augustine: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 102. This phrase is used in the context of Augustine's personal struggle with Continence as given in *Confessions* 8.

the faculties of the body;⁵⁰³ after the fall the self experiences the possibility of its good will being overcome by desires precipitated by its inferior members and for inferior purposes. As Mathewes notes, For Augustine,

Good action is the action of an integrated self while wicked action is not; but whereas an integral self can, by its own will, will itself into chaos, once the self falls, its integrity is lost, and it cannot reintegrate itself. The self's decision to love the wrong end can never succeed, for the self is hard-wired to seek right relationship with God; yet if it attempts to return to loving the right ends, it finds that its continued attraction (or addiction) to wrong loves prevents such a conversion. In this state of disintegration... its loves are in internal conflict and so the will...cannot will anything coherently... in a fallen state... the self is perpetually torn apart by its divergent loves.⁵⁰⁴

Temptation is precisely this dynamic of being pulled toward divergent loves, one good and another evil. The will, once fallen, is no longer capable of directing its full energies, or the full energies of the body, toward the Good. There is then always an aspect of the will, and therefore an aspect of the self's physical actions, that is directed by lust rather than love. The loss of integrity of the will itself leads to a loss of integrity between the will and its expressions in the body. The self can no longer be itself coherently as it once could. According to Augustine's commentary, the self would not experience shame if these discrepancies within

⁵⁰³ See *City of God*, XIV.24 for his arguments about the extent of control humans have over the body even in their fallen state as an indication of the control they would have had were they not fallen.

⁵⁰⁴ Mathewes, "Augustinian Anthropology," 206.

its being were not there. Thus, in his model, shame appears as a response to the realization that the self is in the incoherent situation of being out of sync or at odds with itself.

It is significant (and strikingly consistent) that in Augustine's thought the paradigmatic situation for experiencing shame is linked to the disordered activity of organs that are intended for the intimate unification of the self with and the procreation of an other. James David Velleman suggests that, in a tradition stemming from Augustine, "The genitals became shameful...when they became private."⁵⁰⁵ Although I have my qualms with much of Velleman's interpretation,⁵⁰⁶ Augustine's work does seem to suggest something along these lines.

⁵⁰⁵ James David Velleman, "The Genesis of Shame," *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 30:1 (Winter 2001): 31.

⁵⁰⁶ This correlation of shame and privacy is intriguing even though much of the rest of his analysis in the article is on very shaky ground in terms of its consistency with Augustine. Velleman suggests that "Privacy is made possible by the ability to choose in opposition to inclination... our capacity to resist desires enables us to choose which desires our behavior will express" (p.35). While his analysis has its place, it is not at all reflective of Augustine's thought on the structure of the will and the function of desire. Disregarding Augustine's overarching framework, Velleman focuses on the will as the ability and advantage of having our actions diverge from or negate our inclinations; freedom is the ability to say "no" or at least "not now." "You thus have a fundamental interest in being recognized as a self-presenting creature, an interest that is more fundamental, in fact, than your interest in presenting any particular public image. Not to be seen as honest or intelligent or attractive would be socially disadvantageous, but not to be seen as a self-presenting creature would be socially disqualifying: it would place you beyond the reach of social intercourse altogether. *Threats to your standing as a self-presenting creature are thus a source of deep anxiety, and anxiety*

Augustine contends that before the fall, sexual arousal was subject to the will and directed for the purpose of procreation.⁵⁰⁷ But after the fall, he writes, “the genital organs have become as it were the private property of lust, which has brought them so completely under its sway that they have no power of movement if this passion fails... It is this that arouses shame.”⁵⁰⁸ Lust, for Augustine, indicates a perverted form of love. It is a self-seeking desire that aims to acquire its object rather than be united with it. As Wetzel puts it, “Lust is love that has lost its trust that the flesh of the other can be loved and still remain inalienably their own.”⁵⁰⁹ To say that the genitals are the private property of lust indicates that are being directed by a drive which seeks to, for lack of a better term, consume the other in order to satisfy the self. Organs originally intended to

about the threatened loss of that standing is, in my view, what constitutes the emotion of shame” (p. 37, emphasis added). He concludes that our attitudes toward “nakedness may confirm St. Augustine’s hypothesis that what’s shameful about nakedness is the body’s insubordination to the will. And my account of privacy may explain this hypothesis by explaining why the insubordinate body threatens to put its owner in a socially untenable position, by undermining his standing as a self-presenting person” (39-40). This is a bald-faced example of a Sartrean and modernist interpretation which makes use of Augustine’s work while discounting his framework; it is an interpretation that forgets that the self Augustine describes is fallen, not free; in a very un-Augustinian approach, he venerates the human ability to dissemble rather than appeal to a situation in which we have no need to do so.

⁵⁰⁷ “...had there been no sin...the man would have sowed his seed and the woman would have conceived the child when their sexual organs *had been aroused by the will, at the appropriate time and in the necessary degree...*” Augustine, *City of God*, XIV. 24 (emphasis added).

⁵⁰⁸ Augustine, *City of God*, XIV.19. See also, *City of God*, XIV.17

⁵⁰⁹ James Wetzel, “Life in Unlikeness: The Materiality of Augustine’s Conversion,” *The Journal of Religion*, 91:1 (2011): 62.

cultivate loving relations were converted into organs dominated by lust. Rather than being enacted with the will and with the other to accomplish the *mutual* activity for which they were created, in lust the genitals are privatized in the sense that they are activated primarily for private purposes, that is, by a desire to assert the self rather than procreate with an other.

Augustine's broader comments on Genesis 3 indicate that at the most fundamental level, the "privatization" that subjects the genitals to lust is just a physical expression of the "privatization" of the will that occurred with Adam and Eve's original disobedience.⁵¹⁰ He writes,

they heard his voice, and hid themselves from his sight. Who are the ones who hide themselves from the sight of God, but those who have turned their backs on him and are beginning to love what is their very own... and this is why they are said to have hidden themselves at the tree which was in the middle of paradise, that is, at themselves... Having turned away from [Divine light] and turned to himself... he saw his own nakedness, and was displeased with himself as not having anything he could call his very own.⁵¹¹

Having been created to love God, they allowed self-love to dominate their wills.

In turn, "the flesh... [gave] proof of man's disobedience by a disobedience of its

⁵¹⁰ Augustine indicates that this loss of control over the body was a punishment imposed by God rather than a natural consequence of Adam and Eve's disobedience. But his commentary indicates that the structure of the punishment precisely mirrors the structure of the original sin.

⁵¹¹ Augustine, *On Genesis: A Refutation of the Manichees*, II.xvi.24 in *On Genesis*, in *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, Part I, Volume 13, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill, and John E. Rotelle. (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2002). (Hereafter, *De Gen c. Man.*, Rotelle).

own.”⁵¹² The inversion of their wills led to disordering of the actions performed by their bodies. Seeing their own bodies move fruitlessly of their own accord, instead of according to a will that would ensure their fruitfulness, gave them a visible representation of what they had perpetrated in relation to God. According to Augustine’s commentary, the urge to hide, or shame, appears as the consequence of an unjustified self-ward orientation. That he believes shame necessarily accompanies involuntary lustful arousal indicates that for Augustine, shame is, at its most fundamental level, a recognition of the gap between how one’s will *should be* directed (toward or for the sake of the other) and how it *is* directed (toward the self). Again we see that shame is a response to being at odds with oneself.

While it may seem that shame requires being seen by the other, in fact, it only requires the existence of the other. According to Augustine’s commentaries, it is not possible that Adam and Eve hid because they thought seeing their nakedness would make God aware of their disobedience; after all, they hid *after* shame at the involuntary actions of their bodies incited them to make coverings for themselves. They did not actually need to be seen by anyone to feel ashamed.

⁵¹² Augustine, *City of God*, XIV.17.

Rather, having become aware through the responses of their own bodies of the disorder their disobedience perpetrated in their relationship to God, they were afraid⁵¹³ of coming into the presence of the one against whom they had sinned. The disparity within the self is recognized as a direct result of the perpetration of an injustice against the other. The self, originally created to be other-oriented has become self-oriented and thereby forsaken integrity within itself by forsaking the integrity of its relationship with the other. Augustine's work reveals that it is because an other to whom the self is responsible exists in the first place that the shame of being self-serving can be recognized even if no other is actually there. Shame is a response, not primarily to being seen by the other, but to seeing the self as a being which in a fundamental way has transgressed against the other it was intended to affirm.

BAD FAITH: A BEING IN CONFLICT

Although Augustine's work reveals that the self need not actually be seen by the other to experience shame, he includes an extensive analysis of what happens when the self is in fact seen by the other in its fallen state. While we have characterized shame primarily as a self-awareness of the dichotomies

⁵¹³ Genesis 3:10.

present within the self, this awareness seems to express itself as the impulse to hide these dichotomies. Augustine notes that in the case of Adam and Eve, “Shame modestly *covered* that which lust disobediently moved in opposition to the will.”⁵¹⁴ And he goes on to give a detailed account of the meaning of this impulse to initiate such a cover up:

When Adam heard God's voice, he answered that he hid because he was naked... as if a man naked, as God had made him, could be displeasing to him... For he [had been] naked of dissimulation, but clothed with the divine light. From this light he turned away and turned toward himself, and this is the meaning of his having eaten from that tree.⁵¹⁵

For the human soul can be a partaker in the truth, but the truth is the immutable God above it. Hence, whoever turns away from that truth and turns toward himself... becomes dark by reason of the lie. For he who speaks a lie speaks from what is his own.⁵¹⁶

For when anyone has fallen from that intimate and hidden light of truth, there is nothing else from which pride wants to derive pleasure than fraudulent pretenses. From this there also arises the hypocrisy by which men think that they are very wise if they can deceive and beguile whomever they wish.⁵¹⁷

...they made for themselves aprons from the leaves of the fig tree, but God made for them garments of skin. That is, having abandoned the face of truth, they sought the pleasure of lying, and God changed their bodies into this mortal flesh in which deceitful hearts are hidden.⁵¹⁸

⁵¹⁴ Augustine, *City of God*, XIV.17. Emphasis added.

⁵¹⁵ Augustine, *Two Books on Genesis Against the Manichees*, II.xvi.24 in *On Genesis*, trans. Roland J. Teske (Baltimore: Catholic University of America Press, 1990). (Hereafter, *De Gen. c. Man*, Teske).

⁵¹⁶ Augustine, *De Gen. c. Man*, Teske, II.xvi.24.

⁵¹⁷ Augustine, *De Gen. c. Man*, Teske, II.xv.22.

⁵¹⁸ Augustine, *De Gen. c. Man*, Teske, II.xxi.32.

By Augustine's account, the fall towards the self initiated by Adam and Eve's disobedience was also a fall away from Truth ("for he who speaks a lie speaks from what is his own"). As a result, pretense and dissimulation became part and parcel of human interaction. As Phillip Cary explains, for Augustine, the ability to conceal one's true thoughts and intentions is

strictly a consequence of the Fall, a result of the ignorance and discord that divides soul from soul in our present state of sin and punishment. The opacity of our fallen bodies is a result of this fundamental division of souls rather than a cause of it; hence when souls are... divided by conflicting, evil wills, bodies also... serve to divide one soul from another...⁵¹⁹

Augustine believed that before the fall, the body could not but express with complete transparency the contents of the heart and mind.⁵²⁰ But with the division of the will, the possibility of temptation away from the Good, the severing of the necessary link between the will and the body, and the loss of a common good, there comes not only the possibility of a discrepancy in what is expressed by the body but also the impulse to willfully deceive.

⁵¹⁹ Cary, 122.

⁵²⁰ "It is not to be supposed, after all, that thoughts can remain hidden in celestial bodies in the same way as they do in these present bodies of ours; but just as some at least of our inner thoughts and feelings are revealed by the expression on our faces, and especially by our eyes, so I am convinced that in a similar way no feelings and thoughts of the spirit whatsoever are concealed in the transparent simplicity of heavenly bodies." *De Gen. c. Man*, Rotelle, II.xxi.32.

Bad faith is what we can call the self's attempts to deceive about, cover up, or deny these disparities in the being of the self. In the Augustinian context, having become "naked of the grace that prevented [it] from being ashamed of bodily nakedness,"⁵²¹ the self seeks not a renewed gift of integrity from the Other who originally gave it, but rather depends exclusively on its own resources (lies) to negate the gap it experiences in its being. These attempts, however, are misguided and futile because they aim to put the self back into sync with itself by adhering to itself instead of to the other it had originally forsaken. But the cleavage within the self caused by its cleavage from the other can only be mended by a renewed cleavage to that other. Thus it is *bad* faith precisely because it is confidence in the self rather than in the other;⁵²² further, it is *bad faith*, in the sense of bad fidelity, because in its use of deception it seeks specifically to reproduce itself as something it is not. Taking one form, the self in bad faith focuses its energies on its physical expressions without truly conforming the will to seek the good of the other; taking its other form, the self focuses its energies on its good intentions without effecting the corresponding actions on the part of the body. Taking advantage of the disparity that has

⁵²¹ Augustine, *City of God*, xiv.17.

⁵²² For an analysis of the detriments of self-confidence in Augustine's thought, see the section entitled, "Augustine's Affirmation of Negation" in Chapter 4.

become possible between its various aspects, the self makes presentations with its body to distract from, dissemble, and deny the incoherent orientation of its will. In either form of bad faith, the break between the divergent aspects of the self effected by the Fall is never healed, only concealed; thus, through acts of bad faith, the conflict within the self results in further conflict between selves.

Although Augustine himself does not use the term “bad faith,” in E.J. Hundert’s article, *Augustine and the Sources of the Divided Self*, we find a discussion of Augustine’s work that reveals how Augustine himself recognized this dynamic as a powerful factor influencing human behavior.⁵²³ In his analysis of Roman foundational stories and theatre culture, Augustine reveals an understanding of the shameful impulse to cover up as a faulty attempt at bridging the gap between the divergent loves of the divided will and the subsequent gap between the unseen intentions of the will and their physical expression in the body. Hundert insightfully recognizes that when in *Confessions* and *De Civitate Dei* Augustine is critiquing these foundational aspects of the dominant culture, “What centrally concerns him are the developed patterns of public performance by which authoritative standards of common morality may

⁵²³ E.J. Hundert, “Augustine and the Sources of the Divided Self,” *Political Theory*, 20:1 (Feb., 1992): 86-104. To be clear, Hundert does not use the term “bad faith” either, but the dynamics he describes in his analysis exemplify the concept to a T.

be corrupted into opportunities for the enhancement of pride."⁵²⁴ In other words, Augustine is determined to reveal the ways the fallen self makes use of what can be publicly seen and accepted to avoid facing the unseen and unacceptable truth: that the self has willfully forsaken responsibility to and for the other in order to secure itself.

For an example of the first form of bad faith, we turn our attention to Augustine's analysis of the rape and suicide of Lucretia and its function in revealing certain foundational values according to which such an episode would be venerated. Roman tradition held that after she was raped Lucretia killed herself "never [to] ... provide a precedent for unchaste women to escape what they deserve."⁵²⁵ But Augustine asks, "If she is adulterous, why is she praised? If chaste, why was she put to death?"⁵²⁶ His analysis reveals that only an alternative interpretation of her intentions can resolve the paradox created by her actions:

She was ashamed of another's foul deed committed *on* her, even though not *with* her, and as a Roman woman, excessively eager for honour, she was afraid that she should be thought, if she lived, to have willingly endured, when she lived, what she violently suffered. Since she could not display her pure conscience to the world she thought she must exhibit her punishment before men's eyes as a proof of her state of mind.⁵²⁷

⁵²⁴ Hundert, 95.

⁵²⁵ Livy, *The Early History of Rome*, Books 1-5, 1.57, as cited in Hundert, 98.

⁵²⁶ Augustine, *City of God*, I.19.

⁵²⁷ Augustine, *City of God*, I.19.

Augustine recognizes Lucretia's actions as a glaring example of bad faith. Her pride could not bear living with the gap between the violated state of her body which others could see and the chastity of her intentions which they could not. Fearing that the discrepancy would be reconciled in the minds of others by assuming that her intentions were ignoble, she sought to bridge the gap herself by sacrificing her body to their judgement. But succumbing to an unjust punishment proved not that she had the good of her community at heart, but rather that she valued her own reputation above all else. Rather than resolve the discrepancy between the intentions of her mind and the violence done to her body, Lucretia's act of bad faith simply deflected or concealed from attention the fact that her will had succumbed to a more fundamental violence: being rend between the desire to promote the well-being of others and the desire to retain glory for herself.

Hundert argues that where dominant tradition held the episode up as a paradigm of cohesive rational action undertaken for the sake of the common good, Augustine's discussion is constructed specifically to reveal it as an example of

highly stylized forms of self-display [that] were meant to obscure shameful impulses whose public exposure would render these feats of self-advocacy inept.... Ever needing to satisfy a "swollen pride," this fragile amalgam of competing passions depended absolutely on the

opinion of others to certify [her] own identity. In manipulating that opinion to win glory [and] conceal the incomplete person beneath, Lucretia... emerged in Augustine's analysis as [an exemplar], not of a selfless devotion to a civic and moral ideal but of the fragmented personality unable to confront, save through dissimulation, the sources of its own obsessions.⁵²⁸

In the classical mind, virtuous moral action could only result when dispassionate reason exercised complete and unified control over the self's will and actions.

Through his reinterpretation of Lucretia's story, Augustine sought to reveal for his audience that even the most purportedly virtuous of humans in the City of

Man were still subject to the corruption of body and mind by "passions...

disastrously perverted from their proper ends"⁵²⁹ Even with good reason, acts of bad faith cannot effect the necessary realignment.

In Augustine's critique of the spectator of Roman theatre we find described the second form of bad faith along with a more direct explication of the threat posed by action in such a mode. In this analysis we see a self which tries to close the gap between intentions and actions by focusing his energies on intentions while negating the value of actions. Augustine begins his analysis by remembering his own experience attending Roman plays: "Stage-plays...carried me away," he writes, "... in the theatres... when [lovers] lost one another, as if

⁵²⁸ Hundert, 98.

⁵²⁹ Hundert, 93.

very compassionate, I sorrowed with them, yet had my delight..."⁵³⁰ Reflecting on this odd dynamic he asks,

How is it that a man wants to be made sad by the sight of tragic sufferings he could not bear in his own person? Yet the spectator does want to feel sorrow and it is this feeling of sorrow he enjoys... In my wretchedness I loved to be made sad and sought for things to be sad about: and in the misery of others—though fictitious and only on the stage—the more my tears were set to flowing, the more pleasure I got from the drama and the more powerfully did it hold me.⁵³¹

Augustine finds that the repeated activity of theatre-going orients the self into a pattern of behavior that, while seeming to arouse compassion, actually leads it to seek the misfortune of others in order to feel good about itself.

But Augustine recognizes that only a truly depraved person would seek that others—in reality and not just on stage—be sorrowful in order to commiserate with them. The others whose pain he seeks to enjoy are, after all, only actors. They are trained to arouse his sorrow without actually experiencing any pain themselves. The spectator knows this and so can enjoy their suffering without any real responsibility to interfere in their affairs.

⁵³⁰ Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, ed. Valenti Angelo, trans. E. B. Pusey (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1999), III.ii.2.
<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/augustine/confess.html>.

2. Ibid.

⁵³¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, III.ii.2.

But it is in this relationship between spectator and actor that Augustine notes a more subtle attitude toward the other being shaped in the self. Hundert explains that Augustine's critique of the theatre is most fundamentally based on his assessment that

The "feigned and personated" misery associated with the theatre... deflects the genuine and honorable emotions of pity or compassion from the sufferings of others. Here the person who commiserates with another so relishes this feeling itself that he desires someone else to suffer in order fully to enjoy it. When in the theatre, neighbor and citizen may thus be transformed into passive consumers of sensation; stimulated by personated embodiments of passions he loves, the theatrically constituted spectator longs for another's pain, "which [he] is not called upon to relieve." Augustine's suspicion of the relation between the performer and his audience rests on his claim that men, when spectators, are encouraged to relieve themselves of moral responsibility.⁵³²

While the spectator does not leave the theatre actually seeking the misfortune of others, he does get used to observing the misfortune of others without taking any responsibility or action for relieving their pain. It is this less obvious, but no less depraved, orientation toward the other that Augustine seeks to reveal.

Augustine's critique of the theatre is a critique of what he sees as a staple expression of the dominant culture. It is because he sees that, in general, selves are prone to taking on this attitude of the "theatrically constituted spectator" that he undertakes this analysis.

⁵³² Hundert, 95.

The dynamic he sees at work here fits into our analysis as the second form of bad faith. Here the self, being moved toward compassion, stops short of any physical expressions of its emotional reaction. Augustine is adamant that when selves are correctly constituted, “the sorrows of others must move our love;”⁵³³ that is, they should result in acts which practically promote their well-being.⁵³⁴ Where corresponding action no longer necessarily follows the intentions of the will, the self satisfies itself with the intentions alone. In this mode of bad faith the self denies the gap between intentions and actions by satisfying its desire to help the other simply by enjoying the desire itself.

Here too Augustine sees the infiltration of lust where love should be operating. He comments,

whereas no one wants to be miserable, there is a real pleasure in pitying others... All this takes rise in the stream of friendship...But where does that stream go to?... Why must it run into—and lose itself in—that torrent of pitch which boils out in great waves of vile lust?⁵³⁵

Compassion is meant to satisfy the self when its initial motion in the heart is completed by the action of the body; taking satisfaction in simply pitying another’s pain without taking responsibility to relieve the pain is a disoriented

⁵³³ Augustine, *Confessions*, III.11.2.

⁵³⁴ For a discussion of Augustine’s view of loving one’s neighbor as a practical enterprise, see Chapter 2, the section entitled “Pressing Forward: Redeeming with Paul.”

⁵³⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*, III.ii.2.

response of self to other. Although it denies the disparity in self in the opposite manner, bad faith in the mode of a “theatrically constituted spectator” still operates to deny the moral and ethical claims of the other in favor of satisfying only the self.

And so we find that for Augustine, the conflict within the self is primarily what leads to conflicts between selves. But, on his view, neither of these conflicts is essential to the constitution of the self. At issue in the current discussion is the way the self comes to recognize and cope with disintegrating forces within itself, specifically the disparity between its visible physicality and invisible intentionality. According to Augustine’s model, the fallen self is subject to a division in its will that diverts its originally other-oriented concern self-ward. Created with the integrity to relate to the other in love, a dynamic which establishes the self by establishing the other, the dis-integrated will subjects the self to the temptation of lust which seeks to satisfy the self by objectifying the other. In shame, the self becomes aware of and disconcerted by such a disparity between the mode of relation for which it was created and the mode of relation to which it has been relegated. In bad faith, the self attempts to ameliorate these disparities without converting the self-ward orientation that led to its fall in the first place; an approach which proves to be ineffective. But Augustine goes to

great lengths to convince his readers that bad faith is not the only option for coping at the self's disposal.

IN A PLACE OF UNLIKENESS: DISTANCE FROM SELF APPEARS AS A PROMISE

In *Confessions* VII.x Augustine gives an example of his own experience of shame. Having a vision of God, he also comes to see something previously hidden to him about his own self:

When first I knew Thee, Thou didst lift me up, so that I might see that there was something to see, but that I was not yet the man to see it... and I was shaken with love and with dread. And I knew that I was far from Thee in the region of unlikeness.⁵³⁶

The description captures his burgeoning awareness of the profound disparity between the self he is and the self he was created to be. Augustine recognizes here the vast difference between his lustful manner of existence and the being of the loving God whose image he was created to reproduce. Seeing himself in this new way, he characterizes himself as being in a "region of unlikeness." As Wetzel comments, "Literally this place is nowhere, occupied by no one; it is outside the logical space of being. The last thing we should expect, then, to emerge out of such a paradox would be... any concept of an intelligible self."⁵³⁷ In

⁵³⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, VII.x.16.

⁵³⁷ Wetzel, *Crisis Mentalities*, 127.

contrast to the God whose coherent being he was meant to emulate, Augustine finds himself to be nonsensical, incoherent, and thus, ultimately unknowable.

But his response to his shame is not one of bad faith. Rather, it is exactly the opposite:

But now that my groaning is witness that I am displeasing to myself, You shine unto me and I delight in You and love You and yearn for You, so that I am ashamed of what I am and renounce myself and choose You and please neither You nor myself save in You. To You then, O Lord, am I laid bare for what I am.⁵³⁸

Instead of trying to institute a cover up, he fully exposes his weakness to the Other in whose sight he has come to see himself for what he is. Rather than a dynamic in which the self tries to close its gaps by alienating the other, Augustine effects a dynamic where he holds the gaps wide open and invites the Other to dwell in their very center. Rather than succumbing to lust and turning self-ward, he finds satisfaction for himself in affirming the Other.

God shows Augustine the true nature of his divided self. But critically, He does not just show Augustine the gap between what he is and what he could have been had he not fallen—a possibility now lost. Instead he shows him the distance between what he is and what he can still become. Augustine realizes that he is “not yet the man” who can see all that God wants to reveal. But in

⁵³⁸ Augustine, *Confessions*, X.ii.2.

coming to understand the distance between his current manner of existence and God's, he is also shown a path between his current state and a future state in which such discrepancies no longer characterize the self.

What is pictured in Augustine's vision is an offer of for(e)givenness that operates to convert the self from a response of bad faith to a response of openness to the other. And it does so by combating the rampant willful deception made possible by the fallen state of the body and will. As if commenting directly on the consequences of actions undertaken in bad faith, Wetzell writes,

...disaffection always veils, never reveals, the person. Someone whose treatment of you is indifferent, deceptive, or overtly malicious shuts you out; you can see and shun what this person does, but you have no insight into who this person is...

The self who operates in bad faith does so deliberately so that the other will not fully know his character. Thus one way to characterize what is at stake in for(e)givenness is the restoration of the ability to truly be known by oneself or by an other.

But the problem for the fallen self is not simply that the self's outward expressions can no longer be taken as accurate representations of true intentions; it is that even if the transgressing self has the desire to repent and rebuild, the other has no way of knowing the fortitude of such intentions. Given that the self

has had the type of will that was capable of transgression in the past, it is likely that he can be tempted to transgress again in the future. The past act of transgression has revealed the character of the self to be corrupted and corruptible. Knowing this, the other cannot forgive without seeming to condone the possibility of future transgression; or she can extend the pretense of forgiveness but really live suspended in mistrust. There seems to be an unbridgeable gap between the kind of self that can be trusted and the kind of self the self has become.

But if “forgiveness [is] the resumption of mutual knowing in the wake of disaffection,”⁵³⁹ then the person that becomes known in forgiveness is, and must be, of a very different quality than the one who undertook the original deception. This new identity is forged when the other who will forgive determines to know the self as one for which

...sinner and sin are separable, [not just distinguishable]... I mean that sin is removed from the sinner, as if time could be undone... What the distinction grants is a space for unknowing, a gap between knowing the deed and knowing the doer, expressed in time as a delay of final judgement. What the separation grants is an actual anachronism, a paradoxical *memory of future innocence*.⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁹ James Wetzel, “Some Thoughts on the Anachronism of Forgiveness,” *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 27:1 (Spring, 1999): 84.

⁵⁴⁰ Wetzel, *Anachronism*, 90. Emphasis added.

The other cannot ignore that the self who seeks his forgiveness cannot by changing his current intentions negate the transgressions committed in the past. From that point on, as Wetzel puts it, “the wrongdoer will always be the person who acted wrongly.”⁵⁴¹ The only way to move forward is to engage the self as one who could act with integrity instead of in bad faith. The attitude of forgiveness grants the self such an identity. It is an identity the self can no longer earn, and that is why it is a grant. The one who forgives gives something to the self that the self cannot achieve on his own. In order to resume relationship, the self which has previously transgressed against the other has no other option but to accept such a gift— this fore-given identity is the only one under which he can be seen to be worthy of trust.

It is precisely this gift which prompts Augustine to be filled with love in addition to dread in *Confessions* VII. God shows Augustine an identity which Augustine has not achieved, but that has been granted him by grace nonetheless. Augustine sees the future self God sees he could be. In turn Augustine accepts *with dread* where he is and is drawn *in love* to the other through whom he has been offered a vision of himself in future innocence. He renounces his divided

⁵⁴¹ Wetzel, *Anachronism*, 8.

self and chooses to act in good faith toward the other who has chosen to see him with the integrity he hopes to regain. The other fills the gap between the self that has transgressed and the self that will no longer do so. The fore-given self constitutes Augustine as a forgiven self.

Finally, the distance from the desired self appears as a promise because although a renewed identity has been made possible, it is not yet attained.

Augustine is in his vision as the person God sees him eternally to be, but for the man still trying to put together the narrative of his life, that is a person who is yet to be. Even within himself, Augustine sees that he remains outside of himself, but here in a way far more promising than offered him by sin. He will want to become that person outside of himself, a person, he is ecstatic to report, who is able to love God without missing the mark.⁵⁴²

The self must become itself. The promise incites the hope necessary to step into the new identity; if it chooses to take on such a task, it has been assured by the other's offer that it will reclaim its integrity. If in the "place of unlikeness" Augustine has pictured the self's fundamental incoherence, then the renewed identity given in God's vision is the promise of intelligibility. Thus, in Augustine's model, it is only in relationship with an other that the self can hope to find a vision and version of himself that is not only fore-given and forgiven, but in so being, becomes once again knowable to itself and to the other. Only by

⁵⁴² James Wetzel, "Crisis Mentalities," 126.

being for(e)given by an other can the (Un)Seen self become fully seen, even by his own self.

SARTRE: BEING SEEN AS BEING TAKEN

For Sartre, as for Augustine, being seen by an other is definitive for self-knowledge. Sartre's account of the workings of such a dynamic is given in *Being and Nothingness* under the heading of "the Look." His analysis of the Look appears as part of his argument against solipsism and is, in essence, his account of the structure of the self's fundamental relation to the other. Although for Sartre to be a self is to be conscious, it is the Look of the other through which the self becomes *self*-conscious. But the same Look that gives the self awareness of itself threatens its control over its identity. And so, for Sartre, the other stands as one who usurps the self's ability to take up its authentic identity instead of the one who offers it to him.

IN A PLACE OF UNLIKENESS: DISTANCE FROM SELF APPEARS AS A THREAT

Sartre's account of being *seen by* the other begins first with a description of *seeing* the other. Imagine I see a man in the park. Sartre observes that to recognize him as a man, and not just another object, is to recognize that he is a consciousness which can organize the world around himself just as I can.

“Perceiving him as a *man*... is to register an organization *without distance* of the things in my universe around that privileged object.”⁵⁴³ That is, in relation to any other object in my world, “the distance *is unfolded starting from* the man whom I see... instead of a grouping *toward me* of the objects, there is now an *orientation which flees from me*.”⁵⁴⁴ Unlike the bench or the trees within my field of vision, the man appears as a very particular and peculiar type of object: an object, other than myself, toward which the world can be aligned. And so, “suddenly an object has appeared which has stolen the world from me.”⁵⁴⁵

But even with this recognition, insists Sartre, “the Other is still an *object for me*.”⁵⁴⁶ Sartre explains that to say that the reorganization this man has effected is “without distance” indicates two things. First, as noted above, *I* no longer define the distances between the man and the objects in the world; but secondly it means that the man and the world still appear as a whole⁵⁴⁷ *within* my field of vision. Sartre argues that although I know the man’s consciousness can produce a new relationship between the man and the world, “I can not put myself at the

⁵⁴³ Sartre, *BN*, 341. Emphasis in original.

⁵⁴⁴ Sartre, *BN*, 342. Emphasis in original.

⁵⁴⁵ Sartre, *BN*, 343.

⁵⁴⁶ Sartre, *BN*, 343.

⁵⁴⁷ Sartre, *BN*, 342.

center of it."⁵⁴⁸ I cannot leave my world and enter into his. I stay in my universe... as does he. There is, in a sense, no distance *between* me and the man because the "total space which is grouped around the Other... is made *with my space*... the disintegration of my universe is contained within the limits of this same universe."⁵⁴⁹ No matter how I look at him, "He belongs to my distances;" thus I can only experience him as an object *within* the world that I as a consciousness organize. Although I observe him to be a *man*, seeing him does not give me a way to experience him as a *subject*.

Sartre argues that the only way to access his subjectivity is to become an object for him. "The man is defined by his relation to the world and by his relation to myself... He is the subject who is revealed to me in that flight of myself toward objectification... the Other is on principle the *one who looks at me*."⁵⁵⁰ Just as my subjectivity is expressed in my ability to define the objects I see, so is his. Thus, according to Sartre, "'Being-seen-by-the-Other' is the *truth* of 'seeing-the-Other.'"⁵⁵¹ In order to know and experience the character of the other

⁵⁴⁸ Sartre, *BN*, 342.

⁵⁴⁹ Sartre, *BN*, 343.

⁵⁵⁰ Sartre, *BN*, 345.

⁵⁵¹ Sartre, *BN*, 345.

*as an other*⁵⁵² I must submit to a way of encountering him that leaves him outside my realm of definitions. *I must be seen from a distance.*

But being seen not only reveals the other to me as subject, but also reveals me to myself. Sartre explains that when I look at something or someone, I am only aware of the object of my attention. In his example, my attention is focused on spying through a keyhole. Although I am conscious, when acting in this mode of the seeing subject, I am not *self*-conscious.

I am alone and on the level of a non-thetic self-consciousness. This means first of all that there is no self to inhabit my consciousness, nothing therefor to which I can refer my acts in order to qualify them. They are in no way *known*. *I am my acts* and hence carry in themselves their own justification. I am a pure consciousness of things.⁵⁵³

While I focus on seeing, I do not reflect on my acts; *I am* my acts. As Sartre puts it, I have no positional consciousness of myself. In fact, "I escape [the] provisional definition of myself by means of all my transcendence."⁵⁵⁴ That is, as I sense what is before me, I do not have a sense of myself. I am a seeing self, but to myself I remain an (Un)Seen Self.

But if I hear footsteps in the hall, I become aware that someone is looking at me. "What I apprehend immediately... is that I am vulnerable, that I have a

⁵⁵² Or, as an other *subject*.

⁵⁵³ Sartre, *BN*, 347.

⁵⁵⁴ Sartre, *BN*, 348.

body which can be hurt, that I occupy a place... Thus the look is first an intermediary which refers me to myself."⁵⁵⁵ Being seen makes me aware that I am not simply my acts, but I am also an actor in a world occupied by an other whose purposes may be at odds with my own. Instead of having my awareness directed entirely on the view through the keyhole, I become aware of myself.

But Sartre argues that the self-consciousness that arises from the event of being seen takes a very specific form:

The unreflective consciousness does not apprehend the *person* [or self] directly or as *its* object. The *person* is presented to consciousness *in so far as the person is an object for the Other*. This means that all of a sudden I am conscious of myself as escaping myself, not in that I am the foundation of my own nothingness, but in that I have my foundation outside myself. I am for myself only as I am a pure reference to the Other."

The first thing to note is that the event of being seen does not give me an awareness of myself as an *object for myself*. Having been seen, I have become an object for the other. The object of *my* awareness is the view through the keyhole. That is what I am at liberty to interpret, define, and know. And yet I do come to have an awareness of myself. But the self of which I become aware "is a self which I *am* without *knowing* it. For I discover it in... [a way] which makes me *live*,

⁵⁵⁵ Sartre, *BN*, 347.

not *know*, the situation of being looked at.”⁵⁵⁶ The immediate response to being seen is a change in the way I *experience* myself, not *know* myself. It is a modification in my approach to my subjectivity in light of the fact that I am not the only subject assessing the world. Thus the self of which I become aware is neither simply subject nor object; rather this self is specifically a subject that can, by virtue of being seen, be taken as an object. Being seen gives me to myself as one who is taken by an other.

Secondly, my self is given to me as the self seen through the eyes of the other—from the outside. “If there is an Other... whatever may be his relations with me, and without his acting upon me in any way except the pure upsurge of his being—then I have an outside. I have a *nature*.”⁵⁵⁷ Sartre argues that when I am alone, I do not see myself as defined by my actions; I *am* just my freedom to act. Sartre uses the example of being seated. I am seated. But as soon as I become conscious of myself as a seated object, I put myself at a distance from myself as a consciousness. It is not my self who *is* seated, but who *was* seated or *will be* seated. As a subjective consciousness I am what I am in the mode of not being it.

⁵⁵⁶ Sartre, *BN*, 350

⁵⁵⁷ Sartre, *BN*, 352.

My freedom forges a gap between what I am and what I do that I can never close. As Sartre puts it,

I myself shall never succeed at realizing this being-seated which I grasp in the Other's look. I shall remain forever a consciousness. But... for the Other... the nihilating escape of the for-itself is fixed, once more the in-itself closes in on the for-itself. But once more this metamorphosis is effected *at a distance*. For the Other *I am seated* as this inkwell is on the table; for the Other, *I am leaning over* the keyhole as this tree is bent by the wind. Thus for the Other I have stripped myself of my transcendence.⁵⁵⁸

While I can only experience myself as a subject, the other can only see me as an object. And so the self of which I become aware when I recognize that I am seen is a self stripped of its freedom. For Sartre, "I grasp the Other's look at the very center of my *act* as the solidification and alienation of my own possibilities."⁵⁵⁹ Experiencing myself under the look of the other, I am not myself purely as an actor, but rather as a set of already defined actions.

Just as I recognized that the world as observed by the man in the park was subject to his definitions, so my awareness of myself comes at the same expense. According to Sartre, prior to being seen, I was a self, but I did not "have" a self. Once I am seen I become aware of how I have situated myself in the world and how I may be perceived, interpreted, or defined by the other who sees me. As

⁵⁵⁸ Sartre, *BN*, 352.

⁵⁵⁹ Sartre, *BN*, 352.

such I become aware of “myself as escaping myself.” The self I experience, rather than being completely *self*-contained, so to speak, necessitates the participation of the other. So my self, or self-awareness to be more precise, has its foundation outside me in the other.

Thus, we could say that I find myself in a place of unlikeness. Sartre calls it “the uneasy indetermination of the being” in which I experience my self in a new way. He writes,

The Other’s freedom is revealed to me across the uneasy indetermination of the being which I am for him. Thus this being is not my possible... On the contrary, it is the limit of my freedom... Yet we still have to do with my being and not an image of my being... Everything takes place as if I had a dimension of being from which I was separated by a radical nothingness; and this nothingness is the Other’s freedom.⁵⁶⁰

The distance from which the other sees me opens up a space across which my power of self-definition is drained away from me. The self I come to “have” is of a different quality than the self which I am. Whereas I originally experience myself as a subject who defines her own possibilities, under the look of the other, my self comes to me from someone else. The distance from which the other sees me encapsulates me from the outside and forces the in-itself aspect of my being upon the for-itself aspect. I am frozen for the other in the position in which he

⁵⁶⁰ Sartre, BN, 351.

sees me and I become aware that I am not the only one responsible for defining my possibilities. Rather than being a subject, I come to experience myself as an object which has its definitions placed upon it from the outside.

It is this very possibility of becoming an object for an other that causes me to become aware of myself. It gives me my self and thereby strips my subjectivity of some of its possibilities. And so, according to Sartre, "the Other is for me ...the one who causes 'there to be' a being which is my being," and "the one who has stolen my being from me."⁵⁶¹ And so the distance from myself appears not as a promise, but as a threat.

SHAME: A BEING SEEN

To be sure, Sartre's explanation of how being seen reveals me to myself in a way that does not make me an object for myself is not easy to follow. He describes the event as the appearance of "essential modifications in...my structure."⁵⁶² We could describe it by saying that my subjectivity takes on a new mode; an internal transformation through which *self*-consciousness, rather than *other*-consciousness, is given a space in which to arise. For Sartre, this new mode is evinced specifically in the experience of shame. He insists, "I discover [my self]

⁵⁶¹ Sartre, *BN*, 475.

⁵⁶² Sartre, *BN*, 349.

in shame... It is shame... which reveals to me the Other's look and myself at the end of that look."⁵⁶³ Thus, for Sartre, unlike for Augustine, shame is not only a necessary aspect of being seen, it is indispensable to being a self and is *the* fundamental mode of responding to the presence of the other.

For Augustine, shame appeared essentially as an awareness of a discrepancy or gap between the original orientation of the self (other-ward) and the way it became oriented after the fall (self-ward). Although framed in terms of consciousness rather than will, Sartre's description of shame develops along markedly similar lines. As described above, consciousness appears originally as consciousness of some *other* object. I am alone in defining and organizing the world.⁵⁶⁴ But under the look of the other I become aware of *myself* as potentially being subject to his designs. Instead of being entirely occupied with enacting my own possibilities, I find my possibilities arrested by his objectifying look. Thus,

⁵⁶³ Sartre, *BN*, 350. The original text includes pride as another possible response, but the dynamic underlying both is the same. According to Sartre, "Shame—like pride—is the apprehension of myself as a nature although that very nature escapes me and is unknowable as such" (*BN*, 352). See also p. 386-387 for a similar discussion. So for the purposes of this analysis, I will focus on examining the dynamic through the lens of shame.

⁵⁶⁴ As noted above, "I am alone and on the level of a non-thetic self-consciousness. This means first of all that there is no self to inhabit my consciousness, nothing therefore to which I can refer my acts in order to qualify them. They are in no way *known*. *I am my acts* and hence carry in themselves their own justification. I am a pure consciousness of things," (Sartre, *BN*, 347).

for Sartre, “My original fall is the existence of the Other.”⁵⁶⁵ It is only because he can see me that I appear to myself in this altered mode— seeing the two disparate aspects of myself and, as Sartre asserts, the irreconcilable disparity between them.

For Sartre, as for Augustine, my awareness of the discrepancy in my being is evidenced by shame. As he describes it,

Shame is the consciousness of being irremediably what I always was: “in suspense” —that is, in the mode of the “not yet” or of the “already-no-longer.” Pure shame is not a feeling of being this or that guilty object but in general of being an object; that is, of *recognizing myself* in this degraded, fixed and dependent being which I am for the Other. Shame is the feeling of an *original fall*, not because of the fact that I may have committed this or that particular fault but simply that I have ‘fallen’ into the world in the midst of things and that I need the mediation of the Other in order to be what I am.⁵⁶⁶

In this passage we find that for Sartre, as for Augustine, the essence of shame is recognition; but here the recognition is not that I have transgressed against the other, but that I need the other. I cannot come to a full recognition of who I am without the participation of the other. For Sartre, this is incongruent with the absolute freedom which characterizes the being of a self. Thus, says Sartre, “I am

⁵⁶⁵ Sartre, *BN*, 352.

⁵⁶⁶ Sartre, *BN*, 384.

disgusted or disappointed with the dependency or vulnerability I feel before the other."⁵⁶⁷

Given that Sartre has identified the self as autonomous freedom, it is not immediately obvious why Sartre also insists that the self needs the other to be itself. In a manner similar to Augustine, Sartre argues that once the self is fallen, there are aspects of what it takes to be a fully actualized self that can be seen by the self only when it comes to see itself in the sight of the other. According to Michelle Darnell, the process can be summarized as follows: First, as noted, to be a self I must be free. But I can only be free if I can act intentionally in the world. In turn, I can only act intentionally in the world if I am aware of my situation in the world. Finally, because consciousness appears as being-for-itself in the form of non-positional consciousness, I can only become aware of my situation in the world under the look of the other. Thus I need the other to be myself.⁵⁶⁸

As discussed above, the other makes me aware of my situation in the world by "giving me an outside." Under the look of the other I am no longer simply aware of the view on the other side of the door, but become aware of

⁵⁶⁷ Luna Dolezal, "Reconsidering the Look in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*," *Sartre Studies International*, 18:1 (2012): 22.

⁵⁶⁸ Michelle Darnell, "Being-looked-at: Ontological Grounding for an Ethics in Being and Nothingness," *Sartre Studies International*, 10:1 (2004): 15-24.

myself as “bent over the keyhole.” Luna Dolezal explains the significance of such an awareness:

Instead of being lived through, one’s actions or appearance become laden with value, conditioned by the judgemental attitude inherent in the other’s Look. In this way, the Look gives me a body image or, as Sartre puts it, an ‘outside’. I suddenly realise and know that I am vulgar; I am a voyeur; I am spying, and so on. Furthermore, I suddenly know that the other can see all these things about me too. This is what Sartre means when he says that the other ‘teaches me who I am.’⁵⁶⁹

By making me aware of my situation, which I could not see on my own, the other gives me the means to evaluate and take responsibility for my actions. Thus, in one respect the other “teaches me who I am” by giving me the type of awareness required to enact my freedom as a self.

But the other also “teaches me who I am” by giving me my context. Seeing me, he organizes me into the world as he sees fit. In recognizing my situation as revealed to me by the other, it becomes obvious that I am not the only one who can assign value to my actions. My free act of looking through the keyhole no longer carries in itself its own justification; rather my internal consciousness becomes synced with my external situation. I have lost my “non-positional self-consciousness” and assumed the position he has given me. Thus, I become

⁵⁶⁹ Dolezal, 18.

subject to a shared scheme of evaluation. I become synched up, as it were, with myself and into a world of objects that I and the Other come to share.⁵⁷⁰

It is this process of synchronization that incites my shame. As Sartre puts it, "Shame is by nature *recognition*. I recognize that *I am* as the Other sees me."⁵⁷¹ In the process of being seen I move from a being that is characterized by not being what it is and being what is not, to a being who is also determinately what it is. I go from a being fundamentally out of sync to a being that is in sync to an uncanny measure. The other syncs me with a self that as a free consciousness I have an irresistible impulse to resist admitting or committing to. Thus I find myself, as Sartre puts it, "in suspense," conscious of both my absolute freedom as a subject and my need for the other to objectify me in order to enact it.

According to Sartre, "my shame is a confession."⁵⁷² In other words, the fact that I experience shame is confirmation that, on some level, I not only recognize but also accept the object nature I have been given. Accordingly, Sartre contends that I have abdicated my freedom because "By my very shame I claim as mine that freedom of another."⁵⁷³ One cannot help but note here the stark contrast here

⁵⁷⁰ See also Sartre, *BN*, 358.

⁵⁷¹ Sartre, *BN*, 302.

⁵⁷² Sartre, *BN*, 350.

⁵⁷³ Sartre, *BN*, 351.

between the fundamental character of confession for Sartre and for Augustine. In the presence of an absolutely transcendent other whose look can offer the self completion, one responds with praise⁵⁷⁴ while the other responds with shame. Both recognize the other's freedom helps to shape his existence; Augustine responds with a form of acceptance colored by gratitude while Sartre operates in a mode of acceptance tinged with resentment.

The dynamics underlying this resentment are further revealed in Sartre's discussion of modesty. In a move similar to Augustine, Sartre also notes that shame in nakedness is "only a symbolic specification of original shame."⁵⁷⁵ But for him, "the body symbolizes here our defenseless state as objects. To put on clothes is to hide one's object-state; it is to claim the right of seeing without being seen; that is to be pure subject."⁵⁷⁶ Here the body is not so much an integral means for the expression of my will as it is the object upon which the other enacts his. In a manner entirely consistent with *Sartre's* position, rather than Augustine's, Velleman's analysis of privacy helps us to understand this point by explaining shame specifically in terms of agency:

⁵⁷⁴ "...but in your praise let me confess my shame" (Augustine, *Confessions*, IV.1.1). For a discussion of confession as praise see Chapter 3, section entitled "Not Asking Questions... But Making My Confession to You."

⁵⁷⁵ Sartre, *BN*, 384.

⁵⁷⁶ Sartre, *BN*, 384.

When something private about you is showing, you have somehow failed to manage your public image, and so an inadequacy in your capacity for self-presentation is showing as well, potentially undermining your standing as a social agent... Failures of privacy put you at a disadvantage by threatening the power inherent in your role as a participating member of the community, and the resulting anxiety constitutes the emotion of shame.

The move to conceal here is not a response to one's moral lapse before the other; rather it is a matter of asserting one's freedom or power in the face of the other's imposition of his own. And so we find that for Sartre, as for Augustine, shame is also fundamentally a matter of losing control; but in this case I do not cover up in order to eclipse an unwanted aspect of *myself* that is causing the complications, but rather to neutralize the inescapable influence of the *other*.

Finally, Sartre, like Augustine, makes us aware that the other need not actually be present in order for me to feel shame.⁵⁷⁷ He need only exist. And the very fact that I experience shame is itself proof of his existence. Sartre argues that if after I hear the footsteps in the hall I discover that no one is actually there, my being-as-object for the other is not what has been revealed as an error. In fact, my shame may persist nonetheless. "I do not cease to *experience* my being-for-others; my possibilities do not cease to 'die,' ... because I am already in the state of being

⁵⁷⁷ Sartre, *BN*, 369-370, 374.

looked at.”⁵⁷⁸ As Sartre puts it, “‘being-looked-at,’” and all its attendant implications, “... derive[s] its meaning and its very nature... only from a fundamental certainty that the Other is always present to me inasmuch as I am always *for-others*.”⁵⁷⁹ It is only because other subjects exist that there is the possibility of becoming an object for the other. Shame can only be engendered by the existence of such a subject.

But unlike for Augustine, for Sartre shame is the only possible response that the other can engender. Because for Sartre,

being-seen constitutes me as a defenseless being for a freedom which is not my freedom. It is in this sense that we can consider ourselves as “slaves” in so far as we appear to the Other... this danger is not an accident but the *permanent structure* of my being-for-others.⁵⁸⁰

The other, whose existence I have secured through my shame, necessarily makes my own existence insecure. Thus shame appears not as *an* “essential modification” in my structure that gives me to myself, but rather *the* “essential modification” which reveals the fundamental structure of my relation to the other. Therefore, I cannot help but respond to the other in shame and the necessary resentment, rejection, and retribution it engenders. For Sartre, evidence

⁵⁷⁸ Sartre, *BN*, 370.

⁵⁷⁹ Sartre, *BN*, 374.

⁵⁸⁰ Sartre, *BN*, 358. Emphasis added.

of the other's existence is not evidence of my original responsibility to him but of my original conflict with him.

BAD FAITH: A BEING IN CONFLICT

Given the threat inherent in being seen, and the inevitability of conflict with the other, Sartre observes that the self necessarily operates to neutralize the objectification to which it finds itself vulnerable. To do this the self employs a strategy that Sartre calls "bad faith." Taking into account what both Augustine and Sartre present as the original being or state of the self, we will see that bad faith appears for both as a fundamentally dysfunctional mechanism by which the self tries to reconcile its dichotomous aspects. For both, bad faith is how the fallen self unsuccessfully tries to sync up a being it finds to be radically out of sync.

Because Sartre's ontology is fundamentally different from Augustine's, the discrepancy revealed to the self in shame is not between the self I *am* and the self I *ought* to be; rather it is between the self who appears in the world as a *subject* and the self that appears in the world as an *object*. But just as in the Augustinian paradigm, Sartrean bad faith acts to eliminate this fundamental gap through deception and denial. And in Sartre's case, as in Augustine's, bad faith takes on two generalized forms. In both, the self identifies with only one aspect

of its being. In the first, the Sartrean self in bad faith “attempt[s] to become identical with the image others have of one, without accepting responsibility for becoming this image;” in the second, it “attempt[s] to define the self wholly through self-assertion, without the social validation of others.”⁵⁸¹ In the first form the self identifies itself completely with its facticity or objectivity; it defines itself solely based on what the Other can see. In this form, the self identifies itself entirely with the self for which the other is responsible for bringing into view. In the second form it identifies completely with its subjectivity; that is, it defines itself solely based on its capacity for intentionality, which the Other can never see. In this form the self identifies itself entirely as the freedom that is perpetually distinct from the self the other views.

While Sartre notes that bad faith differs from a simple lie in that this deception is aimed at the self instead of the other,⁵⁸² the fact remains that bad faith is fundamentally an act of deception. And like any form of deception it trades on inequalities in information to deny its intended target access to the “truth.” The problem is, since the intended target is consciousness itself, there is

⁵⁸¹ T. Storm Heter, *Continuum Studies in Continental Philosophy: Sartre's Ethics of Engagement: Authenticity and Civic Virtue* (London: Continuum International Publishing, 2006), 70.

⁵⁸² Sartre, *BN*, 87-89.

no information inequality.⁵⁸³ As Sartre puts it, "I must know in my capacity as deceiver the truth that is hidden from me in my capacity as the one deceived."⁵⁸⁴ The truth to which Sartre is referring here is that our freedom is "our constant obligation to make ourselves what we are."⁵⁸⁵ Of this obligation consciousness is always aware because this freedom is in fact what consciousness is.

So because the self cannot ever be entirely deceived about its character, bad faith does not deny the self access to such truth, but rather denies the other access to the self by removing the self from a realm in which truth comprises common ground. As Sartre explains,

Bad faith does not hold the norms and criteria of truth as they are accepted by the critical thought of good faith. What it decides first, in fact, is the nature of truth... Bad faith apprehends evidence but it is resigned in advance not to being fulfilled by this evidence, to not being persuaded and transformed into good faith.⁵⁸⁶

Operating in good faith, the self would commit whole-heartedly to accepting all relevant data when constituting an image of its character and the scope of its responsibility—including data brought to its attention by the Look of the other.

But bad faith makes its own truth. That is, it chooses to measure its responsibility

⁵⁸³ For a discussion of Sartre's conception of bad faith as a reply to inconsistencies in Freudian formulations of the unconscious, see Stewart, 218-220.

⁵⁸⁴ Sartre, *BN*, 89.

⁵⁸⁵ Sartre, *BN*, 101.

⁵⁸⁶ Sartre, *BN*, 113.

according to standard that disregards any external factor that would challenge its assessment. When in bad faith, consciousness either denies itself as being the freedom that makes it what it is or denies its obligation to deal with the consequences of what it has made of itself. In either case, it makes its criteria for responsibility inherently inaccessible to the other. As such, bad faith denies any shared basis for evaluating the scope of self's responsibility or negates any shared basis that may appear. For, as Sartre explains, "The goal of bad faith... is to put oneself out of reach."⁵⁸⁷

But "the first act of bad faith," according to Sartre, "is to flee what it cannot flee, to flee what it is."⁵⁸⁸ Under the look of the Other, the self becomes aware that what it "is" is *both* a transcendent freedom *and* a situated facticity. In its alternative forms, bad faith acts in resistance to both. For Sartre, in either mode the self is in *bad* faith because regardless of the basis for adopting its identity, "it wishes itself to be not quite convinced"⁵⁸⁹ of its choice; it cannot commit wholeheartedly. Because of the type of being that it is, the self always remains in conflict about identifying with only one or the other of its aspects. Further, it is in bad *faith* because based on its choice it goes on to produce an

⁵⁸⁷ Sartre, *BN*, 110.

⁵⁸⁸ Sartre, *BN*, 115.

⁵⁸⁹ Sartre, *BN*, 114.

image of itself in bad fidelity: in seeking to identify itself with only one of its two aspects, it necessarily reproduces itself as something it is not.

Further, as was the case in Augustine, bad faith here necessarily transmits its internal conflict outward. As T. Storm Heter notes, as a means of determining identity,

Bad faith also can be understood as a mistake about character analysis. If I am in bad faith, then I misjudge my own character. And since my self-image is often intimately tied to my image of others, I often make the same mistakes in judging the character of others... Agents in bad faith have a distorted portrait of their moral responsibilities; they have a systematic tendency to place blame in the wrong place.⁵⁹⁰

Bad faith begins on the ontological level as the distance between consciousness and the facts of which it is aware; it expresses itself at the phenomenological level as an ambiguity in the self's apprehension of its identity. A self in bad faith makes use of the distance at the heart of its being to limit the scope of its responsibility by strategically selecting which facts about itself it chooses to recognize and which it chooses to deny.⁵⁹¹ When these choices result in a self-image which is inconsistent with the image seen by the other, the result is a discrepancy between their expectations for responsible action in the world in which both operate. This precipitates conflict between self and other. The self,

⁵⁹⁰ Heter, 70.

⁵⁹¹ See Detmer, 77-81 for a broader discussion of bad faith as "trading on ambiguities."

already in bad faith, addresses such conflict by continuing to maintain its own image of itself over the other's. Thus, bad faith appears simply as a form of self-assertion aimed at maintaining control over one's identity in the face of competing forces.

Interestingly, although bad faith appears as a strategy of self-preservation, Sartre characterizes it specifically as a move of self-negation.⁵⁹² It seems odd that Sartre would note that an attitude he pictures as an unavoidable aspect of the self's attempts at preservation is precisely what effects the self's negation. This section will end with a discussion of the basis for such a paradox and the possibility for its resolution. Although buried in over 700 pages of bleakness, there is some indication that what Sartre has presented in *Being and Nothingness* is "an ontology before conversion;"⁵⁹³ the implication being that a turn to an alternative standard of value may leave open a path to life in good faith—that is, a situation in which consciousness makes use of its freedom to cooperate with the other instead of rebuff him. So, while framed in significantly different terms, ultimately for both thinkers the dynamic of bad faith reveals

⁵⁹² "... to choose and to examine one determined attitude which is essential to human reality and which is such that consciousness instead of directing its negation outward turns it toward itself. This attitude, it seems to me, is *bad faith*." (Sartre, *BN*, 87).

⁵⁹³ Detmer, 137.

their understanding of the tension between the self's fundamental impulse to promote itself and its fundamental recognition of its responsibility to participate in promoting the being of the other.

Sartre's discussion of the self in the first form of bad faith reveals a self who relies entirely on the objective and visible aspects of itself to constitute its identity. According to Sartre, the self who operates in this mode is motivated by fear of living in constant suspension between being and non-being and the obligation that entails. He explains,

we definitely establish that the original structure of "not being what one is" renders impossible in advance all movement toward being in itself or "being what one is." And this impossibility is not hidden from consciousness; on the contrary it is the very stuff of consciousness; it is the embarrassing constraint which we constantly experience; it is our very incapacity to recognize ourselves, to constitute ourselves as being what we are. It is this necessity which means that, as soon as we posit ourselves as a certain being... we surpass this being...toward *nothing*.⁵⁹⁴

But there are people who are attracted by the durability of a stone. They wish to be massive and impenetrable; they wish not to change. Where, indeed, would change take them? We have here a basic fear of oneself and of truth. What frightens them is not the content of truth, of which they have no conception, but the form itself of truth, that thing of indefinite approximation. It is as if their own existence were in continual suspension. But they wish to exist all at once and right away.⁵⁹⁵

⁵⁹⁴ Sartre, *BN*, 106.

⁵⁹⁵ Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 18-19 as cited in Detmer, 87.

To make his point more concrete, Sartre gives the example of a waiter who conflates his entire identity with his occupation.⁵⁹⁶ He focuses his energies so entirely on fulfilling the functions of his job so as to lose sight of the fact that every time he gets up at 5 a.m. or sweeps the floor or balances a tray of drinks he is *making a choice* to be a waiter. And yet he can never quite ignore that he has the ability to stay in bed, drop the tray, or make some other choice that would result in his no longer being a waiter. But he runs from these possibilities by committing himself even more resolutely to his role. "He applies himself to chaining his movements as if they were mechanisms... he gives himself the quickness and pitiless rapidity of things... [he] plays with his condition in order to *realize it*."⁵⁹⁷

This person is in bad faith not because he chooses to recommit himself daily to this project of being a waiter, but precisely because he *denies* his choice in the matter out of fear. We could express this fear through the statement, "If I were not a waiter, then I would not be anything." He finds unsettling the truth that his identity is always an "indefinite approximation" that must be enacted by his freedom. As soon as he admits that he could be something other than a

⁵⁹⁶ Sartre, BN, 102

⁵⁹⁷ Sartre, BN, 101-102.

waiter, he opens himself up to the reality that his situation is not secure. If he *is not* a waiter, he *will be* nothing in particular. This insecurity operates on the level of occupation, but more fundamentally, on the level of identity. Unsettled by his freedom, he seeks the “durability of a stone.” And so, he ignores the freedom of his situation in order to cloak himself with a sense of security— false as it might be.

Further, Sartre asserts that this type of bad faith is encouraged by society in general. Detmer comments that, in Sartre’s view,

the public at large... demands of all persons in the service industry that they give up their status as autonomous human beings and exhaust themselves utterly in serving their social function. And the service industry personnel, in turn (perhaps for reasons of economic necessity), seem willing to oblige.⁵⁹⁸

Although the example deals specifically with someone in the service industry, the commentary applies to all selves— everyone is in some type of service to someone; that is, all selves are subject to the pressure to conform to the roles they have found it necessary to play.⁵⁹⁹ Like Augustine’s Lucretia, the Sartrean self in

⁵⁹⁸ Detmer, 71.

⁵⁹⁹ “A grocer who dreams is offensive to the buyer, because such a grocer is not wholly a grocer. Society demands that he limit himself to his function as a grocer, just as the soldier at attention makes himself into a soldier-thing with a direct regard which does not see at all, which is no longer meant to see. . . . There are indeed many precautions to imprison a man in what he is, as if we lived in perpetual fear that he might escape from it, that he might break away and suddenly elude his condition,” (Sartre, *BN*, 102).

this form of bad faith depends disproportionately on how the other defines him in order to convince himself of what he is. Again we find the observation that the self, necessarily fallen into objectifying relation with the other, makes use of what can be publicly seen and accepted to avoid facing the unseen and unacceptable truth: that it has willfully forsaken its responsibility to and for the other in order to secure itself.

Sartre's discussion of the self in the second form of bad faith relies on the example of a woman flirting on a first date. He sets the case up in this way:

She is profoundly aware of the desire she inspires, but the desire cruel and naked would humiliate and horrify her... In order to satisfy her, there must be a feeling which is addressed wholly to her *personality*—i.e., to her full freedom—and which would be a recognition of her freedom... But then suppose he takes her hand... The young woman leaves her hand there, but she *does not notice* she is leaving it... And during this time the divorce of the body from the soul is accomplished...she permits herself to enjoy his desire, to the extent that she will apprehend it as not being what it is, will recognize its transcendence. Finally, while sensing profoundly the presence of her own body—she realizes herself as *not being* her own body, and she contemplates it as though from above as a passive object to which events can *happen* but which neither can provoke them nor avoid them because all its possibilities are outside of it.

This woman, acting in bad faith, identifies herself entirely with the aspect of herself that cannot be expressed by her observable actions. Instead of admitting that her physical actions have the consequence of encouraging her date's sexual desire, she divorces herself from her body. She denies that the actions of her

body have any bearing on her identity. She considers as “her own” only her freedom.

Sartre comments on the significance of such a stance. On his interpretation,

We can see the use which bad faith can make of these judgments which all aim at establishing that I am not what I am. If I were only what I *am*, I could, for example, seriously consider an adverse criticism which someone makes of me, question myself scrupulously, and perhaps be compelled to recognize the truth in it. But thanks to transcendence, I am not subject to all that I am. I do not even have to discuss the justice of the reproach... I am on a plane where no reproach can touch me since what I really am is my transcendence.⁶⁰⁰

In line with Heter’s characterization, Sartre observes that the self in this mode of bad faith defines itself without regard for the social validation of others. It holds itself above and apart from the aspects of itself that place it in a shared world. When the woman in Sartre’s example leaves her hand in the hand of her date without “noticing” it, she plays on the discrepancy between her consciousness and her body to garner the attention she seeks without regard for the fact that she is leading him on. She divorces herself from a shared scheme of evaluation and the responsibility it entails in order to assert the value of her own freedom above all else.

⁶⁰⁰ Sartre, *BN*, 99.

And yet, her action is self-defeating. Although she seeks recognition of her “personality,” i.e. her character or freedom to choose her values, her actions encourage only her date’s desire for her objectifiable aspects. Sartre claims that “these two aspects of human reality are and ought to be capable of a valid coordination. But bad faith does not wish to either to coordinate them or to surmount them in a synthesis.”⁶⁰¹ This self in bad faith conceives of her freedom specifically as freedom from her body instead of the freedom to control it; because she divorces her freedom from her objectivity instead of making use of her objectivity to express her freedom, she has lost the ability to effect the response she desires. Thus, she has not only forsaken her responsibility to the other, but also undermined the efficacy of her own freedom in the process.

Sartre insists that bad faith, in either of its forms, is not simply a matter of the self’s conscious decision; rather it is a risk associated with consciousness itself.⁶⁰² According to Sartre, consciousness is characterized as being for-itself whose fundamental project consists in seeking to become in-itself—a goal which it cannot accomplish. Instead of accepting that both subjective and objective aspects are relevant for the identity of the self, a consciousness in bad faith rejects

⁶⁰¹ Sartre, *BN*, 98.

⁶⁰² Sartre, *BN*, 113; “The origin of this risk is the fact that the nature of consciousness is simultaneously to be what it is not and not to be what it is,”(116) .

one of these aspects and tries to sync identity with only one aspect of its being. The very ability to be selective about what aspect of its being the self chooses to focus on or identify with results, it seems necessarily, in a distorted self-image. And this distorted self-image results in an undermining of freedom, rather than its full expression.

And while Sartre has set up the existence of the other as a possible remedy to such a partial view of the self, he has also insisted that the self cannot ever welcome such participation in providing a more accurate or realistic view of itself. As noted above, the look of the other syncs the self with itself in a way that its structure as a subject is reluctant to commit or admit to. Although Sartre argues that being seen by the other is a necessary moment in the self's understanding of itself as a free subject, by binding the self to its facticity it strips the self of its possibilities. Thus, the other's giving of the self to itself is never portrayed as a gift of empowerment, but rather as a form of enslavement. Furthermore, society in general seems to encourage and perpetuate responses of bad faith. So it seems that due to the very structure of the self and its fundamental relation to the other, the disintegrative stance of bad faith seems inescapable. According to this ontology, perpetual objectification and conflict between self and other seem to be humanity's only options.

And yet there are glimpses in *Being and Nothingness* that betray a deeply held conviction that the situation should and can be otherwise. After asserting that bad faith is inherent in the very structure of consciousness, Sartre comments in a footnote that somehow this

does not mean that we cannot radically escape bad faith. But this supposes a self-recovery of being which was previously corrupted. This self-recovery we shall call authenticity, the description of which has no place here.⁶⁰³

And after extensively arguing how concrete relations with others necessarily take on the objectifying and conflictual forms of love/masochism and hate/sadism, he again buries in a footnote that “These considerations do not exclude the possibility of an ethics of deliverance and salvation. But this can be achieved only after a radical conversion.”⁶⁰⁴ Somehow, despite all of his observations to the contrary, Sartre seems to hold fast to the idea that our fallen situation is in contradiction to the true character of humanity instead of the direct expression of it. Detmer observes that it is as if,

Rather than arguing straightforwardly for an ethics centered on the pursuit of freedom, Sartre [in *Being and Nothingness*] attempts to persuade us to take this route by showing us the intolerable consequences of doing otherwise. He tries to demonstrate both that it is our ontological condition to yearn for something utterly unattainable, and that if we act on that yearning, our inescapable lot will be bad faith, endless

⁶⁰³ Sartre, *BN*, 116.

⁶⁰⁴ Sartre, *BN*, 534, fn 13.

interpersonal conflict, and futility. What is needed, then, is a “radical conversion” from the project of being-God to a project based on recognizing freedom as the highest value.⁶⁰⁵

So rather than an assertion of the necessity of absurdity and futility in interpersonal relations, it seems that what Sartre has given us is a description of a broken world for which there may be a fix. And when he writes explicitly that *Being and Nothingness* describes “an ontology before conversion,”⁶⁰⁶ what we really have is “the candid admission that his phenomenology is a kind of secular Augustinianism, that hope for...justice and love require radical conversion.”⁶⁰⁷

But maybe Sartre has done too good a job making his case for a situation in which conversion can be no more than wishful thinking. The ontology that underlies the self before conversion cannot be any different afterward. And if, as the ontology he has uncovered necessitates, bad faith and conflict is the default or “natural”⁶⁰⁸ and self-perpetuating condition for the self, the possibility of conversion seems to be pre-empted. Further, Sartre argues that conversion, if it is possible, is the result of a purified form of reflection that the self can come to after repeated failure at accomplishing its original fundamental project of “being

⁶⁰⁵ Detmer, 138.

⁶⁰⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Notebooks for an Ethics*, trans. David Pallauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 1992), 6. (Hereafter, *NFE*)

⁶⁰⁷ Westphal, “The Welcome Wound: Emerging from the *il y a* Otherwise,” *Continental Philosophy Review*, 40 (2007): 223.

⁶⁰⁸ Sartre, *NFE*, 6.

God.” According to Sartre, such failure can “push the For-itself to ask itself the.... question of the meaning of its acts and the reason for its failure... This question is a solicitation for us to place ourselves on the plane of reflection ... Reflection is born as an effort by consciousness to regain itself.”⁶⁰⁹ But this recovery of a more enlightened mode of enacting freedom remains purely a matter of the self’s will. It is a “pull yourself up by your own bootstraps” approach that also only works if everyone else is converted as well.⁶¹⁰ This is because, although the converted self seeks to operate under an ethics of *mutual* recognition, the motivation for respecting the other remains the self’s need for the other’s respect in order to maintain itself. Unless the other is also converted, Sartre recognizes that the self’s resolve to remain converted may not be strong enough and it is just as likely, if not more so, that the self will just lapse back into bad faith.

Sartre seems to imply that the true character of freedom is to promote freedom universally instead of acting in bad faith to secure oneself in opposition to the other. But because in his ontology freedom is conceived as being fundamentally a form of negation and self-assertion, it is difficult to see how it can practically be transformed into a basis for affirmation. If Sartre cannot find a

⁶⁰⁹ Sartre, *NFE*, 472.

⁶¹⁰ Sartre, *NFE*, 9.

place for such an ethics in *Being and Nothingness*, it is not because he has run out of room in the book but because the phenomenological ontology he has built has made no room for it in his universe.

AUGUSTINIAN RESPONSES: BEING SEEN AS BEING CALLED

It seems that what has been revealed here in our exploration of the (Un)Seen Self is not simply that being seen is a necessary moment in revealing the self's true identity; but more importantly that the process reveals the self's fundamental responsibility to and for the other. This appears to be equally true in the ontologies of both Augustine and Sartre. In Augustine's ontology the ability to receive and reciprocate a beneficial exchange with the other is original to the self while in Sartre's ontology such an attitude appears to be foreign; and yet both thinkers appeal to the need for a conversion in order for the fallen self to be able to respond to the look of the other in an attitude of good faith that will accept being seen as an opportunity rather than a threat. In Augustine's case this hoped for conversion comes about when the self sees itself through the gracious sight of the Christian God; for Sartre conversion becomes possible when the self's own repeated failures spontaneously transform the way it sees itself. In the work of Emmanuel Levinas and the commentary of Merold Westphal we find alternative explanations for the key to making the move from egoism to ethics.

In the work of Emmanuel Levinas we find a postmodern appropriation of Augustine that moves toward founding an ethics of responsibility by positing a model in which the other is constitutive of the self in a way which does not necessitate the opposition inherent in Sartre's model. This is because, while for Sartre consciousness appears spontaneously on its own and then is made self-conscious through the threatening Look of the other, Levinas builds on Augustine's idea of a "truth that accuses"⁶¹¹ to develop a model in which the other takes priority in bringing the self into being originally through a Call to ethical responsibility. Through such a model Levinas aims to establish, as he puts it, "the unconditionality of a subject, which does not have the status of a principle."⁶¹² That is, Levinas seeks to establish a model of the self that relies more fundamentally on the other rather than itself for the structure of its being. In line with the characteristic postmodern resistance to models of the self like Sartre's, which tend to overcome the other in favor of the self, in Levinas we find

⁶¹¹ Augustine, *Confessions* X.xxiii.34. "Reproves" or "challenges" are other translations of *redarguens*. Here I follow Bernasconi's characterization of "accuses" for the idea as developed in Levinas. See, Robert Bernasconi, "The Truth That Accuses: Conscience, Shame, and Guilt in Levinas and Augustine," in *The Ethics of Postmodernity: Current Trends in Continental Thought*, ed. Gary Madison and Marty Fairbairn (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 24–55.

⁶¹² Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alfonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 116. (Hereafter *OBBE*).

a thinker whose work aims at countering the “imperialism” of the modern self.⁶¹³

To this end, Levinas attempts to draw a relationship between self and other which at once makes it possible to affirm the self as a center of subjectivity while making it impossible to subjugate the other. While similar to Sartre’s account in that the other is instrumental for the identity of the self, Levinas is distinctive from Sartre in that he insists that the primary relation between self and other is ethical rather than ontological; the Levinasian self is characterized by responsibility rather than freedom. So where Sartre’s ontology preempts his desire for an ethics, Levinas reverses the priority of ethics and ontology and thereby seems to take a step forward where Sartre meets a roadblock.

Levinas’ model centers a challenge to the notion that the self is characterized primarily by consciousness or pure freedom. For Levinas, as for Sartre, in order to be a self, one must be self-conscious. But while for Sartre the process through which the other evokes self-consciousness is one which both enables and threatens freedom, for Levinas it poses a challenge which invests

⁶¹³ “Levinas asserts that the habitual mode of philosophical thought is one of an “allergy” to the other that remains other... Philosophy in its essential project is an adventure, or would-be adventure, that in the end discovers only itself, returns to itself... there is an “imperialism” of the philosophy that unfolds within this homecoming paradigm...” Jill Robbins, “Tracing Responsibility in Levinas’s Ethical Thought,” in *Ethics as First Philosophy*, ed. Adriaan T. Pepperzak (New York: Routledge, 1995), 74.

freedom with its true character as responsibility. Where Sartre has pictured the true function of freedom as the perpetuation of freedom, the embracing of spontaneity for its own sake, Levinas sees that it only makes sense to promote freedom for the sake of justice. As if responding directly to Sartre, Levinas writes that within the tradition of European thought

The spontaneity of freedom is not called in question; its limitation alone is held to be tragic and to constitute a scandal. Freedom is called in question only inasmuch as it somehow finds itself imposed upon itself: if I could have freely chosen my own existence everything would be justified. The failure of my spontaneity still bereft of reason awakens reason and theory... From failure alone would come the necessity of curbing violence and introducing order into human relations. Political theory derives justice from the undiscussed value of spontaneity; its problem is to ensure, by way of knowledge of the world, the most complete exercise of spontaneity by reconciling my freedom with the freedom of the others.

But rather than depend on the inevitable violation of justice to incite the proper realization of freedom, Levinas posits that an understanding of freedom as being originally shaped by responsiveness to the needs of the other seems more coherent.

Like Sartre's voyeur through the keyhole, the Levinasian self is initially totally absorbed by the objects and activities of his life. Levinas characterizes this unreflective state as "enjoyment." As he puts it,

...life's relation with its own dependence on the things is enjoyment-which, as happiness, is independence... this consciousness of consciousness is not reflection... It is not knowing but enjoyment, and, as we shall say, the very egoism of life... Enjoyment is not a psychological

state among others, the affective tonality of empiricist psychology, but the very pulsation of the I.⁶¹⁴

Although directed at objects, such a (non-positional) consciousness is completely self-absorbed. It is consumed by the act of consuming the objects of its enjoyment without regard to the needs or even existence of the other. It is an enactment of a freedom, of sorts, but one that for Levinas is as incomplete because unaware of its proper function.

For Levinas, the self is called out of mere “enjoyment” and into self-consciousness, not by an equal but opposing locus of freedom, but by an other who transcends the self’s understanding so completely that he is subjected to it not as a slave but as a student. For Levinas,

The other is not opposed to me as a freedom other than, but similar to my own, and consequently hostile to my own. The Other is not another freedom as arbitrary as my own... His alterity is manifested in a mastery that does not conquer, but teaches.⁶¹⁵

Further,

The Other qua Other is situated in a dimension of height and of abasement—glorious abasement; he has the face of the poor, the stranger,

⁶¹⁴ “...life's relation with its own dependence on the things is enjoyment-which, as happiness, is independence... It is not knowing but enjoyment, and, as we shall say, the very egoism of life... Enjoyment is not a psychological state among others, the affective tonality of empiricist psychology, but the very pulsation of the I,” (Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alfonso Lingus (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1979), 112-113. Hereafter *TI*).

⁶¹⁵ Levinas, *TI*, 171.

the widow, and the orphan, and, at the same time, of the master called to invest and justify my freedom.⁶¹⁶

The Levinasian other appears originally to the self as one who is disadvantaged and as such calls the self's unreflective and consumptive activities of enjoyment into question.

Where the Sartrean other approaches through a Look, which attempts to turn the self into an object, the Levinasian other approaches the self with a Call whose fundamental aim is to make the self aware of its potential as a responsible subject. The Call comes as a

revelation of a resistance of my powers that does not counter them as a greater force, but calls in question the naïve right of my powers, my glorious spontaneity as a living being. Morality begins when freedom, instead of being justified by itself, feels itself to be arbitrary and violent... Existence is not in reality condemned to freedom, but is *invested* as freedom... To welcome the Other is to put in question my freedom.⁶¹⁷

Rather than the Sartrean self who, when confronted by an other, discovers herself as vulnerable, the Levinasian self discovers himself as privileged, transgressive and violent.⁶¹⁸ It is the other who appears as vulnerable and the self who finds himself responsible for that vulnerability. Then, instead of

⁶¹⁶ Levinas, *TI*, 251.

⁶¹⁷ Levinas, *TI*, 84-85.

⁶¹⁸ "In this commerce with the infinity of exteriority or of height the naïveté of the direct impulse, the naïveté of the being exercising itself as a force on the move, is ashamed of its naïveté. It discovers itself as a violence, but thereby enters into a new dimension." (Levinas, *TI*, 117).

understanding its freedom as condemned to being an arbitrary and unjustifiable pursuit of arbitrary and unjustifiable ends, the self comes to know its freedom as a potential source of justice for the vulnerable other. The result, as Jeffrey Kosky explains, is that

In responsibility, the I is the first person, but comes after its summons. As itself an appearance placed in its position by a summons from the other, the I is no longer the privileged place where beings appear... In responsibility, I am not the place or stage of appearing but the first to appear on the stage."⁶¹⁹

Unreflective consciousness is transformed into reflective self-consciousness through a process that displaces the dynamic of mutual objectification and conflict by investing freedom with the character of goodness. As Levinas writes,

The being that expresses itself imposes itself, but does so precisely by appealing to me in its destitution and nudity—its hunger— without my being able to be deaf to that appeal. Thus in expression the being that imposes itself does not limit but promotes my freedom, by arousing my goodness. The order of responsibility... is also the order where freedom is ineluctably invoked. It is thus the irremissible weight of being that gives rise to my freedom.⁶²⁰

Thus, self-consciousness arises in the recognition that freedom is only freedom when it serves the good of the other.

⁶¹⁹ Jeffrey L. Kosky, *Levinas and the Philosophy of Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 89.

⁶²⁰ Levinas, *TI*, 200.

As Bernasconi notes, Levinas finds inspiration for his critique directly in Augustine's *Confessions*. Levinas cites the passage in *Confessions* X. "they love the truth when it enlightens; they hate it when it reproves," as example in the history of western philosophy where "traces of the ethical [break] through the ontological."⁶²¹ By reversing the priority of ontology and ethics Levinas creates a model in which being seen is subjected to being called. Or as he would put it, intelligibility is subjected to justice. Levinas explains:

What is the relation between justice and truth? Truth is in effect not separable from intelligibility; to know is not simply to record, but always to comprehend. We also say that to know is to justify, making intervene, by analogy with the moral order, the notion of justice. The justification of a fact consists in lifting from it its character of being a fact, accomplished, past, and hence irrevocable, which as such obstructs our spontaneity. But to say that as an obstacle to our spontaneity a fact is unjust is to suppose that spontaneity is not to be put in question, that free exercise is not subject to norms, but is the norm. And yet the concern for intelligibility is fundamentally different from an attitude that engenders an action without regard for obstacles. It signifies on the contrary a certain respect for objects. For an obstacle to become a fact that requires a theoretical justification or a reason the spontaneity of the action that surmounts it had to be inhibited, that is, itself put into question. It is then that we move from an activity without regard for anything to a consideration of the fact. The famous suspension of action that is said to make theory possible depends on a reserve of freedom, which does not abandon itself to its drives, to its impulsive movements, and keeps its distances. *Theory, in which truth arises, is the attitude of a being that distrusts itself. Knowing becomes knowing of a fact only if it is at the same time critical, if it puts itself into question...*⁶²²

⁶²¹ Levinas as cited in Bernasconi, 25.

⁶²² Levinas, *TI*, 82. Emphasis added.

According to Levinas, intelligibility requires justification. More specifically, self-knowledge is a matter of justifying one's spontaneity. Whereas for Sartre the self is intelligible only as unabated freedom, for Levinas, true comprehension requires an abatement in spontaneity in order to properly assess the self's nature. In more Sartrean terms, before the self can in good faith see the other as an obstacle or threat to her freedom, she must first ask herself if the enactment of her freedom is taking its proper form and does not in fact deserve to be thwarted. As Levinas sees it, to determine something or someone as an obstacle first requires the self to question whether its spontaneity or freedom should not be subject to such a barrier. The call of the vulnerable other triggers such an assessment. Thus for Levinas, the truth about the self's character does not come to light simply by seeing the facts of her situation as assessed by a necessarily equally objectifying other; rather the self's true character becomes intelligible only after heeding a call which challenges the self to justify the values according to which it is operating. In other words, for the Levinasian self, being seen is subject to being called. And instead of feeling threatened by the other, the self welcomes him.

For Levinas the ability of the other to call the self into question stems from the self's inability to encompass or grasp the other. While one might expect this

total incomprehension to be alleviated at some point in the dynamic of ethical relation, Levinas asserts that the other always remains absolutely other. This is the means by which Levinas maintains the integrity of the other as other and avoids the possibility of objectification or appropriation by the self. But it is this very aspect of Levinas's model which excludes relationship from the relation between self and other.

According to Levinas, there is no shared space between the self and other. They do not operate on the same plane.⁶²³ To conceive of self and other on the same plane is to conceive of them in a totality. For Levinas this would be an appropriation of the other into the self. This would destroy the alterity of the other which makes its ethical command possible. For Levinas, the other can command the self only because it commands from a "height." Levinas writes,

The dimension of *height* in which the Other is placed is as it were the primary curvature of being from which the privilege of the Other results, the gradient... of transcendence... The Other is not transcendent because he would be free as I am; on the contrary his freedom is a superiority that comes from his very transcendence.⁶²⁴

⁶²³ Levinas, *TI*, 101.

⁶²⁴ Levinas, *TI*, 86-87

For Levinas, transcendence is trans-ascendance,⁶²⁵ that is the other not only stands beyond the bounds of the self it also stands above the self. It is because the other stands outside and above that it can command at all. From the perspective of the self, the other takes precedence and cannot be commanded in the same way that it commands.

Due to the height at which the other stands, there is an asymmetry in the relation of responsibility. Levinas insists on the necessity of this asymmetry. He asserts that "The [self] and the other do not constitute a simple correlation, which would have been reversible."⁶²⁶ The self cannot assume that the other is responsible for it as it is for the other. The relation is not reciprocal. As Treanor explains, "Levinas claims that to insist on reciprocity is to say 'I am to you what you are to me.' Such a correlation reduces the other to the same by comprehending him under the denominator of reciprocal obligation."⁶²⁷ The radical alterity which makes the call possible necessitates that the self understand itself in terms of its responsibility to the other without any regard to the role of the other's responsibility to or for the self. In fact, the self is responsible for the

⁶²⁵ Brian Treanor, *Aspects of Alterity: Levinas, Marcel, and the Contemporary Debate* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 34.

⁶²⁶ Levinas, *TI*, 35.

⁶²⁷ Treanor, 128.

other even to the extent of being “responsible for the responsibility of the other.”⁶²⁸ Because the other calls from an infinite height, the extent of the responsibility of the self toward the other is infinite. This leads to extreme formulations of responsibility in which the self is responsible to affirm the other to the point of substituting itself for the other in its guilt. As noted above, the self is responsible to “nourish the hunger of another *with one’s own fasting*.”⁶²⁹ And so the fundamental relation to the other is one in which the other is affirmed at the expense of the self with no prospect for the self of any alleviation or aid.

While this may engender an ethical relation, it cannot form the basis of a *mutually* edifying relationship. Without reciprocity relationships of intimacy, fellowship, or communion, in which both self and other can be affirmed, are not possible. Although self and other are affirmed as centers of value in Levinas’s model, the self is only affirmed to the extent where it substitutes itself for the other and thus loses itself. The self’s only legitimate response to the other is “*me voici*,” here I am. The self puts itself at the complete and total disposal of the other. It seems that although Levinas seeks to establish an ethical system in

⁶²⁸ Levinas, *OBBE*, 117.

⁶²⁹ Levinas, *OBBE*, 56. Emphasis added.

which self and other can be affirmed he can only do so in such a way that the self is ultimately effaced. In Levinas's own words,

The I approached in responsibility is for-the-other... does not posit itself, possessing itself and recognizing itself; it is consumed and delivered over, dis-locates itself, loses its place, is exiled, relegates itself into itself, but as though its very skin were still a way to shelter itself in being, exposed to wounds and outrage, emptying itself in a no grounds, to the point of substituting itself for the other, holding onto itself only as it were in the trace of its exile... To be oneself as in the trace of one's exile is to be as a pure withdrawal of oneself...⁶³⁰

In this model the self relates to the other only in terms of obligation and possibly annihilation. But if one party is effaced in the relation, then there is still no basis for positive relationship. In this case we have not solved the problem of the imperialism of the modern self; we have only reversed its direction.

And so, Levinas leaves the self with an overwhelming responsibility. As Merold Westphal notes, Levinas' ethics seems just as unlikely as Sartre's to work. While Levinas asserts that the self's response to the other can and should be one of welcome,

Like Sartre's analysis, Levinas' shows how difficult, how unlikely such a welcome is, how weak is the desire to be decentered... As if responding to Sartre, Levinas poses the question how the other's traumatic intrusion into my life, indeed my very identity, could be experienced as other than enslaving, alienating violence; and he answers that the voice of the other

⁶³⁰ Levinas, *OBBE*, 138.

is the voice of the Good... It strikes me that this is too abstract to have the power to convince, much less to enable.⁶³¹

While Levinas's characterization of freedom seems to have bypassed the ontological roadblocks to ethics inherent in Sartre's model, as Westphal notes, he has not surmounted the practical ones. For a self whose default position is enjoyment, the call to responsibility does not seem to provide enough of an incentive to leave its comfort zone. The good of the other, while providing for my intelligibility, does not seem to provide for my good. If welcoming the other with open arms requires that I be willing to be crucified, then what could steel me with the resolve to make such an offering? As it turns out, in the end the weakness in Levinas' model is remarkably similar to that in Sartre's: the self has only its own resources on which to draw in order to respond to the needs of the other, but the self originates in such a way that these resources are not enough. Ethics requires that the self welcome an other who comes to take something that the self, in its original state, cannot stand ready to give.

Westphal responds to this dilemma by posing the following challenge:

...what if ethics needs salvation, as Augustine and Sartre join in suggesting? What if welcoming the other requires forgiveness grounded in atonement and conversion grounded in regeneration? What if the

⁶³¹ Westphal, *The Welcome Wound*, 223-224.

command that comes from on high needs the gift of grace that the widow, the orphan, and stranger cannot give?⁶³²

In contrast to both Sartrean and Levinasian models where the other appears in a mode that is poised to take, Westphal cites a model where the other appears first in order to give. He writes,

It seems to me that the most fitting home for Levinasian ethics is an overtly biblical theism. There is no need to be allergic to the God of the Bible, no need to transfer the divine predicates, such as height, transcendence, revelation, glory, etc, to the human other, as if in the service of Feuerbach. As First Interlocutor, this God can do what human others so conspicuously fail to do, enable the justice and the love whose urgency Levinas so eloquently elaborates.⁶³³

If the self is to be prepared to give of herself there must first be someone who has given her to herself. A self that is secured in such a way, by something other than itself, will then have what it needs to both avoid Sartre's vicious cycle of mutual objectification and not be overwhelmed by the responsibility of facing the Levinasian other. A self who is first allowed to receive love will then be enabled to give love. And as Westphal notes, this will work only when the love received

is not the love that is merely the demand to be loved. It is gift love, not need love. It is demanding to be sure; but first it is self-donation. Before it is Law it is Grace... [the self] becomes aware of her obligations precisely as indebtedness. She has received; therefore she must give. Then again, she has received; therefore she is able to give. "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). *Requirement is preceded by enablement.* If we deeply

⁶³² Westphal, *The Welcome Wound*, 223.

⁶³³ Westphal, *The Welcome Wound*, 224.

discover that our demand to be loved has been fulfilled even before we issue it, we just might find it unnecessary to make the demand to be loved, to be the center to which all others are periphery, the end to which they are means, our fundamental project in the world. We might be able to give ourselves, to welcome the other, to be hospitable.⁶³⁴

Westphal cites the God of the Bible as potential resource that solves the problem of the inability of the human self or other to provide for the necessary conversion from egoism to ethics. For Westphal, the religious dimension provides for “a possibility, however impossible it may be when only I and my neighbor are taken into account.”⁶³⁵

While Westphal cites biblical religion as his alternative model, he also notes that “there are indeed mysticisms, both eastern and western... in which the self is brought outside itself not in order to disappear but to be transformed from concupiscence to compassion.”⁶³⁶ Perhaps what Westphal hits on is that the religious enables the otherwise impotent ethical impulse by inciting the self to accept a heteronomous source of affirmation. Both Sartre and Levinas indicate that it is only by a surrender of autonomy that the self can move from egoism to ethics; but Westphal notes that this surrender involves primarily the acceptance

⁶³⁴ Westphal, *The Welcome Wound*, 223. Emphasis added.

⁶³⁵ Westphal, *The Welcome Wound*, 225.

⁶³⁶ Westphal, *The Welcome Wound*, 224.

of forgiveness rather than an assignment of duty.⁶³⁷ A self that has been constituted by such a forgiving other is then neither overwhelmed by responsibility to preserve itself or to preserve the other; rather it can welcome the other with a spirit of generosity that is fueled by its ability to receive rather than its status as a source. Through his appeal to religion Westphal opens up the possibility of an ethics through the intuition that openness to a divine other facilitates conversion in a way that mundane experience, especially failure or brute responsibility, cannot.

⁶³⁷ Merold Westphal, "Inverted Intentionality," 252.

**PART III:
RELIGION AND ALTERITY**

CHAPTER 6. **THE RELIGIOUS SELF: CONSTITUTING OTHER-ORIENTATIONS**

In the previous three chapters we have examined Augustine and Sartre's models of the self in an attempt to reveal the possibilities each allows for potential relation with the other. As we have seen, the structure and ontology of the Sartrean self precludes the possibility of mutually edifying and affirming relationships and necessitates conflict. The fundamental reason for this is his assumption of autonomy as being the necessary condition for freedom, which he in turn identifies as the fundamental characteristic and highest value of the self. Augustine, on the other hand, identifies a model in which genuine love and communion, while not guaranteed, remain possible modes of human relation. While Sartre traps the self in a mode of perpetual conflict, Augustine seems to preserve a way out. As my analysis has tried to uncover, the basis of Augustine's ability to maintain such an alternative rests on his assumption of a common ground, or more precisely a common good, to which the self is naturally inclined to submit itself. For Augustine, an assumption of autonomy is counter-productive to human well-being as it obscures the true nature of human selves and leads to disordered priorities and relationships.

For Augustine, the basic assumption of human selves having, needing, and submitting to a heteronomous source of value in order to live well stems

from his religious commitments and beliefs.⁶³⁸ But this is not incidental. In fact, it is the goal of this study to highlight that religiously orientated selves are constituted in such a way as to make mutually affirming modes of relation possible specifically by excluding autonomy as a fundamental feature of the self. More succinctly, religious worldviews can function as a basis for mitigating conflict in a way that systems based on an autonomous model of the self simply cannot.

I am acutely aware that the preceding claim may seem outlandish given the long historical record of religiously motivated conflicts and wars, not to mention the current outbreak of global terror attacks being perpetrated in the name of Islam. And yet, as I hope to show in this chapter, there is ample evidence to suggest that much of our current inability to stem such conflicts derives from a loss of the ability to locate ourselves in a system of shared values— due specifically to our modern obsession with autonomy.

As the preceding analysis of Augustine and Sartre has tried to demonstrate, while modernity has fostered a deep-seeded preoccupation with

⁶³⁸ One may argue that Augustine's basic assumptions were a function of his philosophical rather than his religious commitments; however I would contend that even the Platonist and Neo-Platonist contributions to his worldview were themselves religious in nature as they also appealed to a heteronomous and transcendent source of Good.

faith in the self, the remedy for conflict seems to be some sense of faith in the other;⁶³⁹ further, such faith is based in the self's capacity for receptivity rather than in its capacity for productivity. To this end, one of the major contributions of postmodern thought has been highlighting the impact of inverted intentionality. As a foil to modern thought—which advances a vision of the self as completely free to constitute its world on its own, theories of inverted intentionality draw our attention to the role of external factors in constituting consciousness itself. As the work of postmodern thinkers such as Heidegger, Levinas, Derrida, Marion, Westphal, Caputo—and even Sartre—has shown, a more robust assessment of a self's capacity to interact in the world must entail an account of the ways in which such a self is itself shaped by factors or structures which precede and transcend its control.

Notably, in making their cases for a more decentered and ethically responsible model of the self, all of the above theorists resort to religious language. While some like Marion argue explicitly for the relevance of traditional Christian notions of God, even the most avowed atheists among them include appeals to notions of conversion, the divine, or religion as central features of

⁶³⁹ See the final section of Chapter 4.

their arguments.⁶⁴⁰ Although the latter set aim to couch these appeals within a broader model of “religion *without* religion,” one must stop and ask why they find it necessary to appeal to religion in any form at all— especially as they are arguing against the relevance or efficacy of concrete religions for achieving the goals of justice to which they aspire. Perhaps it is because religion is not only the realm of human endeavor in which notions of transcending the self are most at home, but also because it is the primary place in which they are organically generated. Like beams of reclaimed wood, while amenable to use within a new design, the unique character and texture that such notions contribute to the new structure is a direct result of their presence within their original architecture. In this case, such a reliance on religious language is not simply a matter of repurposing familiar terminology, but rather an indication that there is something that occurs specifically in religious life that cannot be fabricated from the resources available to bare humanism.

⁶⁴⁰ In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre speaks in terms of Original Sin, the Fall, and conversion to describe the fundamental relationship between self and other; Levinas transfers traditionally divine attributes such as transcendence and glory to the human other and redefines “religion” as “the bond that is established between the same and the other without constituting a totality.” (*Totality and Infinity*, 40); Derrida calls directly for “religion without religion,” (*The Gift of Death*, 49) and the “messianic without messianisms” (*Specters of Marx*, 59), appealing to a deep logic or structure underlying all religions that calls humanity to justice.

In the following sections I will examine the work of three theorists of Religion, Adam Seligman, Merold Westphal, and Thomas J. Csordas, to try to uncover what it is about religion that seems to provide this resource or corrective to the failings of the modern self. Each approaches religion from a different perspective—Sociology, Phenomenology, and Anthropology, respectively—but all are well-versed in postmodern thought and all approach religion as a distinct discipline or phenomenon in its own right. Despite their diversity, all of these thinkers 1) address particular ways in which religious belief, practice, or experience constitutes consciousness, 2) contrast such a constitution with that of the modern self, and 3) locate as an essential aspect of religion some “principle of internal criticism,”⁶⁴¹ be it skepticism, ontological inadequacy, or intimate alterity, which functions to destabilize self-certainty and open the self up to the other. What I undertake here is far from equating or essentializing the goals of various traditions, arriving at a conclusive definition of religion, or even delineating a concept of a “pure form” of religion that is immune to corruption by the pressures of mundane existence; rather the aim is simply to offer a more broadly based theoretical foundation for the idea that religious orientations, by

⁶⁴¹ Mark C. Taylor, *After God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 12. (Hereafter, M. Taylor).

nature of their general structure, regardless of tradition, and as a distinct area of human endeavor, can provide the self with an original notion of self-critique and openness to the other that is sorely lacking in modern conceptions of identity. Further, this resource is vital if we are to be able to pursue and maintain solutions to political and social conflicts from the standpoint of justice and morality.

SELIGMAN: AUTHORITY AND TRANSCENDENCE

In Adam Seligman's book, *Modernity's Wager: Authority, the Self, and Transcendence*,⁶⁴² we find our first clue as to the nature of this factor that, while present at the core of religious life, is conspicuously missing from the constitution of the modern self: the acceptance of authority in the constitution of identity. Seligman further argues that appeals to justice can only be founded within a schema which recognizes a sacred *and transcendent* source of authority—another notion roundly rejected in modern understandings of the self.

It may be helpful to view Seligman's work as a response to what he describes as the "increasing contemporary concern... at the center of political

⁶⁴² Adam B. Seligman, *Modernity's Wager: Authority, the Self, and Transcendence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

thought and action with the issue of recognition.”⁶⁴³ He notes a widespread emergence of ethical or moral claims as to the rights of those individuals or groups whose identities are usually viewed primarily in terms of their alterity to be recognized on their own terms rather than in contrast to the dominant cultural identity; the reason being that the lack of such recognition often results in the perpetration of injustice and oppression toward such individuals or groups. But for Seligman, “the problem of recognition... is nothing other than the problem of self.”⁶⁴⁴ Despite the presence of such moral and ethical appeals, he argues that modernity has left us in a situation where we have

certain ideas of selfhood [that] can in fact vitiate [moral authority] and with it any idea of morality....without a sacred locus of self, any attempt to account for action cannot rise beyond the purely calculative, power-orientated acts of utility maximization. If the self has a sacred locus, however, then it must be an authoritative one as well, for what is the sacred if not authoritative?⁶⁴⁵

Seligman’s analysis highlights that if we are to make progress in mitigating conflict, injustice and oppression of the other, we must first reevaluate the foundation modern notions of identity provide—or lack—to support such goals.

⁶⁴³ Seligman, 119. See also Charles Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” in *Multiculturalism*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 1994): 25-74. What is noted here is a contemporary example of the contradictory dynamics of recognition discussed in the Sartre and Levinas sections of Chapter 5.

⁶⁴⁴ Seligman, 120.

⁶⁴⁵ Seligman, ix.

While approached from within the methodology of sociology, rather than ontology or phenomenology, Seligman's analysis ends up with a vision of the modern self that is entirely consistent with the analysis of the preceding chapters. He begins by noting that modern identity hinges on an understanding of selves as discrete individuals locked in fundamental relations of coercion, power, and exchange.⁶⁴⁶ As Seligman puts it, rather than submitting to authority out of a belief that such action is necessary for salvation or in service to some set of ultimate values, as modern selves "We have wagered our idea of the sacred on beliefs in individual rights, rooted in reason and serving as the "touch-stone of [our] morality."⁶⁴⁷ This is where, as he cites Durkheim,

the sources of moral action rest on the cognizance of the individual sanctity of each member of society and where "each of us incarnates something of humanity, each individual consciousness contains something divine and thus finds itself marked with a character which renders it sacred and inviolable to others."⁶⁴⁸

But as such inviolable centers of value, we still

accept the need to coerce our will, in order to fulfill certain needs or attain certain goals... we rein in our wills in order to maximize certain utilities... We accept the authority of those wielding power because over the long run it is in our interest to do so.⁶⁴⁹

⁶⁴⁶ Seligman, 5-6.

⁶⁴⁷ Seligman, 12-13.

⁶⁴⁸ Seligman, 43.

⁶⁴⁹ Seligman, 4.

Seligman explains that as modern selves we hold sacred only the inviolable rights of the individual. Further, we locate legitimate authority primarily in the ability or effectiveness of those with power to bring about results desired by the self. As such, the modern self's acceptance of the dictates of an authority is subject to its personal desires. Thus the self gives authority its legitimacy rather than finding its own legitimacy in terms of its submission to authority. In effect, the individual self and its transitory interests are the self's only source of authority — circumscribed only by its own power to coerce or trade to induce compliance with its will.⁶⁵⁰

However, argues Seligman,

if that moral authority upon which the self rests is not conceived of in transcendent terms, its definition can only be immanent, can only rest on society.⁶⁵¹

That is, appeals to ethical and moral standards of action can only go as far as those standards already accepted by self as it has internalized the values and

⁶⁵⁰ "...when it comes to the influence of one man's mind over another's, that is necessarily very restricted in a country where the citizens have all become more or less similar, see each other at very close quarters, and since they do not recognize any sights of incontestable greatness or superiority, in any of their fellows, are continually brought back to their own judgment as the most apparent and accessible test of truth. So it is not only confidence in any particular man which is destroyed. There is a general distaste for accepting any man's word as proof of anything. So each man is narrowly shut in himself, and from that basis makes the pretension to judge the world." (Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, as cited in Seligman, 49)

⁶⁵¹ Seligman, 42.

constructs of reasoning as given in the dominant culture. There is no space to move beyond the self to the other because there is no path between them. As Seligman notes,

An internally constituted self cannot be recognized as such because recognition can only occur in a shared and common framework, which is precisely what has been undercut by those very developments that... have left us in a situation where "every individual is a little World by itself."⁶⁵²

As highlighted in the analysis of Chapter 5, recognition entails an acceptance of a vision of the self as valued and assessed by the other. But if each self is an inviolable standard of moral authority, and therefore impervious to alternative measures of assessment, then it can neither recognize itself as unjust nor recognize the other as worthy of justice. Further, if the rules of engagement hinge primarily on the ability to wield power, and the other is in a position of disadvantage, there is no higher standard of justice to which one can reasonably appeal.

In such a context, notes Seligman,

It is very well to call for a politics of recognition, but for that call to be meaningful it must countenance social conditions and orientations that are, more often than not, inimicable to the logic of modern life.⁶⁵³

⁶⁵² Seligman, 120.

⁶⁵³ Seligman, 122.

Seligman's point is that appeals to universal rights and equality cannot be based in the idea of the *individual* as an absolute arbitrator of acceptable actions and values. For reasons that retain a structure similar to those given by Schindler in Chapter 3,⁶⁵⁴ Seligman concludes that

a purely autonomous and atomistic view of the self is insufficient, not only on the prescriptive level, but equally on the descriptive level, incapable finally of giving a proper account of human action in the world. For that we must return to that concept we moderns so instinctively reject, to the idea of authority as an essential aspect of life in the world.⁶⁵⁵

Seligman explains that constructs of morality and justice cannot exist in a society where coercion and exchange are the primary basis of action. A self can only identify as *moral* if he has an aspect of his identity anchored in some common source of authority that necessarily applies to all others he presumes to judge and by which he judges himself. He uses the example of my stealing a candy bar to illustrate this point. I may refrain simply because I fear punishment. If this is the case, then my actions are simply a matter of a cost-benefit calculation.

⁶⁵⁴ See Seligman, 36-37: "To say that the idea of the self is realized beyond [its social] roles implies as well the realization of self beyond the rules and regulations that structure, order, and organize the division of labor itself. It is in fact a vision of radical autonomy that would seem to divorce the self from all communal referents, from all claims to moral authority — and so, in the reading we have been following, from those, in Charles Taylor's felicitous phrase, very 'sources of the self.'" Schindler: "If choice is free precisely insofar as it is not determined by something outside of itself, then it finds its freedom only in independence from reason," (Schindler, 71).

⁶⁵⁵ Seligman, x.

However, if I believe stealing is sinful or wrong based on some authoritative standard of conduct, then I will refrain because if I do steal I will then be forced to *identify myself* as a thief. And “being a thief, precisely because of the moral claims at stake, touches on aspects of one’s social self that are essential, constitutive of self, and not subject to purely instrumental calculations.”⁶⁵⁶

Without an acceptance, or internalization, of an authority external to the self, identity is simply a matter of arbitrary interest, perhaps of rights, but never of goodness or justice.

Alternatively, argues Seligman,

When the rules of the game are indeed principles of justice and so have an ontological status beyond traffic regulations, they invoke a consideration of society framed in terms of the internalization of values. It is only in such a worldview that the idea of the sacred may exist and with it, its cognate terms of justice, legitimation, and ultimately of authority. Together these terms constitute a set, different faces of a prism, refracting the selfsame reading of social reality and human existence from slightly different angles. Invoking one, we are necessarily invoking all the rest. All are very different from a reading of social order predicated on rational projection of utility functions and the unintended consequences of individual preference maximization.⁶⁵⁷

Further,

If the sacred means anything, it is that place where negotiation ends. Like authority (but unlike power), the sacred is a realm defined by what cannot be bartered or bargained. Especially when posited in transcendent

⁶⁵⁶ Seligman, 26.

⁶⁵⁷ Seligman, 28.

and absolute terms, the sacred becomes a point at which all contestation over meaning ceases. As the foundation of meaning-giving order, the sacred is beyond the play of forces whose negotiation and exchange parse out prestige, status, and wealth to particular roles within the division of labor.⁶⁵⁸

So to invoke the notion or ideal of justice is concomitantly to invoke the notion of the sacred as the common and non-negotiable basis of all negotiations.

Seligman identifies three potential loci of such a sacred source of authority: the civil, the primordial and the transcendent.⁶⁵⁹ To have a civil locus is, as in the case discussed above, to identify the sacred with the individual. In such a case community and identity is defined in terms of voluntary membership in shared civic institutions.

To locate a sacred source of authority in the primordial is to define identity and community along the lines of ascribed characteristics such as kinship, race, ethnicity, gender, etc. The given category forms the non-negotiable basis of commitment. Seligman notes the reemergence of such means of constituting identity as a reaction to the civil model prominent in modernity. He comments that,

One place where we end up, wittingly or no, is with the failure of autonomously defined selves to provide a sufficient foundation for self-identities and the felt need to give expression to a less autonomous, more

⁶⁵⁸ Seligman, 39.

⁶⁵⁹ Seligman, 42.

constituted, more heteronomously defined self. Primordially defined identities and ascriptively maintained aspects of self turn out to be very useful at filling this need.⁶⁶⁰

An autonomously defined modern self cannot support an identity conceived as more than a bundle of desires.⁶⁶¹ Further, in promoting the notion of the sacredness of each individual, modernity has concomitantly promulgated an understanding that there is no *difference in value* between each sacred individual; but this has resulted in situation where individuals feel there is no *value in the difference* that their ascribed or situational characteristics contribute. Individual identity is subsumed by instrumental roles and pressure to conform to dominant trends.⁶⁶² Resorting to ascribed or primordial factors of identity is a way to define oneself in relation to a more stable source of authority and to assert one's own identity as opposed to becoming another instrumentalized cog in society's wheel. It is a form of constituting one's identity in a way that gives a voice to what is otherwise, as Seligman terms it, "the expressive muteness of the autonomous self."⁶⁶³

⁶⁶⁰ Seligman, 53.

⁶⁶¹ Seligman, 54.

⁶⁶² Seligman, 50-51, 76-77.

⁶⁶³ Seligman, 70.

The obvious shortcoming of basing identity on such ascribed categories is that what is the non-negotiable sacred basis of identity and action for members of each group remains non-negotiable between groups. Conflicts based on the absolute values of preserving a particular blood-line, ethnicity, race, or nationality are as equally intractable as those based on individual rights and interests. Recognition is equally difficult as the non-negotiable basis of interest is simply transferred up one level from the individual to the constitutive group, as are the dynamics of exchange, power, and coercion.

Finally we come to the transcendent as a sacred source of authority. It is here that Seligman locates a sacred that can suffice to serve as a legitimate basis of moral identity where the others have failed. Unlike sacred loci of identity based in primordial characteristics or individual autonomy, a transcendent sacred equalizes all people and necessarily undercuts “that propensity of enlightened reason [of modernity] to make of pluralistic goods irreconcilable and absolute oppositions.”⁶⁶⁴ Seligman identifies the transcendent as “the first fully generalizable other [who is] seen to exist beyond all possible social constructions, beyond all negotiation.”⁶⁶⁵ To locate the basis of identity and community in the

⁶⁶⁴ Seligman, 53.

⁶⁶⁵ Seligman, 56.

transcendent is to be constituted by an authority that encompasses all possible characteristics of individuality, particularity, and collectivity.

As Seligman explains,

Absolute transcendent authority thus establishes community in terms that transcend not only the particular member but also the community itself.⁶⁶⁶

Transcendence provides a locus of heteronomy that neither individual autonomy nor group solidarity can provide— one that constitutes authority *as such*. It is this authority that provides what Charles Taylor termed that “constitutive good” upon which individual selves as moral evaluators can rest. Hence, I would claim that it is only in light of such heteronomous authority— that transcendent generalized other— that the particularity of individual selves can be said to exist. Not the autonomous will but fully heteronomous obligation forms the basis of the self— as moral evaluator and not simply as one empowered to work the system and so maximize preferences.⁶⁶⁷

... the idea of transcendence provides a locus of moral authority and selfhood, albeit one foreign to modern sensibilities. It provides for much of what would seem to be missing in a purely autonomously conceived model of the self. It does so, moreover, without falling back on ascriptively defined and primordial categories of selfhood. However paradoxical it may seem to us, its very authority calls the self into being as moral evaluator, as agentic in a sense other than of power. Problematizing existence, transcendence drives the self to encounter Being. In this encounter agency can become an existential and moral endeavor rather than simple power.⁶⁶⁸

Being other to the self, the transcendent provides a source of authority that allows the self to overcome the contingency and arbitrariness of pure autonomy;

⁶⁶⁶ Seligman, 88.

⁶⁶⁷ Seligman, 58. Emphasis added.

⁶⁶⁸ Seligman, 56.

being equally other to *all* selves and groups it allows the self to overcome the oppositional nature of primordially defined identity; being other to the whole of the mundane order it provides the basis upon which all relationships within that order, both material and moral, should be organized.⁶⁶⁹ It establishes Being as the common and incontrovertible basis of Good in relation to which action and intention can be evaluated, making agency a matter of morality and not just power.

But beyond pointing to the transcendent as the most viable source of a shared sacred, Seligman seems to point specifically to religion as a resource for encountering and reclaiming the necessary sense of authority missing from modern identity. While he can hardly be read as an advocate of the way traditional religions instantiate their various conceptions of authority—his critique of fundamentalisms of all sorts is scathing—he ends up appealing specifically to the beliefs or structure of concrete religious traditions. The following passage seems to be an indication of why:

In the case of transcendent religion (and its transcendent edicts), existence is tied to certain ontological premises about the existence of the world and the meaning of human history. And the terms of human existence are redefined in terms of a salvational drama, whose resolution may be expressed in the other-worldly terms of Hinduism or the this-worldly

⁶⁶⁹ Seligman, 56.

terms of Judaism or Islam. In the process human agency, too, is redefined. The individual begins to emerge with greater distinction (as an aspect of that responsibility imposed by transcendent edicts), but, at the same time, the individual is tied to others in a salvational or soteriological program that radically restructures what we may mean by causal chains.⁶⁷⁰

The point here is that, beyond the specifics of the tradition, religion involves a transcendent sacred incorporated into a notion of soteriology; as such, religion constitutes individuals as members of a community whose basis is significantly more stable, binding, and ethically compelling than relations of mere contract, power, and self-interest; when salvation is seen as being the overarching goal of and for humanity, one takes on responsibility for a broader set of people and actions than is necessary or possible when other more particularized interests are at stake.⁶⁷¹

But interestingly, it is in the tension created between the authority of revelation and the dictates of reason that Seligman finally locates the ability of religious belief and practice to provide a basis for mutual recognition in a pluralistic society. He explains,

the pluralism of religions or even (and this is my point) of a single religion, with its built-in tension between reason and revelation, between

⁶⁷⁰ Seligman, 77.

⁶⁷¹ Admittedly, the salvation of all humanity is not the direct goal of all religious traditions. But there are soteriological or at least ontological constructs within most major traditions that are conceived as being applicable to all of humanity, even if their proliferation is not actively pursued.

knowledge and faith does also tend to undermine the taken-for-grantedness of the beliefs and values of modernity. These latter are, after all, identified with a rather totalizing Jacobean project, one that has all too often conflated a substantive rationality with an instrumental one and has sought to promulgate an overarching, totalitarian, and all-encompassing ideology (whether of the right or the left). The very homogenizing tendencies of the modern worldview can themselves be brought to question by the pluralism inherent in religious doubt— that necessary concomitant of faith itself.⁶⁷²

Often enough today's return to religion is done in such a spirit [of foolishness and ignorance], and, if not of foolishness, then of ignorance— with the expected results. By foolish and ignorant, I intend ignorance of precisely those aspects within the different religious traditions that point the way not to a self-satisfied and comfortable validation of oneself and one's belief structure— that certitude that leads to acts like... murder... but rather to an openness to the stranger, to the other, and hence to ethical behavior informed by the principle of tolerance. Those aspects of belief open us as well to doubt and uncertainty and to the responsibilities demanded by that very uncertainty. In fact, the obligations that uncertainty imposes are arguably greater than those imposed by certainty itself.⁶⁷³

Seligman cites the authority of revelation as a source of inherent opposition to the calculating rationality of modernity.⁶⁷⁴ He maintains that it is precisely this openness to the authority of the other inherent in religion that makes self-critique

⁶⁷² Seligman, 138.

⁶⁷³ Seligman, 131-132.

⁶⁷⁴ Seligman frames this argument most specifically in terms of Western religions with their often oppositional histories, traditions, apologetics, and mysticisms. He writes, "To [resurrect a language of toleration based on skepticism] we must enlist the help of precisely those beliefs— chief among which are beliefs in revealed, transcendent truth— of the three revealed monotheistic religions" (141). However, the possibility of self-critique inherent in the tension between reason and revelation is also applicable in many Eastern religious contexts, as in the cases, for example, of Buddhism and Hinduism whose teachings stress the illusory nature of everyday experience in the mundane world.

possible—and thus mutual recognition. And while he notes the all too prevalent failures of religious people and groups to recognize these resources available within their own traditions to counter the conflictual relationships inherent in modern society, the resources remain there nonetheless. Thus Seligman's analysis points us to what is missing from modern sensibility and to religion as a possible arena from which to reclaim it.

WESTPHAL: TRANSCENDENCE AND THE CONSTITUTION OF A RELIGIOUS CONSCIOUSNESS

As Seligman's analysis has pointed, religion is the realm in which the experience of transcendence is constitutive in the most encompassing of ways and as such is the most suitable context for the origin of notions of sacredness and justice. Seligman's analysis cites religion as providing a source of potential self-critique and thus openness to the other due to the inherent tension between the competing authorities of revelation and reason in the modern context.

In a complementary analysis, Merold Westphal in *God, Guilt, and Death*⁶⁷⁵ illustrates self-critique as central to the experience of becoming and being a religious self. In his descriptive phenomenology of religion, Westphal cites

⁶⁷⁵ Merold Westphal, *God, Guilt, and Death: An Existential Phenomenology of Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

religious experience and expression from a broad range of traditions; this results in a model that locates experience of a transcendent sacred, or “the holy” as he often terms it,⁶⁷⁶ as the constitutive factor of religion and in turn of the intentionality of the religious self. Notably, one of the features he identifies as central to such experience includes ontological inadequacy. That this is identified as one of the most basic impulses of religious experience is indicative of the structure of religion as offering an original critique of the centrality of the self so prevalent in modernity. While some theorists seek to transfer the notion of transcendence into purely human and humanistic terms, such a move is only made as a derivative of religious experience in the traditional sense; even if the translation is successful, it is by no means originary. As Westphal’s analysis seeks to reveal, whatever transcendence can be experienced in terms of the

⁶⁷⁶ Westphal’s analysis relies significantly on that of Rudolph Otto’s in *The Idea of the Holy*. Within this tradition of analysis, *sacred* and *holy* are often interchangeable. In fact, *sacred* is one possible direct translation of Otto’s *heilige*. Although *holy* is the translation used in the standard English text, the translator explains that *sacred*, *sacredness*, *sanctity*, *hallow*, and *sanctify* as suitable alternatives. (Appendix X in Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 216). Mircea Eliade, in the opening of *The Sacred and the Profane*, references and builds on Otto’s analysis of religious experience as “d’efroi devant le sacré,” or “terror before the sacred.” (Mircea Eliade, *Le Sacré et le Profane* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), 15 / *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Orlando: Harcourt, Inc., 1959), 9).

human other is by no means as radical or as organically generated as what is experienced in terms of absolute transcendence.⁶⁷⁷

Westphal, like Rudolph Otto whom he cites, bases his analysis on the contention that some form of experience or encounter with the holy is at the core of all forms of religious life.⁶⁷⁸ Following the line drawn by Otto's well-known characterization of the holy as *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*,⁶⁷⁹ Westphal highlights the features of a consciousness which has encountered such an other.

Significantly, this idea of otherness is the first component of the formula.

According to Otto's definition,

Taken in its religious sense, that which is 'mysterious' is—to give it perhaps the most striking expression—the 'wholly other'... that which is beyond the sphere of the usual, the intelligible, and the familiar, which

⁶⁷⁷ It may be worth emphasizing again that in such an analysis, the reality of the transcendent object (be it God, mana, Tao, Brahman, Nirvana, or whatever) that is believed to induce such an experience is not at issue. The issue is that experiences identified by the believing soul as being of a specifically *religious* or *transcendent* object take on this form. Westphal directly cites the *epoché* as a "fundamental concept" (p.4) for his project in which the main question is not "asking about the real existence of the objects of consciousness," (p.4) but rather to "permit the believing soul to speak" (p.12) for itself to answer the question, "What does it mean to be religious?" (p.1). Citing van der Leeuw, Westphal explains, "'We do not intend to pursue causal relationships, but rather to search for comprehensible associations.. Further we do not intend to investigate the truth behind the appearance, but we shall try to understand the phenomena themselves in their simple existence,'" (p.5). The goal here is to explore how *religious* consciousness is constituted without regard for what exactly is doing the constituting.

⁶⁷⁸ "There is no religion in which it does not live as the real innermost core, and without it no religion would be worthy of the name." (Otto, 6).

⁶⁷⁹ Westphal, *God, Guilt, and Death*, 24.

therefore falls outside the limits of the 'canny', and is contrasted with it, filling the mind with blank wonder and astonishment.⁶⁸⁰

In the presence of the sacred, the religious self is struck first and foremost by its radical transcendence. Otto characterizes this experience as "creature-consciousness" in which the self is "abased and overwhelmed by its own nothingness in contrast to that which is supreme above all creatures."⁶⁸¹ This sense of this sacred, whatever it may be, as "supreme above," "beyond the sphere," and outside the limits," of all mundane existence is what leads Otto to coin the term "wholly other."

That the self responds to this absolutely transcendent other with a feeling of ontological inadequacy is significant. Citing personal accounts of such encounters from sources as diverse as Augustine, Mahatma Gandhi, and a Hasidic rebbe, Westphal aptly comments that

the religious experiences we have been reviewing have the opposite structure [of the Cartesian cogito *ergo sum*]. They are based on a sense of the presence of something that is more real than myself and the world of immediate experience. I become what is relative, and in relation to this something I find myself to be suddenly doubtful, less real and not definitely there... for a profane consciousness the self is the *ens realissimum*, the most real being, while [those affected by the above experience] live a religious life grounded in the experiential denial of this assumption.⁶⁸²

⁶⁸⁰ Otto, 26.

⁶⁸¹ Otto, 10.

⁶⁸² Westphal, *God, Guilt, and Death*, 27-28.

Importantly, the response to the sacred is not simply a matter of sensing a lack of power or control over the character of my identity or actions, but of the very actuality of my being.⁶⁸³ Unlike encounters with any human other, the sense of inadequacy here is so thoroughgoing that the unquestionable and necessary existence of the self, the basis of struggle between self and other, is negated.

Relying on the second part of Otto's famous formula for describing the sacred, *tremendum et fascinans*, Westphal outlines the second central feature of religious consciousness: ambivalence. He cites examples from diverse religious traditions to illustrate how the sacred consistently appears as "simultaneously attractive and repellent, 'delectable' and 'distressing,' evoking such contradictory emotions as joy and fear."⁶⁸⁴ Inasmuch as the sacred appears as an inimical power capable of threatening my very being, it also appears as the source of life, comfort, or bliss. In the face of such an overwhelming and confounding presence the believing soul, to use Westphal's term, finds itself torn between the desire to draw close to this source of ultimate reality and the desire to flee back into more

⁶⁸³ Importantly, Westphal also notes, "The sense of selfhood involved here need not be highly individualized. The self, whose ultimacy is at stake, may be a collective (tribal or national) self as easily as a personal self. The sense of human nothingness before the sacred can even extend to the whole of human race and all its history."(p.28). This complements the points made by Seligman to the effect that transcendent sources of sacred authority are most effective at combatting tensions created by primordially or civilly based notions of identity.

⁶⁸⁴ Westphal, *God, Guilt, and Death*, 26.

familiar modes of existence. This initial experience of ambivalence then gives rise to paradoxical religious expressions; the alluring and appalling, maternal and monstrous appear when conceptualizing, speaking about, or picturing the sacred.⁶⁸⁵ For example, Westphal cites Job's reflections on God in the Hebrew Bible saying, "the Lord gives and the Lord takes away;"⁶⁸⁶ As a more dramatic example, he cites the Hindu mythologies and representations of Krishna, the Creator, and Kali, the Destroyer— each in their own right and together as components of the broader tradition—as expressing opposing aspects of the same sacred.⁶⁸⁷ "By speaking (to or about the sacred) the self asserts its own reality, but by what it says (to or about the sacred) it undercuts the original assertion." And in this way as well, comments Westphal, "The Cartesian experience of the self as absolute center is simultaneously given and taken away."⁶⁸⁸

And yet, despite these tensions, the sacred is fundamentally experienced and conceived as that which is of ultimate worth. Whatever it is, and however it is represented, it always appears as that before which the self's own value and

⁶⁸⁵ Westphal, *God, Guilt, and Death*, 32.

⁶⁸⁶ Westphal, *God, Guilt, and Death*, 29.

⁶⁸⁷ Westphal, *God, Guilt, and Death*, 34-35.

⁶⁸⁸ Westphal, *God, Guilt, and Death*, 32.

agency is assessed. Westphal notes that in its initial appearance, the sacred evokes a response in the form of "You alone are Holy." He again cites responses of Arjuna to Krishna in the Hindu tradition and Job to God in the Jewish and Christian traditions as examples which take this form.⁶⁸⁹ And as Otto comments,

'Tu solus sanctus' is rather a paean of praise, which, so far from being merely a faltering confession of the divine supremacy, recognizes and extols a value, precious beyond all conceiving. The object of such praise is not simply absolute Might, making its claims and compelling their fulfilment, but a might that has at the same time the supremest right to make the highest claim to service, and receives praise because it is in an absolute sense worthy to be praised.⁶⁹⁰

Far from simply being a terrifying and fascinating source of power, the sacred moves the believing soul itself "beyond questions of power to questions of status and worth."⁶⁹¹ As Westphal comments, "It is clear that the Holy has ceased to signify an ontology where fact is cleanly separated from value. It is not merely as the ultimate power but as the ultimate worth that the sacred is experienced."⁶⁹²

Having shaken the self of its illusions of centrality and absoluteness of its existence, the sacred moves the self to reevaluate itself in terms of the

⁶⁸⁹ Westphal, *God, Guilt, and Death*, 41. Job: "I know that Thou canst do all things... But I have spoken of things which I have not understood... I repent in dust and ashes," (Job 42:2-6); Arjuna: "Thou art all. For whatsoever I have spoken in rashness... I pray...forgiveness from Thee, the Immeasurable," (*The Bhagavad Gita*, IX, 40-42). The immeasurable and all-powerful God alone is not only able but *worthy* of dictating the proper response due him. Thus the improper response evokes not just fear, but repentance.

⁶⁹⁰ Otto, 54.

⁶⁹¹ Westphal, *God, Guilt, and Death*, 29.

⁶⁹² Westphal, *God, Guilt, and Death*, 41-42.

absoluteness it has as the determiner of value and function for itself and others. Consistent with Seligman's analysis, the sacred appears as the ultimate and non-negotiable basis of all human forms of negotiation.

And so we find in Westphal's analysis the basic outlines of a consciousness constituted by immediate experience of the sacred; and it is this which forms the core of religious experience and tradition. In its original appearance as transcendent and wholly other, the sacred evokes feelings of ontological inadequacy; its original appearance as simultaneously terrifying and fascinating evokes ambivalent feelings and paradoxical conceptions and expressions. Such experience undermines the self's experience of centrality and control in a fundamental way and opens it up to a relation of submission, or at least respect, to the worth of a heteronomous source of value.

Notably, Otto's seminal use of the concept of "wholly other" is later coopted in different forms by phenomenological work of Sartre, Levinas, Derrida, and others. However, in these cases the idea that the human other is *wholly* other and worthy of ultimate respect must be asserted and argued for

against the grain of common experience.⁶⁹³ The self's immediate experience of the human other does not typically evoke the response of complete dumfoundedness as to his or her nature and fear and fascination with regard to his or her designs on me. If nothing else, at the very least I recognize the basic fact that we are of the same species and subject to the same physical constraints, especially mortality. The transcendent sacred, on the other hand is originally conceived as such because it is originally experienced as such. That these theorists must resort to religious language to make their case is a direct result of the fact that religious experience *per se* is the home of the phenomenon they seek to reproduce.

CSORDAS: RELIGIOUS CONSTITUTION AND ALTERITY

In an analysis that turns the above approaches a bit on their head, anthropologist Thomas J. Csordas proposes that religion begins not from the experience of the "wholly" other, but rather from the experience of the "intimate" other. And although he characterizes the relationship between religion and alterity in a very different way than the above theorists, Csordas' analysis is instructive precisely in its unexpected approach. In contrast with

⁶⁹³ For example, in order to demonstrate the absolute transcendence of the Other, Sartre must argue specifically against more intuitive behaviorist models of our experience of other people. See Sartre, *BN*, III.i.2 &4.

approaches like those of Otto, Westphal, or Seligman, which locate the efficacy of religion in the experience or conception of the transcendent and work their way from the top down, or perhaps from the outside in, Csordas begins with the immanent or “intimate” as he calls it, and works his way out and up. As a corrective to the approaches of such phenomenologists of religion (he cites Otto, van der Leeuw, and James specifically), he seeks an approach that “does not have to do exclusively with a personal religion experienced in solitude,” but rather can account for the religious aspect of life as being a “ground for intersubjectivity and, by extension, collectivity.”⁶⁹⁴ Csordas proposes that in order to more effectively isolate the “phenomenological kernel”⁶⁹⁵ of religion, “[i]nstead of examining the most religious moments of the most religious man, we want to know about the most marginally religious moments of the least religious person.”⁶⁹⁶ Accordingly, Csordas proceeds to find the least common

⁶⁹⁴ Csordas, 173. Csordas cites Charles Taylor as noting that approaches of the early phenomenologists of religion like Otto and, more specifically, William James, are “predicated upon the development of a kind of personal religion that was made possible by Protestantism and that today has evolved into a post-Durkheimian expressive individualism in which ‘a host of urban monads hover on the boundary between solipsism and communication’ (p. 86) and in which the emphasis of religion has ‘shifted more and more toward the strength and genuineness of the feelings rather than toward the nature of their object’ (p. 99).”

⁶⁹⁵ Thomas J. Csordas, “Asymptote of the Ineffable: Embodiment, Alterity, and the Theory of Religion,” *Current Anthropology*, 45:2 (April 2004):164.

⁶⁹⁶ Csordas, 166.

denominator that underlies all forms of religious experience and expression, be they mystical, mythical, or mundane.

According to Csordas, the religious experience of the wholly other originates from the experience of embodied alterity. He explains that this original and universal experience of alterity arises because, “the inescapability of our embodied nature and the limitations it imposes contribute to the feeling that our bodies are in a sense ‘other’ than ourselves.”⁶⁹⁷ To illustrate his point, Csordas gives several examples of embodied alterity such as the experience of viewing oneself in a mirror, pregnancy in the case of females, and the appearance and disappearance of the phallus in the case of males.⁶⁹⁸ In each case one’s own body is experienced to some extent as a foreign body. But the most illustrative example he cites is the well-known one given by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in which my left hand touches my right while the right hand touches some other object. In such a case I simultaneously experience my right hand as sensing and sensed. Merleau-Ponty comments that this

⁶⁹⁷ Csordas, 170.

⁶⁹⁸ Reminding us of Schleiermacher’s definition of religious experience as a feeling of dependency by way of reference to Otto’s creature-feeling, Csordas makes a direct connection between embodied alterity and religious experience saying, “Thus there are two gendered modes of intimate embodied otherness with different valences of dependency and therefore different potentials for becoming vehicles of the divine. From this standpoint, the recurrence of the phallus and the pregnant female in religious symbolism does far more than to signal the veneration of potency or fertility,” (171).

is a reversibility always imminent and never realized in fact. My left hand is always on the verge of touching my right hand touching the things, but I never reach coincidence; the coincidence eclipses at the moment of realization, and one of two things always occurs: either my right hand really passes over to the rank of touched, but then its hold on the world is interrupted; or it retains its hold on the world, but then I do not really touch *it*—my right hand touching, I palpate with my left hand only its outer covering.⁶⁹⁹

Thus there is a “fundamental fission or segregation of the sentient and the sensible.”⁷⁰⁰ As immediate or intimate as my experience of my right hand is, there is always a gap between the moment in which I sense it and that in which I sense with it. In the latter it is I who sense some other object through my hand; in the former I sense myself as the other object.

Similar in many respects to Sartrean notions of consciousness, Csordas finds this gap to be the key to our ability to relate to and in the world. Using Merleau-Ponty’s terminology, he refers to this gap as *écart* and explains it as a

space of non-coincidence that resists articulation . . . the unrepresentable space of differentiation . . . the invisible ‘hinge’ that both makes reversibility [between the sensible and the sentient] possible and, simultaneously, prevents it from being fully achieved.⁷⁰¹

Further, as

“the moment of disincorporation that makes all forms of corporeal differentiation possible, is also precisely what allows us to establish boundaries between bodies, boundaries that must be respected in order

⁶⁹⁹ Merleau-Ponty as cited in Csordas, 171.

⁷⁰⁰ Merleau-Ponty as cited in Csordas, 171.

⁷⁰¹ Gail Weiss as cited in Csordas, 171.

to respect the agencies that flow from them"... Yet it is the ground not only for boundaries but for intersubjectivity and intercorporeality. To reiterate, the *écart* "founds transitivity from one body to another."⁷⁰²

There are two important features to note in Csordas' explication: First, the *écart* is fundamental to the human experience of embodiment and, as such, so is alterity. Secondly, in some sense, there is no experience without this *écart*. Just as the nothingness of Sartrean consciousness allows the self to stand apart from the world to question and assess it,⁷⁰³ it is precisely in forming boundaries through a lack of coincidence within the self that the *écart* engenders the possibility of communication across the boundary. The *écart* forms the basis of differentiation which then allows for relation between the self and the differentiated aspects of the body, the bodies of others, and the world.

Now, in a move that follows, but is not entirely intuitive, Csordas argues that this fundamental experience of alterity forms the basis for the possibility of religious experience and expression. As he puts it,

...this inevitable moment of embodied otherness [is] the kernel of the self's alterity (an inner reversibility that corresponds to the reversibility

⁷⁰² Gail Weiss and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, respectively, as cited in Csordas, 171.

⁷⁰³ See Chapter 3. "Our 'sense of self', in Sartre's view, is ...to be understood as a negativity because we are at a distance from ourselves since our conscious awareness drives a gap between us and the world... my sense of self is precisely my ability to nihilate the world by questioning and doubting it (I *am* just this nihilating activity in relation to the world)," (Linsenbard, 40).

between self and other) and hence of the alterity that is ultimately elaborated into the religious sentiment in all its multitude of forms.⁷⁰⁴

He explains that alterity, being fundamental to human experience, enters into all aspects of human life, but finds its most radical expression in the form of religion.

To state this point in more general terms, when alterity is elaborated as oppression of the other we are in the domain of politics; when it is elaborated as striking beauty we are in the domain of art and aesthetics; when it is elaborated as competition we are (perhaps) in the domain of athletics; but when it is elaborated as alterity in and for itself, we are in the domain of religion.⁷⁰⁵

For Csordas, the wholly other can only be conceived because at the very core of our experience lies the intimate other that comes with the fact of embodiment.

According to Csordas,

the phenomenologists' error was to make a distinction between the object and the subject of religion when the actual object of religion is objectification itself, the rending apart of subject and object that makes us human... The "object" of religion is not the other; it is the existential aporia of alterity itself.⁷⁰⁶

Thus, religion is, not as Westphal posits, a matter of ontological inadequacy or, as Seligman suggests, a matter of salvational dramas that redefine human agency and responsibility; for Csordas, religion is nothing other than a grappling with

⁷⁰⁴ Csordas, 171.

⁷⁰⁵ Csordas, 173.

⁷⁰⁶ Csordas, 167. Reading this statement one cannot help but note its consistency with our discussion in Chapter 3 of Augustine's account of his spiritual journey being initiated by his becoming a question to himself.

the mystery of the self' ability to negotiate in a world of which and from which it simultaneously feels so radically (a)part.

And yet these three notions are not unrelated. In Seligman's model the *idea* of the transcendent, as mediated through historical tradition, provides the basis of justice and secures shared standards for action. It is upon this basis that experiences of conflict within the self and between self and other are mediated. When such standards are conformed to, self and other are brought together into community. In Westphal's model the immediate *experience* of the transcendent as a source of ultimate worth forms the basis for conceptual frameworks that include and dictate the terms of agency and interaction for self, other, and world. In Csordas, the relationships are maintained, but the order of operations is reversed. The immediate experience of *embodied alterity* is abstracted into the problem of alterity in general. But inherent in *this* notion of alterity is the *écart*; in a model where receptivity is coeval with and as important as agency, a gap also serves as the bridge in the negotiation between self and other. In all three cases, the experience of alterity, rather than the experience of autonomy, fundamentally defines the realm of religion and the experience of the self. And while in Csordas's model we find the most literal formulation of the "organic" relationship between religion and a basis of relation which transcends the self,

they all find that religion, in particular and to a greater extent than other areas of human endeavor, precisely through its accentuation of alterity, captures and expresses our sense of the necessity of communication, shared space, and shared good between self and other. As Csordas puts it, "religion is predicated on and elaborated from a primordial sense of 'otherness' or alterity. Furthermore, because of this the religious sensibility exists sui generis, that is, is not reducible to any other category."⁷⁰⁷

Perhaps this fundamental link between alterity and religion is a clue as to why we find many postmodern theorists of alterity resorting to religious language despite their rejection of traditional forms of religion. Even some theorists of religion who critique approaches that rely on personal experience of the transcendent find that they nonetheless reveal in religion an "openness to the foreign and unfamiliar, the particular and incidental, yes, even the extreme and the brainsick."⁷⁰⁸ And, as Csordas comments, "this openness to otherness and the unfamiliar is precisely the route by which we can and must trace the link between personal experience and... the 'conflicts and dilemmas of our age.'"⁷⁰⁹

⁷⁰⁷ Csordas, 164.

⁷⁰⁸ Clifford Geertz as cited in Csordas, 166.

⁷⁰⁹ Csordas, 166.

RELIGION OR RELIGIOSITY?

And so we come to the issue of alterity, religious experience, and religious conflict. Even if we admit, as Seligman, Westphal, and Csordas would have us, that religious consciousness holds at its core an openness to alterity and transcendence, then why, we must ask, do religious people and institutions so often react violently against those others who do not share their beliefs or practices instead of negotiating across the gap that both divides and relates them? The complex truth is, as the work of all three indicates, alterity can not only be conceptualized into the divine and transformed into the basis for identity, familiarity, and community, but it can also be elaborated into the monstrous.⁷¹⁰ If we are to insist that on the basis of alterity that the former constitutes a fundamental movement in religious life, then we must also admit and account for the undeniable incidence of the latter.

In *After God*, Mark C. Taylor makes a distinction between religion and religiosity that may be helpful as a starting point in parsing out the dynamics that constitute a religious self or community in one way or the other. Like most

⁷¹⁰ "...alterity is an elementary constituent of subjectivity and intersubjectivity, and this is how it is part of the structure of being-in-the-world. Not only can it be elaborated into the monstrous as well as the divine but it can be transformed into identity, intimacy, or familiarity," (Csordas, 164).

theorists, Taylor sees religion as a meaning-making activity. Most concisely, “...meaning-making is most consequential insofar as it is a bridge between cultural representations and transpersonal processes, on the one hand, and bodily processes and embodied subjectivity, on the other.”⁷¹¹ In other words, religious systems incorporate information from all aspects of life, including the social, biological, environmental, technological, etc., to produce an overarching understanding of the world that encompasses them all. The process is complex, time-consuming and, while not always conscious, extremely effectual and powerful in influencing or even determining behavior. As Taylor explains, having undergone this arduous process,

Religious traditions and cultural institutions tend to be deeply resistant to change. Conservatives cling to the old and resist the new. There are, of course, different degrees of resistance, ranging from traditionalists to reactionaries. When societies change, many seek security and stability through traditional beliefs and practices. As the rate of change increases, a more radical reaction tends to set in. True believers set themselves apart from infidels by constructing an ideal past, which, they believe, has been corrupted in the present. The goal becomes to “recover” this past by purifying the present through the conversion or elimination of nonbelievers. Devotion to this reactionary agenda tends to absolutize faith in unquestionable foundational principles and, in many cases, is accompanied by total obedience to authoritative figures.⁷¹²

⁷¹¹ Csordas, 166.

⁷¹² M. Taylor, 23.

Taylor's comments give a very concise, but nonetheless apt, summary of the process through which religious fundamentalism develops (at least in the Western context) and through which the religious intuition of alterity becomes elaborated in the direction of the monstrous. First, the familiarity and community forged in relation to the divine other is conflated into identity with the divine other (e.g. the sentiment that "God is on our side,") in such a way that the human other becomes represented as a monster and threat. And second, the violations and violence which then become justifiable to defend against this threat are themselves often nothing short of monstrous.

There is often a tendency to reject these negative expressions as being corruptions rather than true expressions of religious insight. Taylor himself makes a distinction between religion and religiosity in which he argues that

Religion degenerates into religiosity when the finite as such is absolutized by constructing foundations that are purported to be unshakable. Fixed structures, however, cannot adapt to changing circumstances. Excessive order, paradoxically, drifts toward chaos....⁷¹³

Translating into Csordas' terms, the initial process of meaning-creation engendered by the "phenomenological kernel" of religion degenerates into a rejection of the continuation of that process. There is no longer communication

⁷¹³ M. Taylor, 347.

across the *écart*, but rather enclosure within the immanence of one's own position. According to such an understanding, the move from religion to religiosity comes from the self's desire to move beyond the initial moment of "ambivalence" and "ontological inadequacy" toward stability. The self (individual or communal) forsakes its original openness to alterity in favor of attaching itself to stable forms to such an extent that the possible benefits or even reality of alterity are then excluded. According to Taylor, "Religiosity, however, is not the same as religion. When understood in all its rich complexity, religion does not simply provide secure foundations but destabilizes every type of religiosity by subverting... oppositional logic..."⁷¹⁴

According to Taylor, religion is *supposed to* both provide stability and undermine it. By his own definition,

Religion is an emergent, complex, adaptive network of symbols, myths, and rituals that, on the one hand, figure schemata of feeling, thinking, and acting in ways that lend life meaning and purpose and, on the other, disrupt, dislocate, and disfigure every stabilizing structure.⁷¹⁵

For Taylor, the power and *essence* of a religious system, like *any other* adaptive symbolic network, is in its ability to incorporate new and even conflicting information into its understanding of the world. In response to the tendency of

⁷¹⁴ M. Taylor, 4.

⁷¹⁵ M. Taylor, 13.

traditional religious establishments to curtail this process, Taylor, like many postmodern theorists of religion, proposes a form of religion without religion as an alternative. Taylor bases this recommendation on the understanding that

God is not the ground of being that forms the foundation of all beings but the figure constructed to hide the originary abyss from which everything emerges and to which all returns. While this abyss is no thing, it is not nothing— neither being nor nonbeing, it is the anticipatory wake of the unfigurable that disfigures every figure as if from within. Far from simply destructive, disfiguring is the condition of the possibility of creative emergence. Even when expected, emergence is surprising— without surprise, there is no novelty; without novelty, there is no creativity; without creativity, there is no life.⁷¹⁶

Keeping within the frame of traditional postmodern theory, in Taylor's model the transcendent does not and cannot serve as the legitimate core of religion; rather, religious structures, like all others, are engendered by an immanent, unnamable, formless, unconditioned, and eternally dynamic source of all contingent forms. Because identity emerges as closed off and fixed when the self encounters or conceives of the divine as a transcendent other, Taylor argues that any model that does not embrace the structure he proposes will be characterized by necessarily oppositional relationships that lead to death. The ideal of self-certainty is itself detrimental to the continuation of the divine expression of life itself. And so, instead of fixating on fixity, he proposes that any meaning-making

⁷¹⁶ M. Taylor, 345.

system follow the following four principles: 1) Embrace complexity, 2) Promote cooperation as much as competition, 3) Accept volatility, and 4) Cultivate uncertainty.⁷¹⁷

In response to the general human tendency to seek stable, lasting, and fulfilling structures through which to experience life, he asserts,

To live within the confines of the expected, which seems to provide stability, security, and certainty, is to be dead even when alive; to be exposed to the unexpected is to be open to the chance of life— and of death. This opening is the space-time of the desire that does not seek satisfaction but cultivates the dissatisfaction that issues in endless restlessness. Satisfaction is entropic— it is the equilibrium that brings everything to a halt; dissatisfaction is negentropic— it is the disequilibrium that keeps everything in motion. Restlessness need not always lead to the melancholy of unhappy consciousness that wallows in interminable mourning but can engender the vitality that in-forms creativity. *The dissatisfaction with satisfaction and satisfaction with dissatisfaction mark the end of the end that brings everything to a close.* What the apocalyptic imagination in all of its guises regards as life eternal is eternal death. Eternal life is the endless restlessness of a creative process that is the Infinite.

In a move that is very similar to Sartre's, to counteract the attachment to absolute forms which closes self off from other, Taylor proposes a system in which the goal of stability as such is entirely eschewed. But according to Taylor's words, it

⁷¹⁷ M. Taylor, 356-358.

is not just dynamism but rather *restlessness* that replaces any fixed form as the *ideal* of religious life.⁷¹⁸

Besides being based on a theological claim about the nature of the divine that seems to be an inappropriate source of data for an analytical study of religion, Taylor's proposal seems to sidestep his own recognition that the process of meaning-making requires stable forms, at least in the intermediate term. Formlessness is idealized above form. As such, Taylor's system does not provide any parameters for the intermediate forms that any schemata must take. Instead, the religion Taylor espouses advocates for a faith that "embraces uncertainty and insecurity as conditions of creative emergence. If faith is not strong enough to rise to the challenge of affirming life in the face of impending death, nothing else matters."⁷¹⁹

But inasmuch as Taylor finds destabilization to be an essential component of religious dynamics,⁷²⁰ his system figures its destructive moments as both inevitable and in some ways desirable. Thus he affirms disfigurement and destruction as necessary components, not just of religion or of contingent human existence, but of the fabric of reality as such; I find it difficult to reconcile this

⁷¹⁸ I highlight this distinction because I realize that the

⁷¹⁹ M. Taylor, 376. We might recall here Carlson's arguments at the end of Chapter 4.

⁷²⁰ M. Taylor, 345. Emphasis added.

position with his appeal to a system in which the destruction or disfiguring of the other could or would not find expression. When he concludes that “the only adequate ethics in emerging network culture is *an ethics without absolutes*,”⁷²¹ like Sartre, he leaves us without any real basis for formulating the shape of ethics. Even if we admit only life itself as the ultimate sacred and its preservation at all costs as the basis of ethics, we are still left with a system in which all forms are equally valuable and destruction and death are integral, essential, and as such desirable aspect of the divine expression of life. Within such a system, there is no reason why I should not prefer the other’s death over my own in the effort to preserve life.

Admittedly, one of the strongest critiques made of determinate systems of religious ethics is that, because they operate according to an oppositional logic engendered by transcendent conceptions of the divine, justice within such systems

inevitably means the justice of a particular ideology and hence means violence for those excluded... determinate, contentful religion always ends up in war, precisely because of its determination to guard the contents of its positive revelation... historically determined religions,

⁷²¹ M. Taylor, 358. Emphasis in original.

inasmuch as they are particular, will necessarily produce violence because of competing claims.⁷²²

Proposals such as Taylor's strive to retain the respect for alterity and life that seems to be an integral aspect of religious life while avoiding the conflict that competing truth claims seems to engender. The objective of such moves is to find an abstraction or generalizable structure that applies equally to all traditions and all historical contexts so as to remove the basis for conflict.⁷²³ If we can refigure the particularities of space and time as simply being incidental instantiations of the same universal principle then, so the hope goes, we can all stop fighting over differences that are not really there.

Taylor's approach is just one instantiation of this general approach to religion. Perhaps its most famous proponent is Jacques Derrida. It is with Derrida that the phrase "religion without religion" is most closely associated and it is his work that provides much of the theoretical framework for such moves. But in a clever article, James K.A. Smith demonstrates that even Derrida's own formulation of the "messianic without messianisms" is itself based on a

⁷²² Smith, "Determined Violence," 201, 207,208.

⁷²³ Smith, "Determined Violence," 200-203. "...an irreducible event or revelation-by means of translation, abstraction, formalization, and so forth-is introduced into philosophy or a certain kind of phenomenology, such that the structure then bears a universal weight as the description of a universal structure that has no need of the religious event which occasioned its identification. As such, it bears a universal validity and marks a universal responsibility," (205).

determinate historical and traditional content.⁷²⁴ If this is in fact the case, then, according to the preceding logic we have two options: 1) concede that, because it cannot escape its own historical context, even a “religion without religion” will result in violence;⁷²⁵ or, if we want to preserve the contributions to the fundamental respect for life and alterity that religion offers, 2) concede that it is not determinate forms *per se* that lead to violence but rather the particular form chosen.

Smith, opting for the latter, argues that we

must concede that the content of... determinate messianisms are not necessarily violent, though they may at times produce violence, even in the name of that content (event, revelation, Book)... What if, perhaps, instead of construing every determinate religion as a violent fundamentalism—which would have to include Derrida's... religion inasmuch as it is conditioned by a determinate place and history—we were to understand religion, in a fundamentally deconstructive gesture, as pharmacological, site of both poison and cure, violence and peace, exclusion and healing. Would not a more consistent and persistent deconstructive indication of the *pharmakon* be forced to admit... the healing possibilities of fundamentalism (though not ignoring its other

⁷²⁴ While demonstrating this requires a more detailed and subtle analysis in terms of Derrida, it is immediately obvious, for example, with Taylor. His model relies heavily on current understandings of genetic and computer network modeling. Further he also relies heavily on Hegelian reformulations of Trinitarian theology (e.g. p.153). The structures he proposes as being universal and eternal fundamentals of reality are formulations based on available information from the Western scientific and philosophical traditions.

⁷²⁵ Again, while parsing this option out for Derrida is more challenging, this option is more than evident in Taylor's formulation. Taylor's claims about the divine stand in direct opposition, i.e. make competing truth claims, to those of traditional forms of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. As such his formulations are just as susceptible to engendering conflict as any traditional religious formulations.

poisonous form)? Must we not do so, inasmuch as a religion apart from historical determination is inaccessible and, given the danger, undesirable? In other words, if it is impossible to have a purely structural religion, but discourse nevertheless remains grounded in some faith and the structure of justice remains a religious structure of alterity and transcendence, then we must address how particular, determinate, religious faith plays a role in the call for justice, and how it can be kept from violence... The means, then, of avoiding violence would not be a suspension of religious content or the production of a "religion without religion" but rather an ethical vigilance accompanied by a recognition of the integral role of determinate religions in the production and determination of justice.⁷²⁶

Smith notes that religion apart from historical determination is not only inaccessible because of its lack of specification for determinate forms and actions, but is also undesirable because it inevitably invokes, like any other religion, a "wholly other"⁷²⁷ to serve as a transcendent basis of justice. But, using the objection originally made of concrete religions, he reminds us:

Has not history demonstrated that transcendentals divorced from place and history have been the justification for the most horrifying crimes against those confined to the "wrong place and time," those from a different place?... And if so, how is it that Derrida [or any of his disciples, for that matter] assumes that the desertification of determinate structures will somehow prevent violence or signal justice?⁷²⁸

Humans live within the concrete realms of history, space, and place. Smith's argument is primarily that if we want to preserve concrete instantiations of

⁷²⁶ Smith, "Determined Violence," 211.

⁷²⁷ Even Taylor's immanent and unconditioned "original abyss" is "wholly other" to concrete human experience which requires forms and structures.

⁷²⁸ Smith, "Determined Violence," 210.

justice within our concrete existence then we must also preserve the determinate bases upon which we formulate those positions. But in Smith's view, differences between determinate forms are not simply apparent. They are substantive. If we want to preserve Derrida's (and many others') intuition that religious life fundamentally entails a call to justice then we must be willing to negotiate through whatever forms are inconsistent with or do not result in such justice.

Perhaps, in keeping with Smith's argument, and as our analysis of Augustine points out, we should not dismiss the tendency of religious traditions to fixate on fixity as mere "religiosity;" rather it may be more fruitful to understand that, just as the desire for stability is part and parcel of human experience in general, this dynamic is part and parcel of genuine religious experience as well. Within the religious context, and especially in messianic religions, relinquishing certainty now is not the same as forsaking the possibility of certainty ever. Contrary to Mark Taylor's view (and Sartre's for that matter), the issue with religious life is not the seeking of stability, it is the form which this stability takes; the problem is not the dynamic by which the process operates but the what, where, and when of the endpoint it envisions.⁷²⁹

⁷²⁹ The recognition of this as a problem in religious life is not new. In more familiar terms, at least in the West, this is the problem of idolatry. Whenever a finite form is worshipped as

Seligman's work shares both Taylor's concern for mitigating our "obsession with and quest for certainty"⁷³⁰ that leads to closure before the other and Smith's understanding that eschewing all concrete forms of religious expression is neither a practical nor effective way to proceed. Instead, Seligman, recognizing that determinate beliefs are often conflicting beliefs, proposes that if we are to work toward real justice and recognition, we approach conflicting views not from a perspective of indifference but rather from an attitude of "principled toleration."

This type of toleration, he explains,

first and foremost must rest on some belief; otherwise the whole issue of tolerance becomes moot.⁷³¹

Tolerance of something, we must never forget, implies tolerance of practices and beliefs whose validity or normative status we reject as wrong, unreasonable, or undesirable. Otherwise we would not need to be tolerant of it. Tolerance does not, however, involve coming to accept these beliefs as correct or somehow less wrong. Rather, it involves the ability to abide beliefs we continue to think of as wrong or misguided... Thus, toleration involves some tension between commitment to one's own set of values or principles or religious edicts and a willingness to put

an end in itself instead of being used in service of the true infinite God who created all forms, corruption and injustice ensue. But traditionally the remedy in such a case is not to negate the function and significance of the finite created forms, but rather to relativize their value in terms of the object that is more truly deserving of worship and is actually able to deliver the desired results.

⁷³⁰ Seligman, 129.

⁷³¹ Seligman, 138.

up with, to abide, those of the other who adheres to beliefs that one thinks are wrong.⁷³²

It is because religious traditions include concrete formulations of right, wrong, acceptable and unacceptable, that Seligman argues that “it is precisely within a religious orientation that one can find the foundation of... a real toleration.”⁷³³

But, contrary to common misconception, stresses Seligman,

people do not become more tolerant by finding certain behavior less objectionable. Quite the opposite, for approved conduct does not need to be tolerated. It is rather in behavior found objectionable, yet unjudged, that tolerance would seem to rest.⁷³⁴

Tolerance requires maintaining a delicate tension between committing firmly to what one believes is right and living peacefully with those whom he believes are in the wrong. Between determinations of right and wrong there is space made for things to remain “objectionable, yet unjudged.” But the only way to make this space is to approach one’s own beliefs with some measure of skepticism.

And, surprisingly, Seligman argues that the basis for this orientation is *also* found within religious tradition. We must remember, he says, that there are

those aspects within the different religious traditions that point the way not to a self-satisfied and comfortable validation of oneself and one’s belief structure... but rather to an openness to the stranger, to the other, and hence to ethical behavior informed by the principle of tolerance.

⁷³² Seligman, 133.

⁷³³ Seligman, 133.

⁷³⁴ Seligman, 133.

Those aspects of belief open us as well to doubt and uncertainty and to the responsibilities demanded by that very uncertainty. In fact, the obligations that uncertainty imposes are arguably greater than those imposed by certainty itself.⁷³⁵

Among many other examples, Seligman's words bring to mind the New Testament parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10) and the Hebrew Bible account of Abraham and the three strangers at Mamre (Genesis 18). In both cases, personal cost and the very real risk of violent threat are subordinated in favor of bestowing blessings upon a stranger. And in each case, the protagonist's actions result in his receiving his own blessings. Thus, within the tradition, this particular type of risk, the risk of blessing the other even if he appears as a threat, is commended as the kind of risk that will be rewarded.

Further, as mentioned above, Seligman argues that the tension between various religious beliefs and practices, as well as the tension between reason and revelation, "tend to undermine the taken-for-grantedness of the beliefs and values of modernity."⁷³⁶ So not only do religious traditions have internal components that advocate for openness, but in the inevitable tension between revelation and experience produces an external impetus for skepticism as well.

⁷³⁵ Seligman, 131-132.

⁷³⁶ Seligman, 138.

Seligman specifically contrasts this religious approach to tolerance based on openness toward the other and skepticism toward the self with approaches of modern liberalism based on notions of the good of individual autonomy. He argues that the resistance of modern notions of self and society to the existence of absolute or transcendent goods results in a

politics of rights over good, of individual autonomy over shared public conceptions of the good, often leads to tolerance not in principle but simply as a temporary expedient, until such non-autonomy valuing subgroups come to share the assumptions of liberalism.⁷³⁷

His point is that such an attitude is not really tolerance and does not exhibit any more openness or willingness to advocate for the good of the other or positions of shared good than do positions of religious absolutism. But in the case of the latter, there actually remains some basis for self-critique—even if achieving it is difficult. In essence, Seligman’s argument intends to highlight that a religious self is specifically constituted in ways that more readily lend it to positions of genuine tolerance than can be expected from selves constituted primarily by constructs in which all positions are relativized or subsumed uncritically into some schemata where *is* obviates *ought*.

⁷³⁷ Seligman, 135.

Perhaps what we learn here from reviewing the thoughts and intuitions of these theorists is not that we should refrain from forming any concrete idea of the divine, but that if our idea of the divine results in our own enactment of the monstrous we should be open to amending our idea. As Seligman advises, the solution is not to reject formal expressions of religion—for religion cannot fulfill its function of meaning-making and community building without them. But from firm positions of principled belief we must act with principled toleration and display “humility then in all directions— of both faith and of reason. The absolute and univocal claims of both must thus be brought together in a dialogue that would, of necessity, question the very ‘givenness’ of each’s certitudes.”⁷³⁸

CLOSING REMARKS

In this final chapter, in trying to point to an aspect of religion that serves as a foil to modern notions of the autonomous self, we have mirrored the arguments and dynamics presented in Part II of the dissertation but on the level of religious theory in general. I recognize that by incorporating a range of theorists I have kept my own working definition of religion vague. But I reiterate that my goal is not to come to a definitive understanding of what religion is, but

⁷³⁸ Seligman, 128.

to make the point that in whatever form it takes, alterity and the *value* of alterity for the constitution of the self turn up as an integral aspect. In the above analysis we have (primarily) seen the work of three very different theorists who approach religion from different directions and end up in different places. And yet all, taking religion as a phenomenon in its own right, discover within the realm of religious belief and practice an essential element of decentering. Whether through skepticism, ontological inadequacy, or embodied alterity, all find some factor of destabilization that is foreign to the modern notion of the self or to the civil conception of the transcendent that forms the basis of contemporary politics and society. I recognize that my review of the above theorists constitutes neither a comprehensive survey of each in their own right nor of theories of the origin of religion in general; I would like to note, however, that collectively they directly encompass, reflect on, and build on the work of theorists of religion ranging, among others, from Hegel, Nietzsche and Freud; to James, Otto, Eliade and Durkheim; to Heidegger and Derrida. Based on this I believe that their work, if not conclusive, is at least indicative of this principle: when we approach religion as a phenomenon in its own right, we will discover that the experience *and value* of alterity in constituting the self serves as its motivating dynamic.

It is this openness to alterity as a constitutive element of the self that marks the difference between what constitutes a religious self and the obsession with autonomy that is constitutive of the modern self. That is not to say that this malady of modernity does not at times find expression in religious life, but it is to say that ultimately it cannot consistently be valued there in the same way. And it is precisely for this reason that religious life offers a much needed alternative to modern conceptions of self and society.

Despite many efforts and predictions to the contrary, religion in its determinate and, unfortunately, sometimes violent forms is not disappearing, but rather seems to be digging in its heels. And so, as Seligman writes,

This, then, is the challenge facing us all. If the secularization thesis has indeed been proved incorrect and the further progress of modernity—and perhaps even postmodernity—is not to be accompanied by the further spread of a secular consciousness but by some sort of return to religious orientations, then how can a principled position of toleration be maintained? *For such a return, I maintain, is almost mandated by the human need for self-expression, by the need for at least a certain aspect of self to be seen as constituted by a heteronomous authority and not simply as autonomous.* As people return to positions of principled belief, there is the possibility either of returning to some of the most horrendous authoritarian terrors of the past or, as I believe is preferable and possible, of resurrecting a language of toleration based on skepticism towards one's own principled beliefs... *the problem [is] not what one believes but how one believes.*⁷³⁹

⁷³⁹ Seligman, 141. Emphasis added.

For if we are careful about *how* we believe, we will then be open to amending *what* we believe if and when we find that it is incommensurate with the call of justice—for we will then understand that in being detrimental to the other it is inevitably detrimental to the self.

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EDUCATION

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January 2011
Master of Arts in Religious Studies
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Boston University, Boston MA

May 2003
Bachelor of Arts in Economics with Minor in Computer Science- Summa cum Laude
College of Arts and Sciences Honors Program
Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Teaching Fellow, RN103: World Religions East
Fall 2010/Professor Thomas Michael & Fall 2008/Professor David Eckel

RN103 is a course designed to introduce students to the basic world views and practices of the religions of Asia. As a Teaching Fellow for this course I held weekly discussion sections in which I presented and reviewed course material and led exercises in which the students further explored the concepts discussed in lecture. In addition to designing quizzes, grading assignments, and generally managing my discussion section, throughout the course I met with students regularly to plan and discuss papers and to offer suggestions as to how they might strengthen their writing skills to better communicate and develop their ideas about the course material.

Teaching Fellow, RN104: World Religions West, Boston University

Spring 2010/Professor Kecia Ali

As a TF I worked with Professor Kecia Ali in a course designed to expose students to the basics of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. My responsibilities included attending all lectures, holding regular office hours and grading student assignments. During this semester I was responsible for the lecture section on several occasions in which I would present new material, lead class discussion and conduct review sessions. I worked closely with students throughout the semester to clarify course material and develop ideas for course papers.

Teaching Fellow, RN220: Holy City: Jerusalem in Time Space and Imagination, Boston University

Fall 2009/Professor Michael Zank

As a TF I worked with Professor Michael Zank in a course designed to explore the development of Jerusalem as a Holy City and religious symbol in the traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The course worked to help students understand Jerusalem's current status by exploring the historical, geographic, and architectural developments through which all three traditions have come to lay claim to the city. My responsibilities included attending all lectures, holding regular office hours, and meeting with students to review material and discuss assignments. As there was a heavy writing component to the course, I spent much time editing and reviewing student essays and offering suggestions as to how to improve their writing. I was also responsible for grading all assignments and working with Professor Zank to assign final grades.

Teaching Fellow, RN101: The Bible, Boston University

Spring 2009/Professor Michael Zank

RN101 is a course that gives students an introduction to the Bible using the historical-critical method of Biblical studies. Students read sections of the Hebrew Bible, New Testament, and Apocrypha and learned to trace themes, motifs and symbols across the bodies of literature and track historical developments that led to the development of the writings themselves. My regular responsibilities included reviewing and grading all assignments and managing the administrative and logistical aspects of the course. During the semester I prepared optional discussion sections to review and explore the lecture material as well as holding regular office hours to meet with

students to discuss their progress and concerns in the course. For each lecture I produced an enhanced set of lecture notes which organized and clarified lecture material for the students. On occasion I was responsible for preparing and leading discussion in the Professor's absence.

WORK EXPERIENCE

Institute for Philosophy and Religion, Boston University

9/06- 5/08- Administrative Assistant

- Edit and produce programs, flyers, email announcements and other printed materials for Institute events.
- Coordinate logistics for the Institute's annual lecture series.
- Communicate with participants and program director regarding scheduling and travel arrangements.
- Manage budget and submit detailed expense reports.

ACADEMIC/TEACHING AWARDS

- **2012 DRTS Travel Grant**, Boston University, 2013- for scholarly travel to present a paper at 2012 American Academy of Religion Conference
- **Religion Department Award for Outstanding Teaching Fellow**, Boston University 2010 - For the TF/TA who, in the opinion of the department, has demonstrated the greatest skill, enthusiasm and dedication to his or her teaching
- **Giffuni Prize for Outstanding Thesis in Economics**, Boston College 2003

CONFERENCE PAPERS

"From Subjectivity to Solitude: Heidegger's Adaptation of Augustine's Absolute Other," presented at the *American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting*, Chicago, November 17, 2012

"Fourth Century Egyptian Theological Debates and Changing Monastic Ideals," presented at *The Fifth Annual Archbishop Iakovos Graduate Students Conference in Patristic Studies*, Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, March, 2009