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MORAL AGENCY AND FAITH: A CONSTRUAL OF LUTHER

by

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A THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty of Waterloo Lutheran Seminary

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To

Ben and Hannah

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this essay is to identify aspects of Martin Luther's view of moral agency and action. The study focuses on themes originating in the *Treatise on Good Works*, particularly the exposition of the Third Commandment: Thou shalt hallow the holy day. Here, the author presents the paradigmatic example of the experience of a participant in the liturgy of mass. The example shows that moral reflection about agency and action is inextricably linked, first, to the consciousness of the worshipper, second, to language – the use of metaphors, images and descriptive words – and third, to the normative, that is, a knowledge of the good.

Moral change is a basic feature of Luther's view of moral agency and moral reflection; it is construed as a transition from one state of consciousness or quality of mind to another such that moral life may be depicted under the metaphors of 'pilgrimage' or 'journey.' Applied to Luther's example, this means that the one participating in the liturgical action of mass undergoes a progressive change through a sequence of states and qualities of mind. Unique to Luther's view is the dominant role of faith in moral change prominent in the acts of attending and listening. This role is explicated using a performative model to identify the several elements of faith including the related notions of cognition and volition. So construed, faith signals Luther's attempt to identify a normative understanding of moral change at the heart of his theory of moral reflection. It does so by showing the development of faith through a series of gradations in levels of moral and spiritual awareness. As a person moves through this continuum there is a correlative and growing awareness of deception and reality, truth and falsity, good and evil as one seeks, struggles, learns and discovers. Moral life is thus envisaged as a process in which cognition and volition in the work of attention interact as the individual undergoes a process of education in faith. It is a process that moves toward a *telos* that Luther regards as a union of faith and love, *eucharistia*, and contextualized in an example of the marital relationship. While Luther's understanding of moral-spiritual change is correlative with the development of a moral psychology, it is crucial to note that central to that psychology is the claim that the moral agent is enveloped in original sin construed as a destructive egoism which pits itself against any or all moral development. For the author of the *Treatise on Good Works*, the remedial strategies to address this are central in the struggle for Christian moral life, and they involve a serious attentiveness to powerful images as well as the repeated discipline of training known as *askesis*.

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CHAPTER I

THE INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this essay is to examine aspects of Martin Luther's view of moral agency in the *Treatise on Good Works*.¹ This treatise originated with a body of pastoral writings published in 1519-1520 intended to benefit the congregation of the city church of Wittenberg where Luther served as pastor. Originally intended as a sermon for the congregation, it grew into a substantial book for a wider audience of Christian laity. Significantly, the book has a dedication to John, the brother of Elector Frederick, Luther's sovereign. Here, Luther identifies his theme as "the greatest question," that of "good works, where immeasurably more trickery and deception is practiced than anywhere else." "Yet of all things," he states, "good works should have a single, simple goodness. Without that they are just color, glitter and deceit."² To address the prevailing misunderstandings of good works, Luther unequivocally states that "The first thing to know is that there are no good works except those works God has commanded" and that "the highest and most precious of

¹ Martin Luther, "Treatise on Good Works," trans. W. A. Lambert, rev. by James Atkinson, in *Luther's Works*, vol. 44, *The Christian in Society*, James Atkinson, ed., Helmut T. Lehmann, gen. ed., (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 14 - 114. See especially the introduction, p. 17f.

Martin Luther, *A Treatise on Good Works Together With the Letter of Dedication* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1996) [database on-line]; available from Project Gutenberg, E-text number 418.

² *Ibid.*, 20.

all good works is faith in Christ.”³ Luther’s view of faith and works provides a fertile base for theological and ethical reflection on the theme of moral agency.

The view taken in this essay is not a defense of Luther’s view of moral agency but an attempt to identify significant theological aspects of moral agency as presented in the *Treatise on Good Works*. To realize this aim the view proposed does not take the form of a genetic argument identifying developments in Luther’s view from the early to the later years, though reference is made to a certain development in the concept of conscience. Again, though the essay will not provide a thorough examination of all major Lutheran texts, attention is directed to specific texts bearing on moral agency found in the *Treatise on Good Works*. The essay is more conceptual: it takes basic concepts in the structure of Luther’s exposition of the Third Commandment in the *Treatise of Good Works*, and uses these to interpret or construe his thinking about moral agency. Inevitably, many of the concepts are used by Luther and central to his position: e.g., faith, attention, mass, *eucharistia*, scale, etc., while other concepts are not so used but included because they either enable an interpretation of Luther’s view or the elucidation of a compatible view, e.g., consciousness, continuum, cognition, volition. In all instances these concepts are enlisted to point out specific aspects of Luther’s view of moral agency including the nature of moral change and his account of the chief obstacle to moral change. The term ‘moral agency’ is used in this context to name aspects of moral action in which an ‘act’ is the deed done; the ‘action’ the doing of it; and the ‘agent’ as the doer.⁴ The primary aspect of agency identifiable in Luther’s exposition is *consciousness* understood not only in the sense in which an agent’s subjectivity has the dimension of privacy and inwardness God-ward, but also in the sense in which it includes many

³ Ibid., 23.

⁴ *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics* (1967), s.v. “Act, Action, Agent.”
By John Macquarrie.

different aspects of knowledge. Consciousness designates that stream of images, thoughts, ideas, memories, attendings and believings that occupy the mind most of the time. So understood it is intimately connected with *language*, which mediates that knowledge by the use of many different value terms, images and metaphors associated with moral change. Further, in line with a traditional view of conscience and natural law, the knowledge involved in a moral agent's consciousness is inherently *normative* in a way that insures that reality is apprehended as a moral reality. Vital to Luther's view of agency throughout the analysis is a holistic view of action: that is, there are internal concomitants to overt human behavior that accompany and even initiate action.⁵ In this respect human moral agency is inextricably involved in moral change conceived of as transition from one state of consciousness to another. Such change, itself a faith-response to revelation, originates and is sustained in the interaction of knowing and willing in the work of attention. Although moral and spiritual change faces serious impediment in the form of original sin construed as a destructive egoism, Luther has proposed remedial strategies in the form of powerful images and the focused practice of *askesis*.

Methodology

Luther's theological method is exemplified in his exposition of the Third Commandment in the *Treatise on Good Works*. Here, his aim is to instruct "how we should relate ourselves to God in works" which includes attending to "divine service, such as hearing mass."⁶ He then proceeds to present an important example, a

⁵ It is important to note that in the construal proposed of Luther's account, 'act' is not restricted to overt behavior. Acts of attending, regarding or even believing are certainly done by an agent, but are not observable occurrences. In the analysis that follows these are depicted as in the verbal form as names of 'acts' which are the internal concomitants of overt behavior and essential ingredients for a plenary sense of 'act' or 'action.'

⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

description of the experience of a person who participates in the liturgy of mass.⁷ This example occupies a large part of the analysis of the present essay for a number of reasons. First, it determines the important range of explanatory subject matter that follows, viz., the themes of proclamation, prayer and *askesis* essential to the structure and understanding of mass. Taken together these make up the entire presentation of the Third Commandment.⁸ Second, the example functions to guide the work of interpreting basic elements of an ethical theory with the leading feature of moral and spiritual change. Finally, the example of the participant at mass supposes the moral agent to be an imaginative and self-interpreting person. In this respect, Luther's construction of what really happens in the liturgy of mass makes use of images, concepts and explanatory examples to depict how a person's thinking and perception are actively involved in his or her change of conduct. Like Plato's allegory of the prisoners in the cave who learn to distinguish between appearance and reality in the journey to the world of light, Luther describes the participant at mass as engaged in a sequence of perceptual changes initiated and sustained by a conscious and attentive faith. This example is repeatedly used throughout the essay and functions in numerous contexts to help illuminate several dimensions of Luther's thought.

Design of the Study: An Overview

In the first section of Chapter II, "The Liturgy of Mass," functions as the important preamble for an interpretation of Luther's exposition of the Third Commandment: "Thou shalt hallow the holy day."⁹ According to the method

⁷ Ibid., 55.

⁸ The first of these themes is that of proclamation addressed in section 3, the other is an extended discourse on Christian prayer in sections 4 to 16 while the final topic is that of the spiritual disciplines elucidated in sections 17-25.

⁹ Luther, *Treatise on Good Works*, p. 53.

mentioned above, he portrays a participant in attendance at mass identifying certain features pertinent to moral and theological reflection on agency. For example, it is the case that a moral theology, like any contemporary ethical method, may analyze the agent's public actions together with the decisions leading to those actions. This is no less true of the liturgical example of the participant at mass. The difference, however, is that Luther's description of the person at mass uses a distinctive language to address phenomena of inner consciousness: the role of attention and non-attention in faith, discernment and non-discernment, desire and its opposite. Because these references are somewhat varied and dispersed, I have chosen to gather them in topical fashion, and along with Luther's own statements, present statements from some Lutheran scholars, as well as my own analysis.

What is distinctive in the analysis of Luther's example are certain features of moral thinking, moral change and even moral struggle in a process of becoming better. The inclusion of an analysis of an inner life of change necessary for moral action and reflection introduces a more complex moral psychology than is usually found in contemporary moral theology or ethics. Specifically, it signals a shift in focus from a voluntarist view of the self to a more cognitive one and brings into focus the notion of consciousness rather than the will as the primary feature of moral agency. This is the theme of the section "Agency and Consciousness" in Chapter II, which identifies Luther's moral reflection as an activity linked to the privacy of individual consciousness. In this respect, Luther's example is composed of many descriptions of actions uniquely applicable to the states of mind of the individual. This includes a range of activities described in a 'vocabulary of inner awareness' that make up what Luther collectively names the 'exercise of faith.' Similar usages in Luther's example appear throughout other sections of this essay as descriptions highlighting the primacy of inner activity and the privacy basic to Luther's view of moral agency. This contributes to a view of the self as an agent constituted not only

by public choices, but also by inner beliefs, desires, and perceptions. This is the source of what Luther's interpreters have named a "moral psychology"¹⁰

Correlative to consciousness is the role of language used in an account of agency and Luther's view on this matter is developed with respect to two positions. The first is subjectivism reinforced by the emphasis on consciousness and claiming that what comes to expression in language is the self, that is, the speaker's feeling response to the world. In contrast, Expressivism holds that what comes to expression in language is the power of language as a structure of signs whose logical inter-relations transcend and preclude the subjectivity of any localized speaker. Luther's approach has features of both views. It seems evident that consciousness is important but not such as to reduce all linguistic expression to self-expression. On the other hand, linguistic structure is important as formative of human identity, but not such as to obscure consciousness. The description of the participant at mass in a vocabulary of inner awareness and the use of secondary moral epithets suggest elements of both subjectivism and expressivism; indeed, while Luther appears to acknowledge the socially and linguistically mediated nature of consciousness and the conventional use of linguistic forms, he is also insisting that human beings are creative and individual *users* of language even as language informs their identities.

Another theme in Luther's view of moral agency concerns the normative, that is, the sense in which there is a way to evaluate the activities of consciousness.¹¹ The question arises because of Luther's understanding that change in the participant at mass is 'progressive,' that is, it occurs over time and is ameliorative (i.e., moves in a

¹⁰ John Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth's Thought* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 166.

¹¹ It is suggestive that *The Treatise on Good Works* be understood as articulating a 'two-tiered' ethic where the more 'outer' public or social realm of behavior, choice and action is affirmed in the exposition of the Decalogue and complemented by the 'inner' more private realm of consciousness and subjectivity.

positive direction). The participant is envisaged as involved in moral and spiritual progress involving a conscious and focused moral effort. In this regard John Webster remarks that Luther's view of morality, in so far as it pertains to the good, "is a matter of the way in which human agents are *oriented* to a creative agency which is the origin, substance and fulfillment of their own acts. We are *inside* morality; we do not transcend it."¹² The implication for Luther's account of the participant at mass is that the kind of ethical norm we *experientially know* is mediated through the conflicting elements of human subjectivity. This takes two forms both addressed in Chapter II: the first is explicit in Luther's account as the concept of conscience that is construed here to mean that the good inheres consciousness. The second is not explicit but a conceptual construction consistent with Luther's view of change, that is, that the good is an implicit standard of perfection towards which consciousness is *oriented*. In sum, the view proposed is that the primary focus in Luther's account of moral agency in the context of the mass is a reaffirmation of a theological description of the mind or consciousness as the bearer of value and moral being and not simply a neutral surveyor of the facts.

Iris Murdoch said of Plato, "He was concerned throughout with how people can *change* their lives so as to become good."¹³ Moral change is also foundational to an understanding of Luther's view of the participant in the liturgy of the mass in which moral-spiritual change and the moral psychology used to explain it are basic to Luther's view of moral agency. The design of Chapter III commences with a characterization of moral change correlative to the view that consciousness is of the *esse* of the moral agent who has the capacity to use language as a medium of moral reflection. The uniqueness of Luther's view is located in the claim that change is

¹² Ibid., 153.

¹³ Iris Murdoch, "The Fire and The Sun," in *Existentialist and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, with a foreword by George Steiner, ed. Peter Conradi (New York: Allen Lane/The Penguin Press, 1997), 404.

initiated and sustained by the exercise of faith, a form of conscious attention or perception. The nature of this claim, construed as an action, is unpacked utilizing a performative model to identify those features of hearing, listening and attending, which together with knowing (cognition) and willing (volition), give faith an active and constructive role in the dynamics of moral change basic to moral agency. It is important to note that this construal of Luther's view does not mean that *all* these features are actually articulated in the example of the participant in mass. For example, the distinction between cognition and volition is not proposed as Luther's view, rather, these are proposed as an account of moral motivation and moral change that is compatible with Luther's remarks. Their inclusion here underlines the manner in which an account like Luther's may address some related issues implicit in moral agency: thinking, motivation and action.

While the performative model of Chapter III displays features accounting for the fact that faith is central to moral change, Luther also addresses this theme in other sections of the *Treatise on Good Works* where faith appears to develop through a series of 'levels' of moral and spiritual awareness. Luther provides an explicit example of this development that is addressed in Chapter IV. But it is important to observe that the notion of development is already implicit in Luther's example of the participant at mass and treated at length in Chapter III, "Phases of Faith." This notion is important to the moral and spiritual vision central to Luther's view of the moral agent who, with the capacity to receive faith, is now envisaged as actively moving through a continuum. That is, there is a growing awareness of deception and reality, truth and falsity, good and evil as one seeks, struggles, learns and discovers. The vision is one of moral life as a process of change facilitated by the exercise of faith in the work of attention that eventually culminates in an ideal *telos* of moral understanding in which Luther connects faith and love.

The introduction of the notion of change central to moral thinking suggests a view of the moral agent as a historic human individual rather than, for example, a rational agent or neutral observer. Yet such a view of human agency is not without difficulties. Chapter IV commences with a statement of the chief impediment to all positive moral change and progress. Though not a dominant theme in the example of the participant at mass, Luther, in the *Treatise on Good Works*, deploys a wide variety of descriptions of the fallen condition of humankind. One description focuses on that aspect of human fallenness understood as aberrant desire, an egoism located at the centre of the desire-laden and image-creating processes of human consciousness. Luther suggests some strategies in response to this egoism that form important ingredients to Christian life. The first of these appears in the section “Images of faith,” which cites those instances where Luther associates faith with many varied and rich images. These, it is proposed, seem to be a kind of ‘focal point’ around which much of the diffusion of energetic desire is organized suggesting that the quality and kind of the images to which we attend are deeply connected with our ability to envisage, choose and act. The role of images is best understood when the problem of egoism is depicted as *homo incurvatus in se* (the person turned in upon the self implying at least an attention turned in on itself), which in the context of our analysis of Luther suggests the role of images is that of redirecting attention as well as a change or transformation of desire.¹⁴ In sum, moral change requires cultivating images as objects of attention in the sphere of consciousness that breaks the hold of egoism on the moral agent. The final section of this Chapter emphasizes that moral change on this account requires an object of attention, a moral resource, outside of consciousness yet working through the energies of consciousness to effect moral change from within. According to Luther this is a very practical matter accomplished by *askesis*, a range of spiritual disciplines,

¹⁴ Actually, these are one and the same problem since the cognition in attention includes desire suggesting a certain precedence in moral life for the cognitive dimension of attention over the volitional aspect.

which create the conditions to access the One Moral Resource that can reorder the self-centered desires of the ego-infested consciousness. In this way consciousness is altered by the perception of a reality outside the mechanism of self centered and deceptive fantasy and the moral agent is oriented appropriately to the objective good, viz., God as the ultimate source of goodness and spiritual life.

CHAPTER TWO

AGENCY AND MASS

In Martin Luther's exposition of the Third Commandment in the *Treatise on Good Work* he aims to provide instruction on "how we should relate ourselves to God in works" by addressing "those matters in which God has to do with man and man with God without the mediation of any other creature."¹ Specifically, this involves attending to those works that are "plain and perceptible," that is, "divine service, such as hearing mass, praying and hearing a sermon on holy days."² In this context, Luther provides an example, a description of the experience of a person who participates in the liturgy of mass, which will serve as the starting point of this analysis. Certain features of this example make visible aspects of moral agency central to Luther's view.

One feature of Luther's description of the person at mass is the focus on individual human consciousness. A person is never described in the *Treatise on Good Works* as a moral agent, moral being, or self; rather the epithets used are 'soul,' 'heart,' 'faith,' 'spirit,' and 'conscience,' a flexible anthropological 'shorthand' that

¹ Martin Luther, "Treatise on Good Works," trans. W. A. Lambert, rev. by James Atkinson, in *Luther's Works*, vol. 44, *The Christian in Society*, James Atkinson, ed., Helmut T. Lehmann, gen. ed., (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966). 54.

² *Ibid.*, 54.

Luther's interpreters claim is applicable to the subjective life of a person.³ A type of this 'vocabulary of subjectivity' appears in Luther's example of the participant at mass to depict the ongoing inner activity of the consciousness of the moral agent. To represent this activity in terms of 'states' suggests a certain fixedness hardly appropriate to Luther's intent. The really serious participant at mass is unintelligible apart from the inwardness and privacy associated with the ongoing activities of consciousness that Luther realistically describes as *actions*: deliberating, regarding, attending, considering, pondering and believing. These are epistemic terms, dynamic rather than static, not totally and simply reducible to social and linguistic determinants. They serve to focus on consciousness as dynamic rather than static and form a collective of different active phenomena occupying the mind most of the time. The identification of this understanding of consciousness is central to Luther's account of the moral agent and represents a significant contribution to theological ethical inquiry.

A second theme in Luther's account of agency pertains to language. At the basis of much current ethical inquiry there is the assumption of a profound shift characterized by Seyla Benhabib as one in which "the paradigm of language has replaced the paradigm of consciousness."⁴ Some theological ethicists regard this move as part of the quest for objectivity in metaethical reflection, which often separates the moral agent from those personal wants and cares which are deemed essential ingredients for a sound moral life.⁵ It is precisely here that Luther's account offers a compelling alternative. Against the displacement of the notion of offers a

³ Steven E. Ozment, *Homo Spiritualis. A Comparative Study of the Anthropology of Johannes Tauler, Jean Gerson and Martin Luther (1509-1516) in the Context of their Theological Thought*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought, ed., Heiko A. Oberman, vol. 6, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), 100-101.

⁴ Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (New York: Basic Books, 1990), 208.

⁵ Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983) 17, 18.

offers a compelling alternative. Against the displacement of the notion of consciousness in favor of the authority and primacy of language in the quest for objectivity, Luther highlights consciousness as a primary aspect of moral agency and in doing so defends the reality and value of the human individual as irreducible, resisting absorption into the linguistic quest for certainty. What is significant in Luther's approach is that he takes language with the utmost seriousness recognizing its formative power and its important role in moral reflection. The position proposed here is that the individual is an autonomous speaker and creative user of language compliant with conventions of usage as well as a being with inward depths and experiences not reducible to a system of public or collective meanings.

A third theme in Luther's view of moral reflection and moral agency is controversial in that it concerns the normative, that is, the sense in which there is an objective standard for the assessment of the activities of consciousness. The question arises because Luther views the change in the participant at mass as one of moral progress. While one may undertake an ethical analysis by an appeal to criteria to objectively determine moral action, Luther's view of moral agency cannot be separated from its context in a larger field wherein the identity of both agent and the good are defined, not by reference to the agent's desires or judgments, but by reference to the action of God. The implication for Luther's account of the participant at mass is that the only kind of ethical 'objectivity' we experientially know is one mediated through the conflicting elements of human subjectivity. In sum, the view proposed is that the primary focus of Luther's account of moral agency in the context of the mass is a recovery of a theological description of the mind or consciousness as the bearer of value and moral being and not merely a neutral surveyor of the facts.

The Liturgy of Mass

In contrast to any view denying that the inner life of consciousness is irrelevant to morality and spiritual life, Luther proposes an alternative account of moral reflection and moral agency. Against the view that morality focuses on choice and moral language functions to moderate choice amidst the specification of facts and events, costs and benefits,⁶ Luther's position regards choices as not simply a function of our will but also of our knowledge and faith, including the quality of our perceptions and states of mind. Moral language no longer functions simply to guide choice but is rather an instrument for an individual's unique perception of the world. Luther's view is developed in the context of the liturgy of the mass, which is the substance of his exposition of the Third Commandment inclusive of his remarks on prayer, proclamation and *askesis*.⁷ The centerpiece used to elucidate Luther's understanding of moral and spiritual agency is found in his presentation of a series of concrete deliberations involving a participant in the mass. In a liturgical context where actions are publicly observable, this account requires we envisage a person in the privacy of a situation where inner experiences are implicit and latent, in Luther's words, "in those matters in which God has to do with man and man with God without the mediation of any other creature."⁸ Luther's introduction to the account includes the statement that it is necessary that liturgical acts be "done in the certainty and confidence of God's favor" or else they are worth nothing.⁹ He expresses concern over riotous and immoral deeds but his attention focuses on those persons who attend mass and simply watch the performance; they hear the preaching and

⁶ Manuel G. Velasquez, *Business Ethics: Concepts and Cases*, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall Inc., 1992), 58ff.

⁷ Martin Luther, *Treatise on Good Works*, 54-80. The first 14 sections are deliberations about mass and the liturgical activities it contains, notably prayer and proclamation (pp. 54-69). The remaining 11 sections (pages 69-80) address the various disciplines of Christian life.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

mouth the prayers but are quite unconscious of any inner change and edification because, as he states,

. . . We do not think that we are to receive something out of the mass into our hearts, learn something from the sermon and appropriate it, or seek, desire, and expect something in prayer.

In the mass it is necessary that we attend with our hearts also; and we do attend when we exercise faith in our hearts. Here we must listen to the words of Christ when he institutes the mass and says, "Take, eat; this is my body, which is given for you." In like manner he says over the cup, "Take it and all of you drink of it. This is a new and everlasting testament in my blood, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins. Do this, as oft as you do it, in remembrance of me." In these words Christ has made a memorial or an anniversary to be observed throughout Christendom. To it he has added a wonderful, rich, great testament in which are bequeathed and distributed not interest, money, or temporal possessions, but the forgiveness of all sins, grace and mercy unto eternal life, that all who come to this memorial shall have the same testament. He died with the intent that this testament became permanent and irrevocable. In proof and evidence of this he has left his own body and blood under bread and wine, instead of letter and seal.

A man must practice the first works of this commandment thoroughly. He not only must not doubt that it is true, but he must also consider the testament as sure, so that he does not make Christ a liar. For if you are present at mass and do not consider or believe that here Christ has bequeathed and given you forgiveness of all sins through his testament, then what else is it than as if you said, "I do not know or do not believe that it is true that forgiveness of my sins is here bequeathed and given me?" O how many masses there are in the world, but how few are they who hear them in such faith and with such profit! How grievously God is provoked to anger by such practices! It is for this reason that no one can benefit from attending mass unless his heart is deeply troubled and he longs

for divine mercy and desires to be rid of his sins; or unless, if he has evil intentions, he is changed during the mass and comes to have a desire for this testament. This is the reason that in ancient times no open sinner was allowed to be present at mass.

When this faith is rightly present the heart must be made glad by the testament. The heart must grow warm and melt in the love of God. Then praise and thanksgiving will follow with a pure heart, from which the mass is called *eucharistia* in Greek, that is, thanksgiving. We praise God and give him thanks for the comforting, rich, blessed testament, just as a man is thankful and grateful and glad when a good friend has presented him with a thousand or more gulden. Christ more often fares like those who make several persons rich by their testament, and then these beneficiaries never think of them, or praise or thank them. And this is the case with our masses. They are merely celebrated. We do not know the why or wherefore of the service. Consequently, we neither give thanks, nor love or praise God, but remain arid and hard at the mass, contented with our own petty prayers.”¹⁰

What exactly does this example contribute to Luther’s conception of the moral agent? The view proposed is that morality and spiritual life (themselves a unity) are inseparable from the activity of thinking, deliberating persons whose inner reflection forms much of the substance of moral and spiritual activity. This claim involves a “moral psychology”¹¹ or theological anthropology that includes the identification of some basic elements of an agent’s consciousness.

¹⁰ Ibid., 55-56.

¹¹ John Webster, *Barth’s Moral Theology, Human Action in Barth’s Thought* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 166.

Agency and Consciousness

By describing a liturgical situation in which an agent's inward deliberations remain private, Luther is implicitly questioning any behavioral claim that inner experiences cannot be said to exist in any meaningful way unless verifiable by outward expression. What are described are certain qualities and states of mind which are perceptions that the attendant at mass is to have if he or she is to participate meaningfully. For example, in the case of the homily at mass it is insufficient to simply "hear the preaching with our ears" rather it "must be *diligently heard, grasped, retained, (and) pondered often.*"¹² To address the situation where "we think it enough to watch the mass with our eyes" with no expectation whatever that we receive something into our heart, it is necessary that "*we attend with our hearts.*"¹³ In the case where we "say the prayers with our mouths" we must learn to begin by "*fixing our mind on some pressing need, desiring it with all earnestness, and thereby exercising faith and confidence toward God.*"¹⁴ Luther's account is very clear in describing action though none of the actions in question are outward activities; they are nevertheless essential for the assimilation or, as Luther puts it, the reception of "something out of the mass into our hearts." Even in the Canon of the Mass proper Luther is clear that the participant is involved with her 'inner' actions of the mind emphasized by the use of words such as 'appropriate,' 'expect,' 'listen.' An emphatic note obtains in making the specific connection between the act of *attending with our heart* in the exercise of faith and the mental images evoked by the spoken words of Christ at the institution of the mass. This is similar to the action of *fixing our mind* to a pressing need earnestly desired in the case of "right prayer." The entire range of activity involved here is described by Luther as one in which we learn or appropriate

¹² Ibid., 55, 57.

¹³ Ibid., 55.

¹⁴ Ibid., 55, 58.

as we “exercise faith in our hearts” and in this phase of the process it requires thorough “practise” as the first work of the Third Commandment. The process described here is one in which we learn, seek, desire and attend allowing sufficient space for a person to arrive at the place where they “*consider* the testament as sure” and apprehend that “Christ has bequested and given you forgiveness of all sins.”¹⁵ This entire range of activities including what is aptly named an ‘exercise of faith,’ are appropriately considered inner activities many of which Luther considers to be repeatable activities as may be required for the development of skills. Others are characterized as activities of an epistemic nature very like the family of uses surrounding the act of attending and its cognates like ‘ponder,’ ‘regard,’ ‘consider,’ ‘believe.’ All are inner activities involved in the change from being “arid and hard” to “thankful and grateful” but the change at point is not in outward behavior but “in our hearts.” In sum, Luther’s example portrays moral (and spiritual) reflection as an activity inseparably linked to an individual’s consciousness. The participant’s reflection about mass is a process that takes place in her mind and is the product of her own personality, history and experience. In this regard, it is an activity that is performed privately rather than something done in conversation with another person. To stress the place of the individual’s unique perception in moral and spiritual reflection is to underline the fact that Luther’s account does *not* support any view that insists that moral deliberation is simply a two step operation: first, a neutral description of facts available to all rational agents; and second, a rational assessment of their value with respect to making a choice. Luther’s description of an agent’s distinct and unique perception of a situation is not simply a preamble to moral choice and action; rather, moral perception is *already at work* in the attentive knowing mind that is determining what is even to count as a relevant fact in the activity of reflection and deliberation.

¹⁵ Ibid., 56.

Moral Language

In spite of his emphasis on the private nature of moral reflection Luther does not deny that the activity of consciousness always takes place within specific social and linguistic contexts. This introduces another noteworthy feature in Luther's exposition of the mass: the relation of moral agency to the language of faith and morals.¹⁶ The emphasis on the uniquely private nature of moral reflection in the analysis of consciousness might suggest that what comes to expression in language is the self. That is, the speaker is responding to his or her way of feeling about the world and bringing this to linguistic expression. The emphasis of this view falls on the consciousness of the subject with attention directed to the various private acts of the mind; it is a subjectivist view. In contrast, there is the view that what comes to expression in language is not the self but the power of language as "a vast system or sign structure whereby meaning is determined by a mutual relationship of signs which transcends the localized talk of individual speakers."¹⁷ In this view, a concern for consciousness and inwardness is precluded and the role of the human subject is diminished in the interests of convention and the formative power of the rational language system; this is an expressivist view of language.¹⁸ While Luther could hardly be categorized by either of these extreme positions, his own view appears to share some features of both. For example, Luther's view would be responsive to the linguistic dimensions of the event of revelation essential to construing the example of the participant at mass and, moreover, concede that there is a non-linguistic reality, that is, a sense in which there is a reality "existing" outside of language. At the same

¹⁶ William Schweiker, "Consciousness and the Good: Schleiermacher and Contemporary Theological Ethics," *Theology Today* 56, no. 2 (July, 1999): 180-186. What follows here is indebted to William Schweiker who explores these issues by noting the development of different theories of language and relating them to changing conceptions of subjectivity and the human good.

¹⁷ Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 188.

¹⁸ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self, The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989). The term "Expressivism" is used by Charles Taylor in his discussion of language. Cf. e.g., pp. 368-390, 413-423, 461-482.

time, there is an important feature of expressivism to retain, namely, the formative impact of language on the consciousness of the moral agent. A more moderate position closer to Luther's view would regard the expressivist power of language as itself a response to the reality of the context in which the speaker is set, yet not reducible to our experience of that response. This is an effort to go beyond subjectivism in the attempt to discover and articulate what is expressed, that is, the speaker is understood to be responding to the way things are, rather than just exteriorizing feelings. This may be regarded as a form of expressivism which is not subjective but does seek to be faithful to that which is beyond language and not simply explicable in terms of human response. Language, in this view, is more like a medium for the perception of the real; it expresses what is irreducible to either language or self-expression; it is perhaps more discriminating at this point to regard language as mediating between consciousness and reality. This view would more nearly approximate Luther's view on the matter since it warrants a moral source outside the self that is intimately tied to human consciousness. This is important for Luther's account since language has a theological and revelatory capacity, that is, words in the language can bear (convey) the Divine Word signifying that *res* which is hidden to our cognitive and linguistic powers, yet, as Risto Saarinen says "it affects our understanding because the Word of God somehow contains this *res* and causes that the thing itself is apprehended when the word is heard."¹⁹

There is reason to think that Luther's description of the participant at mass is subjective yet goes beyond the subjective. For example, what has been termed the 'vocabulary of inner awareness' is an instance of words Luther is using to emphasize the epistemic activities connected with inward and private acts of consciousness. This usage is characteristic of the entirety of section two of Luther's discourse on the Third Commandment where a series of passages introduces language in which we are

¹⁹ Risto Saarinen, "The Word of God in Luther's Theology," *Lutheran Quarterly*, n. s., 8 (1994):35.

invited to image or picture activities which are “inner,” what goes “into our hearts” prior to behavior.²⁰ These activities appear at various phases in the process and contribute significantly to the enablement of change but this is not simply subjectivism, a use of language to exteriorize feelings, rather, it is to express a response to the way things are in the world. That is, Luther says, we *watch* (the gestures at) mass, “*we attend with our hearts*” and “*exercise faith*” at the spoken words of institution, we *listen* to the words of Christ then “*come to this memorial.*” Evidently, these activities and their interaction in this context are subjective yet they have definitive non-linguistic correlates and are all intimately connected to the emergence of a faith-response to actual speech-events and situations. No less is true of what is termed the ‘vocabulary of inner awareness,’ that is, ‘attend’ with its family of cognate uses such as ‘regard,’ ‘ponder,’ ‘believe,’ ‘consider’ which, while they engage an empirical situation, seek to go beyond this to articulate a response to what is more than simply the exteriorizing of feelings. We are, according to Luther, expected to “practice” these actions thoroughly so as to “*consider* the testament as sure” and come to “*believe*” Christ’s forgiveness. While these various activities are epistemic in nature few have those qualities associated with degrees of verifiable empirical belief or knowledge of items in the world. Rather, these are activities that represent a variety of non-empirical cognitions and reflections within the relationship of words to world; they register a speaker’s varying degrees and intensities of cognition at various levels or stages in the sequence of change. To name this a ‘vocabulary of inner awareness’ is a reminder that there is a common allusion to the different quality and kinds of perceptions and states of minds involved in an agent’s unique perception of the world at different levels. Most of these perceptions, especially the act of conscious attention, are deemed by Luther to be essential and integral to an emerging faith that is followed by a longing for mercy as the participant in mass comes to a serious desire for the testament and forgiveness. This is language

²⁰ Luther, “*Treatise on Good Works*,” 55, 56.

striving to be faithful to something beyond us that is not explicable simply in terms of an analysis of human response.

Luther's emphasis on the inner and private nature of moral reflection is not a denial that the activity of consciousness takes place within particular social and linguistic contexts. To this extent there is recognition of the formative power of language in the thinking of a moral agent and the way in which moral reflection is 'made' by linguistic process.²¹ In this respect, there is a certain reticence to claim that Luther holds a naïve realist theory of truth according to which language is directly correlated to non-linguistic reality. The situation is more complex; it seems more in order that to understand Luther is to recognize that knowledge is mediated through language and consciousness rather than simply a correlation of words and world. Such recognition would agree that our moral perceptions are contingent on linguistic conventions and the acquisition of linguistic skills in a community of others and, at the same time, allow that a speaker may have a unique way of appropriating a use of language different from that dictated by communal convention. Consider that in section two of the *Treatise on Good Works*²² Luther presents a kind of evaluative or prescriptive language to indicate the moral and spiritual change that the participant at mass undergoes. Here, the change that takes place during the mass is described by substituting one set of normative epithets for another. One set is used, for example, of the person who comes expecting nothing from the mass; it is "heard without edification," "merely celebrated" or "arid" and then becomes instead "thankful" and she is "made glad" for this "blessed testament." Here the words used to depict change allude to differing states and qualities of mind including emotive elements. Indeed, Luther employs a wide variety of non-literal normative epithets as a person changes from being "arid and dry" to having a "pure" heart which is "warm," "thankful,

²¹ "Made," that is, the kind of moral situation we face is dependant on the way we have learned to construe the world through our language.

²² Ibid., 55,56.

grateful and glad.” In between of course there is a movement in which we “learn,” “appropriate,” “exercise,” and “practice.” One noteworthy feature of this descriptive process is the absence of generalized moral terms like ‘good,’ ‘right’ or ‘ought’ as directives to willful action. No such generalized terms are used in this passage; in fact, what Luther appears to be doing here is presenting a series of secondary moral epithets describing persons and situations in particular and specific detail. Moreover, these appear to be arranged in a gradation from that situation in which “We do not think that we are to receive something out of the mass into our hearts” to that circumstance in which we are glad and grateful as “when a good friend has presented him with a thousand or more gulden.” The movement from the former to the latter is described using a vocabulary resembling the discourse of *askesis* in which we *learn*, *practice* and *exercise*. The process is not painless for “no one can benefit from attending mass unless his heart is deeply troubled and he longs for divine mercy.” When the life of faith and morals is not restricted to rational decision and action according to norms but expanded to include inner perception and attention, then it will require not only general terms like ‘right’ and ‘good’ to direct choice, but also an expanded normative vocabulary replete with allusions to skillful training to aid moral and spiritual vision. Moral and theological language in Luther’s example is an instrument for the person not only to gain theological meaning but also to come to know him or herself and to do so by exercise or practice; its usage is not determined by a public context on which all agents can and must agree.

The forgoing considerations are designed to suggest that Luther in fact acknowledges the socially and linguistic mediated nature of consciousness and the conventional use of linguistic forms, yet he is also insisting that human beings are creative and individual *users* of language even as language informs their identities. To underline this latter phenomenon consider another example found in the remarks on the sin of adultery in the exposition of the Sixth Commandment. Rather than simply citing the command as a convention for ‘correct’ or normative usage used to prohibit

behaviors, Luther confronts us with a description of the way this vice “rages in all our members: in the thoughts of our heart, in the seeing of our eyes, in the hearing of our ears, in the words of our mouth, in the works of our hands, our feet, and our whole body.” This is the context in which use determines meaning. To go on to speak of “controlling” this inner experience is a conflictive struggle requiring “working godly weapons” using skillful disciplines or submitting to another person, a mentor.²³ This is not to describe a process of resolution that simply universalizes a norm requiring general public assent for “Every man must find out what is conducive to chastity in his case. How much of what and for what length of time, he must decide for himself and observe.”²⁴ This is not to deny that a conventional use is stipulated in the commandment; rather, it is to personally contextualize that use and trace out the connection to *askesis*. Luther suggests as much in his remark that the practical instruction in *askesis* that promotes discipline and purity was the very reason for which monasteries were established, the premise being that we will learn through a skillful engagement with inner conflictive struggle. In sum, what is important in this example indicates what is significant in Luther’s approach, namely, that he takes language with the utmost seriousness recognizing its formative power and its important role in moral reflection. The moral agent is viewed as an autonomous speaker and user of language as well as a being with inward depths and experiences not reducible to a system of public or collective meanings.

The Normative

Luther’s exposition of the mass depicts a change in the participant at mass as a *positive* moral change. The participant is represented as making moral and spiritual progress as a result of a conscious and concentrated interaction with spoken words,

²³ Ibid., 104.

²⁴ Ibid., 105.

images, gestures and symbols embedded in the words of institution. The change from a 'hard' to a more 'loving' disposition is not instantaneous and seems uneven, apparently involving the work of *askesis*. In the end, the main question to address about the activities of the participant at mass is: how do we know that the change constitutes 'progress' rather than more deceptive 'good works?' That is, in what way is the participant's struggle to perceive aright guided by normative considerations? Now there is reason to think that Luther's account indicates a relation between the activity of consciousness and a notion of what is good. For example, the participant at mass is involved in a change that provokes a reassessment of her initial attitude to mass. That is, the participant experiences a disjunction or changeover between her initial attitude, viz., that we *receive nothing* out of the mass into our hearts and the growing but contradictory perception that she now *desires and longs* for the testament. Her original self-centered perception has become questionable in the light of some presupposed value; that is, her genuinely positive desire for the testament reveals her initially negative attitude as somehow mistaken or distorted. In terms of the larger theological framework in which Luther thinks, this prior presupposed value, is innate to consciousness itself; it is readily conceived in terms of the notion of conscience, a recurring term in the early sections of the *Treatise on Good Works*. As a 'sense of goodness' or value inalienable to human moral agency, the notion of conscience is founded in Luther's traditional understanding of natural law as natural moral knowledge implanted in the rational structure of human consciousness.²⁵ As von Loewenich puts it, "Man is indeed fallen, but he has retained the ethical consciousness, the inclination toward the good."²⁶ In this context, we interpret it to refer to the inescapable value-bearing nature of consciousness, the way that

²⁵ Antti Raunio, "Natural Law and Faith: The Forgotten Foundations of Ethics in Luther's Theology," in *Union With Christ, the New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*, ed. Carl E. Bratton and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 99-102.

²⁶ Walther von Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, trans. Herbert J. A. Bouman (Belfast: Christian Journals Ltd., 1976), 53.

perception itself is a mode of evaluation. Significantly, however, Luther makes repeated reference to conscience (*synteresis*) in the *Treatise on Good Works* in the midst of his growing emphasis on the importance of the normative function of faith. Michael Baylor identifies this change:

“[I]t is faith which confers on the conscience the ability correctly to judge, as God judges, persons before actions and actions in the light of person. Or, perhaps more accurately, faith is the power of the conscience to accept God’s judgments about the person rather than those which the conscience arrives at naturally, or by inference from actions.”²⁷

On this reading, faith assumes a more dominant normative role with respect to the role of conscience and this gives impetus to Luther’s view that faith is to be regarded as a value imbued activity.²⁸ Yet even this may not be a sufficient answer to the question of whether we should regard the changed disposition in Luther’s example of the participant in Mass as morally praiseworthy. It may be that conscience-cum-faith is infused with value, that consciousness is value-laden and the good inheres human perception, yet not fully answer the question of whether we should see the actual change of heart of the participant at mass as morally praiseworthy. Precisely because of the nature of egoism he or she may slip into deceiving herself about God either for her own sake or the sake of her relation to God.

John Webster in his remarks on the *Treatise on Good Works* claims that the uniqueness of Christian ethics resides in a faith understood as the “orientation to a personal divine reality which at once transcends and evokes the agency of the human person.” He states that it is by virtue of *this orientation* that an agent accomplishes

²⁷ Michael G. Baylor, *Action and Person. Conscience in Late Scholasticism and the Young Luther*, Vol. 20, *Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought*, ed. Heiko A. Oberman, (Leiden: E, J. Brill, 1970), 228.

²⁸ *Infra*. Chapter III, p. 44f.

what Luther calls “single, simple goodness.”²⁹ This is an appropriate characterization of Luther’s view and it does suggest the respect in which consciousness may be related to an idea of the good in the context of Luther’s example of the participant at mass. The *orientation* to divine reality significant to faith suggests a particular direction our agency acquires which relates to the theme of sequential change that pervades Luther’s example. Indeed, the example of the participant at mass recounts the changing perception of an agent that leads progressively in the direction of a confident faith in God rather than degenerating into a settled sense of grievance and hostility. The change that the participant in mass experiences is not instantaneous, but gradual and uneven: she begins in an arid state of mind watching mass with no expectations whatever. Then she *listens* seriously and *attends* carefully and in doing so exercises faith. She may even enjoy pleasurable sins and “evil intentions” in her mind, until she comes to *consider* and then *believe* that the testament is certain. At this point there emerges a desire and longing for change that brings a truly confident faith evocative of a glad gratitude which, with the experience of love, results in *eucharistia*, that is, praise and thanksgiving. Here, the agent’s faith is now joined with love and directed away from self-centered preoccupations to a more compassionate and realistic focus. In this context, *eucharistia* functions as a *telos* in that it symbolizes the way in which the participant in mass through the agency of faith is drawn outside of himself or herself toward a new object of attention, a new moral source. This notion of *eucharistia* as an end point in a process of progressive and fallible moral reflection of the participant at mass is centrally important to the normative aspect of Luther’s notion of consciousness and particularly the element of faith. It gives force to the notion of orientation for it highlights the sense in which there is a *telos* of goodness present as an implicit standard of perfection in the activities of cognition and moral

²⁹ John Webster, *Barth’s Moral Theology, Human Action in Barth’s Thought*, 159. Webster’s point is made in the context of the claim that Christian ethics gains its unique character from its orientation to the command of God. He seeks a more positive view of divine command noting that it is not to be taken to imply a kind of heteronomy where divine agency imposes an alien will on the human agent. Orientation is ultimately directed to divine agency, what Webster terms “a personal divine reality.”

perception. That is, the conscious attention in the exercise of faith is fundamentally oriented toward goodness, the union of faith and love, as the perfect ideal and this permits discrimination among levels or degrees.³⁰ The argument would, presumably, be an empirical one that while we do not directly experience ultimate goodness, we do experience ‘images’ or ‘shadows’ of perfect reality and goodness in every sort of spiritual and moral activity including intellectual study, work, etc. In this way we come to intuitively learn to distinguish gradations of good and bad, better and worse. Experience furnishes us with evidence of the idea of perfection in the various activities of seeking truth. This empirical view complements the view that the notion of good is part of the texture of human consciousness. For the good is now regarded as an implicit standard of perfection for the activity of cognition and perception, that is, consciousness is fundamentally *oriented to a telos* of goodness as its ideal such that faith is enabled to discriminate among levels or degrees of goodness as it carries out its evaluative activity; it is led to seek goodness through the gradual apprehension of lesser degrees of goodness in its surroundings. In this way we are led to believe in the supreme reality of what is perfect by a gradual and growing apprehension of lesser goods in which we discover the intimation of a higher degree of goodness.³¹ In the second place, it suggests that within this orientation the agent accomplishes what Luther calls “single, simple, goodness” by way of practicing attention with its related

³⁰ Luther makes these distinctions in the course of his exposition of the first commandment on page 26f. in sections 6-8. The matter is taken up again with some detail in section 14, page 33 where the matter is put in terms of “classes” of men.

³¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Question II, Article 3, ed. Anton C. Pegis, (New York: Random house, 1948), 26, 27. “The fourth way is taken from the gradation to be found in things. Among beings there are some more and some less good, true, noble, and the like. But *more* and *less* are predicted of different things according as they resemble in their different ways something which is the maximum, as a thing is said to be hotter according as it more nearly resembles that which is hottest; so that there is something which is truest, something best, something noblest, and, consequently, something which is most being, for those things that are greatest in truth are greatest in being, as it is written in *Metaph.* ii. Now the maximum in any genus is the cause of all in that genus, as fire, which is the maximum of heat, is the cause of all hot things, as is said in the same book. Therefore there must also be something which is to all beings the cause of their being, goodness, and every other perfection; and this we call God.”

and varied cognates: 'listening,' 'believing,' 'regarding,' 'considering,' etc.

In sum, Luther's account of the participant at mass suggests at least two approaches to his understanding of the normative within consciousness. First, given the analysis of agency and consciousness in Luther's example and with reference to the larger framework of conscience explicitly mentioned in the early sections of the *Treatise on Good Works*, there is the proposal that consciousness itself is structured by a notion of the good. Moral perception preconditions moral choice and action since the good is present as the condition for all moral experience. While the reference to conscience in the *Treatise on Good Works* is explicit, the reference to Luther's second view of the normative is implicit. On this account, Luther's understanding of the mass indicates that the participant's moral perception is 'progressive' or 'perfectionist' in nature where the good is present as an implicit standard of perfection in the activity of moral perception. That is, the faith embedded in consciousness discriminates among levels or degrees of goodness as it carries out its evaluative activity. This is the first view of the normative and it supports the understanding that the concept of the Good is part of the very fabric of human consciousness. The second argument underlines the sense in which the Good is present as an implicit standard of perfection, an orientation for the activity of faith. The second argument supports the first; that is, consciousness is fundamentally oriented towards the Good as its ideal and, further, discriminates gradations as it carries out its evaluative activity. It is *led* to seek true goodness through the gradual apprehension of lesser degrees of goodness in its surroundings. On this account the individual is envisaged as moving toward a *telos* of perfection as the activity of consciousness is conceived of as moving through a continuum in which we are becoming aware of deception and truth, illusion and reality, evil and good. The image is that of a pilgrimage from appearance to reality instanced in every serious exercise of understanding.

Neither of these views of the good qualify as a definition of an 'objective' norm for they are both understood to be internal to consciousness. To claim that the good is objective because it is conceptually and ontologically 'beyond' consciousness in the form of promulgated divine law is not incorrect; however, it still leaves unanswered Luther's question as to *how we access* that good. Given Luther's example of the mass it appears that access to goodness is typically mediated through the ambiguous and conflicting egoistic desires of human subjectivity.

Concluding Reflections

This interpretation of Luther's understanding of moral agency in the context of his account of the mass emphasizes several features of the moral life not prominent in contemporary ethical inquiry. The first and most obvious is that moral agency is inextricably linked to personal consciousness. It resides not in the will and resultant choices but in the attentive, knowing and reflective mind. Indeed, the activity of the participant at Mass is unintelligible apart from supposing the inwardness and privacy associated with the activities of consciousness. In effect, Luther's description shifts the onus of attention and analysis to the larger horizon of intellect, faith and attention that is the ever-present background to our choices. The move to inwardness in this account of moral agency accords with Luther's intention to address matters in which "God has to do with man and man with God without the mediation of any other creature."³² It follows that the focus is on the inner dimensions of faith and moral action that condition the agent's moral choice and action. A fitting interpretation of Luther's remarks will acknowledge this sphere of privacy that is essential for the constitution of the activity that uniquely reflects the agent's vision, personal history and moral orientation. The *Treatise on Good Works* is not an apology of empirical proofs for the existence or status of inner mental events. Luther is simply taking it for granted that certain remarks about the mind do appear

³² Luther, *Treatise on Good Works*, 54.

to refer to particular mental events and if to suggest this is not so or that they are really only about behaviour, then, presumably, we are radically altering the sense of those terms.

Another feature of Luther's account of moral reflection is the view taken of moral language. The position ascribed to Luther may appear idiosyncratic, that is, it is a use of language that is uniquely private to an individual and this appears contradictory to any view of ethics where the private inner realm of the individual agent is excluded in favor of the public realm of shared conventions. However, Luther is not engaged in any arguments to deny that our language is learned publicly or that we develop a moral and theological vocabulary in the presence of others or that understanding others depends in part on learning the meanings of words in a shared context. Indeed, the activity of consciousness always takes place within particular social and linguistic contexts inclusive of ecclesial-liturgical circumstances. Moreover, Luther recognizes the formative power of language in human thinking -- the way in which moral reflection is constructed in linguistic process. This is a feature in the example of the participant at mass whose change is depicted in language composed of many different value terms and metaphors; different images that are a function of moral change. Indeed, the moral and spiritual change that occurs during mass is a process involving the exercise and refinement of moral vocabulary and sensibilities. This is what is involved in 'becoming better.' At the same time, to acknowledge that there is a linguistically mediated nature of consciousness or even that language mediates and informs the identity of a moral agent is not to preclude the claim that the speaker is also a creative and individual user of the language. This is why Luther's descriptions of the participant at mass includes the use of secondary moral epithets which reflect the individual's knowledge of herself and the world, rather than linguistic meaning conventionally determined by a public context in which all agents agree. This is also the force of the example of adultery in the exposition of the Sixth Commandment where Luther identifies an individual use of

language beyond the shared rules of social and linguistic practices. On Luther's account, the progressive and uniquely individual nature of moral thought means that the knowledge of a value concept is not something to be understood by adopting a meta-language. Rather, we learn the meaning of a moral word, e.g., 'love,' not only by appeal to the given rules of conventional ordinary usage but also through our inner experience of love, our knowledge of ourselves and others. Moreover, what we believe to be love may change throughout our lives. Learning in this case implies a limit of understanding that is conditioned by the privacy and personal history of an individual. To be sure, the concept is governed by public rules of use even as the individual seeks to privately appropriate or assimilate it in the light of her personal history and experience. The notions of privacy and history are integral to the notion of the individual and are inextricably involved in the assimilation and modification of accepted usages.

Finally, Luther has portrayed the obvious change in the participant at mass as *a moral* change. It is the result of a conscious and concentrated interaction with the spoken words, images, gestures and symbols that are embedded in the words of institution. The change is uneven and involves the practice of *askesis*. In the end, the question is whether there is a moral norm that enables one to evaluate the change as 'positive?' If we confine our query to Luther's account of the participant at mass, then there are two suggestions forthcoming that indicate the ways in which consciousness is related to the good. The first is implicit in Luther's frequent allusions to conscience in the early parts of the *Treatise on Good Works*. This is the view that good is a structural background condition in human moral perception and essential to the concept of being human. The second suggestion, though not proposed by Luther, likens the progression of the participant at mass to a type of hierarchy of perfection in which we are lead to the ideal of supreme moral perfection through an experience of lesser goods via moral perception. While these views may be mutually complementary and go some way to make it possible for us to see which of

our cognitions are more 'perfect' than others, they do not have the status of an 'objective criterion' apart from human consciousness. As far as the example of the participant at mass is concerned, Luther's focus falls on the ways and means that we can access the good as mediated through the conflicting desires and vicissitudes of human subjectivity.

CHAPTER THREE

MORAL CHANGE

Luther's exposition of the mass in the *Treatise on Good Works* clearly depicts change. Indeed, the participant at mass is described as undergoing a moral and spiritual change as a result of conscious and concentrated interaction with the spoken words, images, gestures and symbols embedded in the words of institution. The features unique to this view of change are identified in the section of this Chapter entitled "Moral Change." Of paramount importance is the claim that faith as a form of cognitive attention that functions to initiate and sustain moral and spiritual change. This theme, addressed in the section entitled, "Exercising Faith," adopts a performative model to exemplify the conviction that the agency of faith signals Luther's aim to articulate a normative understanding of change at the heart of his view of moral reflection, and is the dominant metaphor of moral cognition. While this model includes the passivity inherent in the act of hearing, it also involves the cognition and volition active in attention which play important roles in the dynamics of moral change. The aim of the third section of this Chapter, "Cognition and Volition," is to develop an understanding of the relation of faith to matters of motivation and conduct. This view is compatible with Luther's account though not explicitly found in that account. Another aspect of change in Luther's example of the participant at mass is discussed in the section entitled "Phases of Faith." Here, the agent is envisaged as moving through differing 'levels' or 'phases' of consciousness not unlike levels of knowledge in a hierarchy. This permits us to distinguish between a 'good' use of faith and a 'bad' use since we can reasonably understand a scale or

continuum with egoistic fantasies of deception at one end and a firm strong faith at the other end. This is a foundational distinction in the *Treatise on Good Works*. Further, there are indications that Luther envisages a change that moves toward an end point, *eucharistia*, which is contextualized in an example of the marital relation.¹ It appears that the more ‘perfectionist’ aspect of morality is actualized in the direction of a relationship in which persons have knowledge of one another in trusting love.

In the liturgical action of mass, Luther depicts the participant’s progressive development of moral perception in a sequence of states of mind. Beginning with a disposition that is “arid and hard,” the participant in mass is described as being involved in a sequence of revision through the “exercise of faith.”² It is a seriatim that increasingly moves towards an end point that is gradually revealed through specific practices of cognition such as attending, believing, regarding and considering. Luther names this *telos* as *eucharistia* where faith merges with love with the result that “praise and thanksgiving will follow with a pure heart.”³ It is helpful to begin an analysis of the moral and spiritual change depicted here by identifying three salient features.

As we have seen, the term ‘consciousness’ as applied to Luther’s notion of moral agency is used to refer to the inner life of human beings, the sense in which subjectivity has the aspect of privacy, inwardness and uniqueness that cannot be

¹ “End point” or *telos* here captures the notion that the acts of attending, considering, etc. are intentional, i.e., directed toward a specific state of affairs that Luther names “*eucharistia*.” Luther’s remarks may also suggest that an action is purposive beyond intention in that there is a further aim, viz., the relation of love displayed in the example of marital life. I have chosen to speak of this as an ‘instantiation’ or a ‘contextualization’ of *eucharistia* rather than the moral theological differentiation of immediate and ultimate ends of action – a distinction found in contemporary Moral Theology.

² Martin Luther, “Treatise on Good Works,” trans. W. A. Lambert, rev. by James Atkinson, in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 44, *The Christian in Society*, James Atkinson, ed., Helmut T. Lehmann, gen. ed., (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 56.

³ *Ibid.*

totally reduced to social, historical, and linguistic determinants. As the *esse* of moral agency, consciousness is the primary texture of our personality. It is expressed in our most basic orientation to the world, our use of language, as well as our settled emotional and moral dispositions. In this respect, consciousness is indissolubly related to the idea of a unique moral agent. Moreover, given the proposals of Chapter II, the concept of the good is inherent in the very texture of human consciousness: first, as the precondition of our moral experience and, second, as an implicit standard of perfection in the activity of cognition. That is, consciousness is primarily oriented towards the Good as its ideal and is able to discriminate gradations or ‘levels’ of goodness as it carries out its valuation activity; it is ‘led’ to seek true goodness through comparison with lesser and greater degrees of goodness in its surroundings. In this way, consciousness is envisaged as moving (as on a ‘pilgrimage’) through a continuum of gradations recognizing truth and falsity, good and evil.

Second, as an implication of the foregoing, Luther’s account of the liturgy of the mass is a concrete example of the moral agent involved in a sequence of change or revision, a pilgrimage facilitated by the exercise of faith. Avoiding the emphasis on the momentary action of the will in moral choice, Luther affirms a view of moral agency that is actively engaged in a moral and spiritual change that is essentially progressive, continuous and fallible. The example begins with the agent who participates in the liturgy expecting nothing and whose disposition is “arid and hard.”⁴ The ensuing change facilitated by the exercise of faith occurs amidst a stream of mental states including seeking, expecting, attending, hearing, receiving as well as the emotional experiences of a troubled heart and a longing for mercy. The entire range of these mental and emotional states is involved in the flux of change prior to the worshipper’s arrival at the state of *eucharistia*. In a similar way, Luther depicts the continuous progress of change associated with prayer, an essential element in the

⁴ Ibid.

liturgy of the mass; it is a special exercise of faith that begins by “fixing our mind on some pressing need” and “desiring it with all earnestness and confidence.”⁵ The ensuing process is an education in which “we are pupils of the first commandment and of faith,” never ceasing to learn “throughout all works and sufferings.”⁶ There is never a guarantee that the situation will not change before arriving at what Luther calls “right prayer.”⁷ The actions that sustain change in a human agent are profoundly self-involving in the sense that they require practise. This is also the case with the proclamation at mass that is to be “diligently heard, grasped, retained, pondered often”⁸ in order to avert temptation and strengthen faith. The activities described in Luther’s view of change are those that are part of an open-ended process in which our endeavors require the serious exercise or practise of faith as they face impediments and imperfections in progression to the end point of *eucharistia*.

Finally, Luther’s view of moral change is specific about *what* exactly is changing. The descriptions that Luther presents depict moral change in persons in terms of a transition from one state of awareness or consciousness to another; from one state of our conscious life construed as ‘amoral,’ ‘immoral’ or ‘sinful,’ to another state construed as ‘pure,’ or ‘moral.’ In the *Treatise on Good Works* these states are varied, often associated with ‘works,’ and characterized in many different ways. For example, in one instance change is depicted as a move from appearance and pretence to genuine reality, from “false, pretentious, pharisaic good works done without faith” to the “right, true, genuine, real works of faith.”⁹ In another instance, the emphasis

⁵ Ibid., 58.

⁶ Ibid., 61.

⁷ Ibid., 59, 61.

⁸ Ibid., 57.

⁹ Ibid., 29.

falls on the disposition of the person who does good deeds like a despairing prisoner "with a heavy heart and great disinclination" moving gradually to the kind of person who does good willingly with a "glad, peaceful and confident heart."¹⁰ The pilgrimage from pretence to a firm confident faith in the heart is a sequence of change in which different states of consciousness and qualities of awareness are bound together. Moral change in these cases is a function of progressively changing states in the changeover from deceptive appearances to genuine faith. In another instance it is compared to discernment in faith or coming to 'see,' as in Luther's reference to subjects who turn from a state of "serious unbelief" implicit in blaming their suffering on other men and the devil, toward a very different but "good firm confidence" in which they perceive the "costliest treasures" in suffering and affliction.¹¹ In this process of moral change, Luther assigns a strategic role to the exercise of faith with its accompanying actions of listening and attending.

Exercising Faith

To appropriately understand Luther's claim that faith has a central role in moral cognition and moral change, our analysis must meet certain constraints. First, while faith has an element of passivity, Luther regularly characterizes it as an "exercise," a "doing," an active constructive and even willful activity. This feature, implicit in the discourse of *askesis*, is an activity responsive to revelation and appropriately taken to have a 'performative' aspect by some writers in the Reformation tradition.¹² Second, while the performative aspect is an important theme

¹⁰ Ibid., 27.

¹¹ Ibid., 28.

¹² There are many such writers. For example, Paul Sponheim refers explicitly to the role of scriptures in terms of *function* and what they *do* to the hearer stating, "This seems to fit with such approaches to language as Wittgenstein's emphasis on *use* and Austin's stress on the performative character of speech. If this faith claim is true, if the whole is a developing reality, it is not strange that such a fundamental matter as language reveals that characteristic." What follows may be construed as an

developed in the analysis, Luther also portrays faith with a leading function in the 'vocabulary of inner awareness' in relation to other cognitive functions such as hearing and attention. Indeed, construed as a kind of attention faith is a form of cognition analogous to empirical perception in that it is a type of 'reflection' on people, events and situations beyond what could be said to be strictly factual. Finally, Luther's account is not only about subjective inwardness; it is about faith and action. Luther's view of moral change is not complete without some account of the relation of belief and action or knowing (cognition) and willing (volition) and the respective roles each plays in moral motivation and change. It is important that the schema adopted to interpret Luther's view address these constraints preserving the sense in which faith is a complex of responsive action preserving passivity, yet an action with elements of knowing and willing.

Luther's account of the liturgy already suggests such a schema in the statement: "In the mass it is necessary that we attend with our hearts also; and *we do attend* when we exercise faith in our hearts. Here we must listen to the words of Christ when he institutes the mass. . ."¹³ This is the characterization of the exercise of faith as an *act*, an act of attending wherein we also listen. The use of the word 'act' is a theologically appropriate characterization in the context of moral change and readily captured in the performative function of language. This way of depicting linguistic behavior captures the important idea that the words uttered in a liturgical setting are the performing of an action rather than a report or a description.¹⁴ The view proposed, then, is that Luther's exposition in the *Treatise on Good Works*, depicts a responsive act, the exercise of faith, including the performance of two other actions:

attempt to develop this remark. See Paul R. Sponheim, "The Knowledge of God," in *Christian Dogmatics*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jensen (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), p. 223, 224.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁴ John L. Austin, *Performative Utterances*, in *Philosophical Papers*, ed. J. O. Urmson, G. J. Warnock, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1961), 221, 222.

we *attend* and we *listen* to spoken words. This is captured in the formula, ‘In (by) doing X, we do Y and Z,’ That is, *in* the act of exercising faith we are both listening and attending.¹⁵ This is a convenient way to indicate that the acts of attending and listening are included in the act of exercising faith. The ‘In’ or ‘by’ formulas are regarded as including descriptions of two different acts but do not imply that there are two distinct temporal acts. The descriptions of the acts of attending and listening are about the one single act of exercising faith from differing perspectives or different aspects of the same act. The act of exercising faith, then, presupposes the performance of two other types of acts, those of listening and attending. We turn now to the first of these.

Listening

The act of listening in the context of the moral change depicted in mass is passive in the sense that it is completely dependent on an ongoing prior linguistic activity. This is the articulation of words, meanings and images embedded in the words of institution enacted by the priest in the spoken performance of the liturgy as Luther states,

“‘Take, eat; this is my body, which is given for you.’ In like manner he [The Priest] says over the cup, ‘Take it and all of you drink of it. This is a new and everlasting testament in my blood, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins. Do this as oft as you do it, in remembrance of me.’”¹⁶

¹⁵ John L. Austin, *How To Do things With Words*, ed. J. O. Urmson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 126 ff. This seminal work adopted a very similar formula to the one used here in order to indicate the relation between elements of the performative speech performance later analyzed into the locutionary and illocutionary aspects of the speech act.

¹⁶ Luther, *Treatise on Good Works*, 55.

These words, essential to the liturgy of the mass, bear on the more profound but implicit themes of sacrament, revelation, faith and scripture. However, in the text of the *Treatise on Good Works* Luther explicitly remarks on only two topics in the final paragraphs of section 2, both of which bear on the act of listening to the words of Christ, suggesting the way in which those words aim to secure uptake with the participant in mass. The first is that the act of listening has the character of receiving a direct address. The *significance* of the mass is that it is a testament, a last will drawn up by Christ at the last Supper, the terms of which are a promised benefit: “the forgiveness of all sins, grace and mercy unto eternal life.”¹⁷ The beneficiaries of the forgiveness, grace and mercy are not just the apostles but the “many” here understood as including the participant; it is an immediate present benefit for the listener. The second element in mass is listening *attentively*. That is, to focus intentionally on the words of institution, in the reception of forgiveness, grace and mercy embedded in the context of image and action given in mass. Here, the act of listening is a serious response of receptivity, a genuine self-involvement in hearing and understanding qualified by the appropriate attention.

Attention

If Luther is clear about the exercise of faith and the inclusion of the act of listening, he is equally concerned about the emergence of faith in the act of attending for his claim is that “we attend with our hearts also; and we do attend when we exercise faith in our hearts.”¹⁸ The convenient formula, ‘In (by) doing X, we do Y and Z,’ captures the fact that the act of exercising faith includes not only attentive listening which is a serious *hearing*, but also the act of *attending*. This notion is introduced to suggest the more normative or realistic kind of knowledge or cognition

¹⁷ Ibid., 55, 56.

¹⁸ Ibid., 55.

involved in the transformation of consciousness. 'Attend' like 'consider,' 'regard,' and 'ponder' belong to the vocabulary of inner awareness that forms a family of uses characterizing a type of understanding of events and situations unconstrained by rigorous empirical thinking. There is also an element of volition¹⁹ involved here for, like the artist who aims to gain a clear view of her subject, the participant at mass makes a conscious effort to expel her own detachment about mass by giving a careful attention to the words and images of Christ given in the spoken sentences of institution. The intention is to hear and envision in a clear light an individual reality of genuine value; the emphasis is on a focused concentration. Luther's qualifying phrase "with our hearts" in this definition reinforces the notion of concentration by indicating that attention is a type of awareness that is not simply seeking after a detached or neutral accuracy in relation to its object. Rather, what the participant in the liturgy is doing is not simply to "watch mass," observing accurately the detail of the ceremonial; the point is to "seek, desire and expect" and to do so with a profound and personal desire, that is, "with our hearts." In contrast to the alien detachment of ceremonial, Luther's remarks suggest that the focused concentration or cognition associated with attending in the exercise of faith is imbued with its own depth of personal desire. On this account, the reality of God and goodness cannot be grasped apart from a desire that enables the expulsion of a self-centered detachment and couples with attention to yield a profound care (even love) *directed aright*. This may be appropriately considered as a kind of transformation.

¹⁹ Gerald May, *Will and Spirit, A Contemplative Psychology*, (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1982), 5,6. A 'volitional aspect' may suggest more complex questions relating to the 'will' and the agent's 'willing.' The usage does suggest a useful distinction in the analysis, viz., that between willing and willfulness noted in May's observation that while the two are easily confused "...willingness implies a surrendering of one's self-separateness, an entering-into, an immersion in the deepest processes of life itself. It is a realization that one already is a part of some ultimate cosmic process and it is a commitment to participation in that Process. In contrast, willfulness is the setting of oneself apart from the fundamental essence of life in an attempt to master, direct, control, or otherwise manipulate existence. More simply, willingness is saying yes to the mystery of being alive in each moment. Willfulness is saying no, or perhaps more commonly, 'Yes, but . . .'."

The formula, “In (by) doing X, we do Y and Z” is a convenient way to indicate that the actions of attending and listening are involved in the act of exercising faith. That is, the act of exercising faith includes the act of listening that is a serious and attentive hearing of the words so as to apprehend their full significance as immediate address. As well, there is included with the act of attending all that occurs in the liturgical context of mass, amidst the perception of images, liturgical symbols and the many verbal and non-verbal gestures including the participant’s act of receiving the element(s). In this context, the act of exercising faith is aptly described as an event or action in which “perceptible thing, image, idea, and the one thinking and perceiving are related in an event of import and significance that defines a space of life in which we must now practically orient ourselves.”²⁰ Luther is emphatic that the participant who hears the mass in this way is doing the “first works” of the Third Commandment and it is to be *practised* thoroughly since it generates a firm confident faith. That is, a firm faith emerges when the one who listens and attends also *believes* truly, i.e., does really “consider the testament as sure” and *confesses* the belief that Christ has bequeathed and given the forgiveness of all sins through his testament.²¹

Cognition and volition

The formula, “In (by) doing X, we do Y and Z” is understood to indicate that the act of exercising faith includes the actions of attending and listening. Included in the act of attending is the element of cognition, a unique type of normative understanding, together with volition, understood as an intentional effort to dispel complacency. The inclusion of volition with cognition in the analysis of attention suggests a more active participation of the self in the moral world where will and

²⁰ William Schweiker, *Power, Value, and Conviction, Theological Ethics in the Postmodern Age* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1998), 78.

²¹ Luther, *Treatise on Good Works*, 56.

desire are operative with the result that faith now assumes a morally active and constructive role in structuring value into our world of deed and action. This accords with the way Luther depicts faith as a value-imbued *activity* at the opening of the *Treatise on Good Works*: “The first, highest, and most precious of all good *works* is faith in Christ” which is the only appropriate response to the query: “What must we *do*, to be *doing* the good work of God.”²² This is, moreover, a good, a value that is shared in the sense that it *causes* works to be good or “*makes* all other works good.”²³ Value is mediated in action, according to Luther, because faith not only “inwardly motivates” but the actions of an agent are an “expression” of the “*exercise* of faith.”²⁴ Indeed, faith is intimately tied to, and participates in, the agent’s actions since “all works are entirely comprised in faith, as I have often said.”²⁵ ‘Faith’ in all these uses is a pro-active ‘doing,’ an activity involving ‘doings’ and reflections on situations, people and events; so while this is a faith that is concerned with the invisible and transcendent it is also very obviously and directly involved with the audible and capable of activities such as hearing, believing, and following in response to the Word of God. All of these involve knowledge as well as value, knowing (cognition) and willing (volition) suggesting that Luther’s understanding of faith has a strong and pro-active role in the moral change that is an inherent feature of moral reflection. Further, the interaction of cognition and volition is important to the understanding of motivation and moral change as a reinforcement of the strong role that Luther assigns to the exercise of faith in the entire process.

Generally, a theory of moral motivation is concerned with the relation between an agent’s moral attitude and his action. The basic question for any ethical

²² Ibid., 23.

²³ Ibid, 38, 26.

²⁴ Ibid, 39, 87.

²⁵ Ibid., 113.

view is whether knowledge is sufficient for moral conduct, or is something more required to compel good action? According to Jonathan Dancy, there are two approaches to this question in contemporary moral theory: Internalism and externalism.²⁶ Internalism is the claim that moral attitudes are more like desires than beliefs and there is an internal relation between moral attitudes and practical moral action. Our moral attitudes include a motive force (i.e., desire) that compels action. Externalism, on the other hand, holds that since moral attitudes are more like beliefs than desires, there is some external desire necessary to motivate moral action; in this view beliefs by themselves cannot compel action. The distinction between belief and desire upon which Dancy's internalist-externalist distinction depends, however, is open to question. For example, one might argue that since certain desires are themselves based on beliefs, then changing the belief will affect the desire. If so, then the distinction between belief and desire, hence between internalism and externalism, does not hold or must be made on different grounds. The account proposed of Luther's view of the act of exercising faith includes the act of attending in which our interpretation does not separate belief from desire.²⁷ In this view, the knowing that is involved in the exercise of faith is construed as a form of normative knowledge or belief which contains the desires that motivate the will in moral action so that a moral belief will automatically compel the will to act. If we assume that moral attitudes are construed as a complex of belief and desire, then a case may be made that Luther's view is an internalist type of view in terms of a theory of moral motivation.

This reading of Luther's theory of moral motivation has a certain interest in that it appears to confirm that the activity of the will is conditioned by the limits of normative moral knowledge, that is, by the cognition involved with the act of

²⁶ Jonathan Dancy, "Intuitionism," in *A Companion to Ethics*, ed., Peter Singer (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 411-420.

²⁷ *Supra.* p. 42. As stated in the view that cognition is imbued with its own sense of personal desire.

attention in the exercise of faith. The will is not regarded as separate from its background in normative moral knowledge, rather its efficacy is now to be seen as a function of moral knowledge with the result that moral change is not first and foremost a matter of choice or action, but rather a revision of the beliefs and desires which compel action. The emphasis in the act of exercising faith now falls on the act of attending and the internalist reading of the relation between knowing and willing in Luther's theory of moral motivation may be construed with a dominant emphasis on cognition. Indeed, in the previous section of this Chapter, the act of attention is proposed with a cognitive component and listening appears to be essentially communicative and rational in the apprehension of meaning. One might suppose, given this emphasis on cognition, that Luther's interpreters are correct in the claim that "understanding and faith belong together"²⁸ and that it is knowledge or cognition that is the larger part of the act of exercising faith. This seems to imply that the kind of cognition involved in the exercise of faith compels the will in producing change, that is, faith compels action.

This interpretation of Luther's view seems quite credible were it not for the fact that the relation between cognition and volition in moral change sounds very like a Socratic or Platonic view in which there is a direct relation between knowing the good and doing the good.²⁹ That is, one cannot act contrary to one's knowledge of the good. No one does wrong willingly or deliberately, since a person only acts on one's current state of knowledge. There is, however, an obvious feature of Luther's account that distinguishes it from this Platonic or Socratic model of moral change; Luther has a more developed and formidable notion of independent willing than does Plato. In Plato's view the desire to do the good is a function of knowledge, which, is

²⁸ Walther von Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, trans. Herbert J. A. Bouman (Belfast: Christian Journals Limited, 1976), 61.

²⁹ William J. Prior, *Virtue and Knowledge, An Introduction to Ancient Greek Ethics*, (London: Routledge, 1991), 70f.

the only necessary and sufficient condition for the good life;³⁰ for Luther willing is not simply dependent on knowing. Luther's account apparently envisages a clear conflict between knowing and willing that acts against the good it knows. This appears to be the force of Luther's example of those spiritual authorities that know their responsibilities yet willfully act like "those mothers who forsake their children and run after their lovers."³¹ In contrast to Plato's view where wrong action is explained by lack of knowledge or wisdom, in Luther's view we are dealing with perversity in the willful misuse of power and engaging in a wicked self-indulgence in opposition to a clear understanding of responsibilities. Presumably, this is why the problem of *akrasia*, the bondage or perversity of the will, is an intellectual puzzle in the Platonic view, but becomes a central critical issue of moral experience for Luther and other Christian theologians.

Luther's more developed notion of willing intensifies and widens the gap between his approach and ethics understood in the Greek tradition. The difficulty is not simply one where there is knowledge of the good but no will to do it as in the example previously cited; the relation appears to be more complex. For example, there appear to be cases where willing appears to affect knowledge. In the exposition of the Second Commandment Luther counsels that *we avoid* the vice of accepting temporal honor and praise. However, he notes that we deliberately ignore this and go on to pursue projects that associate us with self-honor and self-gratification. Indeed, we do so for moral reason, that is, as Luther puts it: we "pass by this good work and practice many other lesser good works,"³² In another instance, Luther claims that the highest and rarest good work of all, next to faith, is that of genuine praise: to bless and thank God for all his good deeds and confidently call upon him in all adversities.

³⁰ Ibid., 70.

³¹ Luther, *Treatise on Good Works*, 87.

³² Ibid., 43.

The problem, however, is that the agent is “so blinded that he does not *notice* this greatest work at all, and for him praising God is a very small matter compared with the great picture he has of the works of his own devising, in which he perhaps praises himself more than God, or takes more pleasure in them than he does in God.”³³ Here, the agent neither knows nor wills what is good. In these examples there appears to be a more complex interaction at work between willing and knowing.

There are certain inferences to be drawn from this view of the relation of volition and cognition and the interpretation compatible with Luther’s view. While there appears to be a *prima facie* similarity between a Socratic view of motivation and the position ascribed to Luther, the three examples cited strongly suggest that there is no simple linear relation between cognition and volition in moral action. Indeed, the relation is a more complex interaction where one influences the other; not only does the knowing involved in attention influence our willing but it appears that willing may also influence our knowing. The relation seems to be reciprocal or mutual. If this is the case, then the act of attention in the exercise of faith is more plausibly understood as the confluence of cognition and volition, of knowing and willing. The suggestion that the activity of the will be included with cognition indicates the way values are ‘inserted’ into the world and it is this activity of the will in attending that accounts for the fact that the exercise of faith is an activity, a ‘doing,’ as Luther regularly characterizes it in the *Treatise on Good Works*. Further, if we consider this mutual relation of cognition and volition with respect to Luther’s example, of the participant in mass we may suppose that there is a simple and straightforward causal type of relationship between knowing and willing in the act of attending. That is, what the moral agent hears and cognitively attends to and desires, viz., the object of attention imaged in the words of institution, conditions our willing and determines the nature of its action; knowing, it may be said, compels our willing. Let us also suppose that the movement of cognition here is toward images that

³³ Ibid., 41.

inspire new values that may then be used to interpret or construe the world in which the agent morally acts. The example would be those persons who “see in their sufferings and afflictions nothing but pure and precious merits.”³⁴ That is, the act of attention not only involves cognition in discovering value in the events and relations in the world but is also constructive in building value, that is, envisaging creative possibilities for action beyond empirical phenomena. In this way, the act of attention involves not only the *discovering* of values but also the *constructing* of values, that is, building values in our perception of the world which then influence action. On this construction the act of attending in the exercise of faith is not only passive in listening or neutral in cognition; rather it has an active volitional aspect in the way in which it inserts values into the world about us. It does, for example, locate positive values in personal suffering.

There is further value to be found in the mutual interaction of knowing and willing in Luther’s view of faith. For example, it appears to provide an explanation of how things go awry. In section 14 of the exposition on the First Commandment in the *Treatise on Good Works* Luther poses the question “If faith does everything through the First Commandment, why then do we have so many laws of the church and of the state, and so many ceremonies of churches, monasteries, and holy places, which urge and tempt men to do good works through them?” His answer: “Simply because we do not all have or heed faith. If every man had faith we would need no more laws. Everyone would of himself do good works all the time, as his faith shows him.”³⁵ Luther’s answer is followed by discussion of an example of “four classes of men” in which he makes a distinction between knowing and the willing implicit in moral action. In the first class of men Luther notes that there is a level of knowing where the believer has a “firm confidence that God’s favor and grace rests upon them

³⁴ Ibid., 28.

³⁵ Ibid., 34.

in all things.”³⁶ This knowledge, moreover, is correlative to actual moral action for “Such men do *willingly* what they know and can.” On one plane the moral agent has knowledge or firm confidence in “God’s favor and grace,” while on the level of moral action the person does “good works all the time as his faith shows him.” In this class of person knowing and willing appear to be unified or integrated, presumably because the manner in which faith conditions action leads the person to do willingly what she knows and can do in a given context. Cognition, we may say, conditions volition and the result is an integration of knowing and willing that Luther names a “freedom of faith.” Apparently cognition can condition volition in a negative way for there is the case of a second class of person who abuses freedom with a flawed knowledge of God’s favor and grace, what Luther calls a “*false* confidence.” This is paralleled with disruption at the level of moral action (volition) such that the false confidence regarding God’s grace licenses sinful deeds and this liberty has become “an occasion for the life of the flesh.” The situation is taken to extremes when both knowing and willing are denied as in Luther’s description of a third class of persons who apparently have set aside not only the knowledge of God and grace, but also moral behavior with the result that they have become “wicked men, who are always ready to sin.” These individuals, according to Luther, are flagrant evil doers who like “wild horses and dogs,” need the restraint of spiritual and temporal laws. A fourth kind of person exhibits an infantilism in their understanding of faith and the spiritual life, requiring encouragement and coaxing at the level of moral action to behave aright. So this kind of person is enticed with what Luther calls “external, definite concomitant adornment” in the form of religious actions such as praying, reading, fasting and singing. These actions suggest the way volition influences cognition for, as Luther notes, these “ceremonies and external works” must continue “until such time as they too learn to know the teachings of faith.”³⁷ To construe Luther’s example this way is

³⁶ Ibid., 34.

³⁷ Ibid., 34.

of value in depicting the interactive relationship between cognition and volition and the roles each plays in those behaviors (and misbehaviors) represented by the different kinds or classes of men. If we envisaged each of these classes positioned at differing points on a scale or continuum, then the optimal point is Luther's 'first class' where the level of knowing synchronizes with appropriate moral action. In terms of the analysis proposed previously, cognition inclusive of desire is able to compel the action, hence cognition conditions volition, faith compels works. Both are united and coincident as a person moves through the continuum becoming aware of truth and falsity, deception and reality in a process of discovery. While this model indicates that both levels interact in differing ways in the process of moving through a series of points, there are, as Luther's example shows, cases where the understanding of faith (cognition) and actual moral practice (volition) do not correspond and even conflict thereby impeding and even stopping movement.

Previous mention was made of the view that the act of attending in the exercise of faith is not merely passive or neutral cognition; rather it has an active volitional aspect in the way in which it inserts values into the world about us. Unfortunately, the values associated with this volitional aspect of attention may also be misleading, false or deceptive. This is because Luther's whole view of moral change is framed against the background of a destructive egoism. That is, the desire implicit in the normative cognition of faith is directed inward to the self rather than outward toward what is good. For in all three of Luther's examples cited above from the *Treatise on Good Works*, the inevitable predicament of the moral agent is that the blindness of both will and mind is such that all physical and spiritual goods are turned back into his or her own uses in pursuit of an egoistic self-gratification. It is precisely because of this dominating egoism, which Luther believes pervades human nature, that the predicament of the self is intensified. Because of the conflictive relationship between volition and cognition, the perverse drive to relate everything to our own self-gratification is intensified, causing the enslavement of both reason and will as

they curve in upon the self (*curvitus*).³⁸ This means that moral change requires a transformation of *both* cognition and volition through a normative use of faith as attention or realistic knowledge. Luther's view about the discovery that effects this transformation is noted in section 9 of the *Treatise on Good Works*. The remedy for the curving in of the self involves a transformation of the relationship between knowing and willing in a manner that both are directed away from self-infatuation to the service of God. For Luther, it is a work of divine grace that disrupts the destructive mutuality of the relationship between knowing and willing by evoking in the agent a quality of faith or trust "from the heart's core" which restores the capacity to access what is the truly good and real, that is, to worship God "in spirit and in truth." It is this act of faith or trust in the deep intimacy of the moral agent's self-awareness that precipitates change, according to Luther, for it is this action that is correlated with the reception of the Holy Spirit. He states: "And this faith soon brings along with it love, peace, joy, and hope. For God gives his spirit immediately to him who trusts him, as St. Paul says to the Galatians, "You have received the Spirit not from your good works but because you have believed the word of God" [Gal. 3:2].³⁹ This believing as an inner awareness is the basis on which Luther contends that a "Christian man living in this faith has no need of a teacher of good works, but he does whatever the occasion calls for, and all is well done. As Samuel said to Saul, "You shall become *another man*, when the spirit enters you; do whatever your hand finds to do, for God is with you" [I Sam. 10:6-7]."⁴⁰ In this transformation, knowing and willing, cognition and volition, continue to relate in mutual fashion, but faith has turned both toward the worship of God, an engagement with a reality beyond egoism. The work of attention now involves the appropriation and even the

³⁸ Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology, Its Historical and Systematic Development*, trans. and ed. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 71, 72.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

construction of images of grace and compassion in the moral world such that the desire implicit in cognition is directed toward the reality and goodness of worship in spirit and truth rather than away from it. The agent's willing is now seen to function not as resolute willfulness but as obedient willingness, conforming itself to the realistic vision of worship in spirit and truth, rather than the construction of false images that inform moral choice and action.

Phases of Faith

The foregoing account of cognition and volition in the act of attention creates a context in which one can understand the inner dynamics of the *exercise* of faith in moral change. There is, however, a broader context that suggests why faith is construed as the primary metaphor for moral change in Luther's view. Recall the proposal that Luther's understanding of moral agency involved construing consciousness as already structured by an idea of the good. This was paired with the complementary view claiming that the perfection of God is discoverable through a hierarchy of perfection in the created universe⁴¹. Now Luther does not explicitly propose this latter view, but it may be that a similar version of that view forms a background to the example of the participant at mass where there is a progression that suggests different 'levels' of faith.⁴² If so, then knowing and willing can be envisaged as functioning in such a way as to empower ascent from the first to the uppermost level, from deception to reality, from fantasy to a firm confident faith. In this way, we progressively move toward the firm faith implicit in the supreme reality of the perfection of worship by a progressive discovery at lesser levels of the 'shadows' of different and more advanced degrees of faith. This is not to claim that

⁴¹ For the full discussion of these two views see the section on "The Normative," Chapter II, page 24 ff.

⁴² The proposal is also implicit in Luther's discussion of the "four classes of men" noted above on p. 49f.

we directly experience the ultimate reality and goodness in the perfection of worship, but we do experience the images of moral and spiritual perfection as we gradually progress. In the process we learn to distinguish gradations of good and bad, better and worse so that our experience provides us with evidence of the idea of perfection in the activity of progressive discovery.

There is some evidence for this found in Luther's exposition of the mass where moral and spiritual change is readily characterized in a series of gradations in which the participant is involved in a change from one state or quality to another; these gradations are very like differing 'levels' or 'phases' of knowledge and value. For example, phase (1) is a situation in which the participant at mass experiences the liturgy, sermon and prayer as empty religious ceremonials observed with no inner desire or apprehension: "the mass and the sermon are heard without edification, and the prayer is said *without faith*."⁴³ The next phase (2), is one in which faith is activated or, as Luther puts it, "it is necessary that we *attend* with our hearts also; and we do attend when we *exercise faith in our hearts*. Here we must listen to the words of Christ when he institutes the mass . . ."⁴⁴ This act of exercising faith is one in which we also perform at the same time (i) the act of *listening* to the words of Christ in the words of institution and, (ii) the act of *attention*. The following phase (3) is one in which the participant in mass comes to *consider or believe* that Christ has actually bequeathed his testament and given "forgiveness of all sins, grace and mercy unto eternal life."⁴⁵ Inner turmoil ensue as the participant in mass "longs for divine mercy and desires to be rid of his sins; or unless, if he has evil intentions, he is changed during the mass and comes to have a *desire* for this testament."⁴⁶ There is a final phase

⁴³ Luther, *Treatise on Good Works*, 55.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 55, 56.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.

(4) in which the participant experiences intense gratitude as faith and love merge. Luther states, “When this faith is rightly present the heart must be made glad by the testament. The heart must grow warm and melt in the love of God.” There follows an experience of worship for “praise and thanksgiving will follow with a pure heart, from which the mass is called *eucharistia* in Greek, that is, thanksgiving.”⁴⁷

There are a number of significant features in this non-rigid schematization in the sequence of change. First, there is a cognitive emphasis in the process such that the perfectionist character of *eucharistia*, is gradually revealed through specific practices of cognition such as attending with its cognates of ‘considering,’ ‘regarding’ and ‘believing.’ We find what is ultimately good and real, the act of worship, by way of variable but sustained acts of attention as the participant moves through the differing phases, a kind of continuum in which one becomes aware of truth and falsity, deception and reality in the ongoing course of orienting to different images. Further, this type of account promotes a view of the changing moral life as an overcoming of an ever-resistant egoism in a process or pilgrimage in which cognition and volition interact together in the exercise of faith. Moral change is now understood to be a function of a progressively changing quality of mind that turns out to be a radical re-education in moral understanding. Faith, on this account, is ‘progressive’ or ‘perfectionist’ in nature. Its activity is guided by an innate sense of the good (the normative) that enables it to discriminate among degrees of truth and falsity, deception and reality; it is also in progress toward an increasing apprehension, a ‘perfectionist’ movement to *eucharistia*, the doxology of praise and thanksgiving, notated in phase (4). In this context *eucharistia* is a response of gratitude and the result of the union of faith with the love of God. Luther does not expand on this

⁴⁷ Ibid.

union in the phase 4 segment of the exposition of the mass,⁴⁸ but he does offer in his exposition of the First Commandment an illuminating example of the way that love works with a confident faith to produce behavior. The example is one in which the perfectionist aspect of morality embodied in *eucharistia* is readily envisaged as contextualized to a relationship between particular individuals who are now privileged objects of moral attention:

“When a husband and wife really love one another, have pleasure in each other, and thoroughly believe in their love, who teaches them how they are to behave one to another, what they are to do or not to do, say or not to say, what they are to think? Confidence alone teaches them all this, and even more than is necessary. For such a man there is no distinction in works. He does the great and important as gladly as the small and unimportant, and vice versa. Moreover, he does them all in a glad, peaceful, and confident heart, and is an absolutely willing companion to the woman.”⁴⁹

Significantly, growing understanding of faith and morality does not move in the direction of an increasing generality or abstract principle, but rather in the direction of an increasing depth, privacy and particularity. Hence Luther’s example connects the idea of perfection with the individual, and the capacity to apprehend her in belief and love, as the important object of moral attention. Knowing the individual in this way becomes the context for a moral understanding resulting in a quality of unconstrained freedom in human action that is informed by faith:

⁴⁸ Both Luther and his interpreters note the importance of this relationship. For example: Tuomo Mannermaa, “Why is Luther So Fascinating? Modern Finnish Luther Research,” in *Union with Christ, The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*, ed’s., Carl E. Braaten, Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 18. Mannermaa’s discussion of faith and love is in relation to law. He cites Luther stating on page 18: “For faith loves and acts, as Galatians 5 says: “Faith is active through love.” Water fills the pitcher, the person pouring also fills the pitcher; the water with itself, the person pouring the water. The sophists called this in their language *effective et formaliter implere* (WA 17 II, 98, 13-14).” Mannermaa’s contention is that “Luther’s understanding of the relation between faith and love is grounded on his concept of participation and/or *theosis*.”

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

“Thus, a Christian man who lives in this confidence toward God knows all things, can do all things, venture everything that needs to be done, and does everything gladly and willingly, not that he may gather merits and good works, but because it is a pleasure for him to please God in doing these things. He simply serves God with no thought of reward, content that his service pleases God.”⁵⁰

This is not a freedom conceived as a matter of simply willing to move away from a situation which constrains or determines choices; rather, freedom is a substantive value enacted within a moral world of others that one strives to know in all its depth and particularity. Not to participate in such unconstrained and spontaneous activity is not to be “one with God” as Luther puts it, and, moreover, risks the doubt that becomes the insidious motivation for an individual to look for ways and means to influence God with many good acts.

In sum, Faith signals Luther’s aim to clarify a normative understanding of moral change at the heart of his theory of moral reflection. It does so by showing the development of faith through a series of gradations in levels of moral and spiritual awareness. Moral life is a kind of process of learning and discovery in which cognition and faith come together as the individual undergoes a reeducation of faith in its cognitive and volitional dimensions. This process culminates in Luther’s connection of perfection and the knowledge of individuals, an alliance of knowledge and value which functions as an ideal *telos* of moral understanding.

Reflections on Moral Change

In summary, Luther views moral change as a basic feature of moral reflection and correlative with the view that consciousness is fundamental and essential to

⁵⁰ Ibid.

moral agency. So understood, moral change is definable as the transition from one state of consciousness or quality of mind (construed as ‘immoral’) to another state (construed as ‘moral’). Moral life primarily concerns the process of change from one to the other aptly described under the metaphors of ‘pilgrimage’ or ‘journey.’ When applied to the example of the liturgical action of mass, this means that Luther depicts the participant’s progressive change through a sequence of states and qualities of mind. Beginning with a disposition that is “arid and hard”⁵¹ the participant in mass is described as evolving through a process of revision that increasingly moves towards a *telos* described by Luther as *eucharistia*, an act of praise and thanksgiving.

In Luther’s account, the process of moral change in an agent is initiated by the exercise of faith inclusive of the acts of attending and listening. It is a faith that assumes an active and constructive role in the internal dynamics of change and whose leading features are readily displayed in a performative model. This enables the articulation of normative moral change by incorporating distinctions between the agents passive involvement in hearing and the activities of willing and knowing embodied in the act of attending. At one level, the cognition involved in the act of attention is very like knowledge or understanding, yet at another level it is more helpful to distinguish faith from knowledge in that it is an act, a ‘doing,’ involving volition as well as a more normative kind of knowledge that adds significance to what is perceived. Though the example of the participant at mass does not articulate these distinctions, they are proposed as an account of moral change and motivation most compatible with Luther’s remarks. Examples from the *Treatise on Good Works* suggest that Luther’s view of cognition and volition in the exercise of faith is more likely a reciprocal relation: there are situations in which moral beliefs empower our willing action and cases where our willing influences moral belief. The former relate faith and action in a mutually embodied way such that the exercise of faith is a lively, constructive ‘doing’ which not only re-perceives the agent’s moral world, but also

⁵¹ Ibid., 56.

facilitates positive moral change in overt behavior. While right belief will compel our willing, the fact is that our willing may also influence our moral beliefs suggesting that in Luther's examples both knowing and willing are in need of radical change because of the dominance of a consuming egoism.

Within Luther's theory of moral change in an agent there is a need to distinguish between 'good' faith and 'bad' faith; faith that generates "real good works" from faith whose "works are pointless."⁵² This problem is addressed since the progression of the participant at mass naturally lends itself to a discrimination of stages. These are gradations on a continuum of different states of consciousness similar to a hierarchy of different levels of knowledge. The notion of a continuum is useful in that it lends itself to the marking of differences between 'grades' or 'levels' as Luther appears to do in contrasting appearance and reality or fantasy and faith. Moreover, we are enabled to envision the change of states in faith in the now familiar example of the participant at mass who undergoes a change in perception. It is a revision that is not only inward and private but progressive and positive. We readily envisage the participant in mass beginning with *no expectation* of receiving anything out of the mass. With this apathy that bears no relation to her actual active involvement in the liturgy, she is presented with the images embodied and spoken in the words of institution. She *attends* to these images, listening and giving attentive and serious hearing with her heart in the light of her scrutiny of her own motives. In doing so, she exercises faith giving serious attention to the testament; expectations change as there ensues a desire for the testament and a longing for mercy with forgiveness and grace. It is important to emphasize that at this point the change that occurs is not behavioral but in the participant's mind. Mass is discovered not to be arid and hard but warm and blessed, not empty ceremonial but a comforting rich testament. The participant's outward behavior in no way alters until at the endpoint or *telos* when faith in union with love evokes *eucharistia*, praise and thanksgiving from

⁵² Ibid., 23.

a pure heart. There are two features of *eucharistia* as a *telos* that are significant in Luther's exposition: (i) it appears to be an instance of that worship "in spirit and in truth" that Luther considers to be the fulfillment of the First Commandment and (ii) it arises in the union of faith and love which Luther exemplifies in a specific marital relation of persons. Progress in faith and moral understanding moves in the direction not of generalities, principles or criteria, but rather in the direction of increasing depth, privacy and particularity, e.g., a relation in which specific individuals are known to each other in trust and love. The firm faith united with love exemplified in the marital relation is the condition that evokes unconstrained freedom.

CHAPTER FOUR

IMPEDIMENT AND OPPORTUNITY

In *The Fire and the Sun*, a treatise about Plato's suspicion of art, Iris Murdoch states: "A portrayal of moral reflection and moral change is the most important part of any system of ethics."¹ This conviction is central to Luther's thinking about moral agency in the liturgy of the mass and is reflected in his view of faith and the claim that there are 'levels' or 'phases' of faith. Indeed, Faith conceived on a performative model is an attempt to articulate the active elements central to Luther's view of moral change at the heart of his view of moral and spiritual life. The moral and spiritual life of an agent is in a process of change in which knowing and willing interact in the work of attention as one undergoes a reeducation in the growing awareness of deception and reality, truth and falsity, good and evil as she seeks, struggles, learns and discovers.

Luther's view of moral and spiritual change and the important moral psychology developed to describe it contains an even more basic claim, namely, that human agency is enveloped in a disastrous condition of obsessive self-interest that resists all forms of positive moral change. In the *Treatise on Good Works* Luther's description of this condition of fallenness is dominated by an emphasis on an aberrant egoism located at the centre of the desire-laden and image-creating processes of

¹ Iris Murdoch, "The Fire and The Sun," in *Existentialist and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, with a foreward by George Steiner. ed. Peter Conradi (New York: Allen Lane/The Penguin Press, 1997), 457.

human consciousness. Rather than only identifying sin as a perversity of will, Luther emphasizes a radically self-idolizing propensity at the heart of our intellectual and emotive responses. This view, noted in the initial section of this Chapter, raises the question as to how the agent is to transcend such a problem to appropriate the reality of God apart from the enclosed world of the ego. In this respect the *Treatise on Good Works* suggests at least two strategies. The first, noted in the second section of this Chapter, identifies those instances where Luther associates faith with a rich variety of images. These appear to be the focus around which much of the diffusion of energetic desire is organized such that the quality and kind of the images to which we attend are deeply connected with our ability to envisage, choose and act. The problem of egoism is aptly depicted as *homo incurvatus in se* (the person turned in upon the self), which in the context of our analysis of Luther, requires the remedial offsetting work of attention for the redirection of desire. If attention is constricted, however, by what Luther describes at times as an all-pervasive system of egoistic desires and selfish deception, then the central moral question is: how is it possible for consciousness to transcend egoism and envisage the reality of God apart from self. The final section of this Chapter recognizes that moral change on this account requires an object of attention, a moral resource, outside of consciousness yet working through the energies of consciousness to effect moral change from within. According to Luther, this is accomplished by *askesis*, spiritual disciplines, which are the way that consciousness may be altered by the perception of a reality outside the mechanism of a self centered and deceptive fantasy.

The Impediment

Given the view of moral change ascribed to Luther, there remains a basic and unspoken presupposition, namely, that an agent has the capacity or ability to change, to develop from one state to another and is enabled to do so by a strong faith. In Luther's view, however, there is an unusually strong impediment in the struggle to

reach the better state and this is our ‘fallen’ human condition, our “many, wicked, sinful affections.”² This is a condition, however, which is not simply represented as the perversity of willful action, though that is involved; Luther’s moral psychology identifies egoism directly at the centre of the image creating process. A variety of terms is used to describe this human condition in the *Treatise on Good Works* and it is clear that it includes a sinful deviance in willful action as when Luther writes of “our perverse wickedness, which not only does that which is evil, but also misuses all that is good.”³ According to Luther’s interpreters there is much more than a perversity of will involved with a wickedness that includes “not only the outward works of the body but also all the activities that move men to do these works, namely, *the inmost heart, with all its powers.*”⁴ This observation is attested to by the many descriptions of an overpowering egoism in the *Treatise on Good Works* where Luther writes of how “deeply is human nature sunk in the evil of its own conceit and self-confidence.”⁵ Human agency is permeated by an unqualified egoism imaged forth as a fantasy in which “the self has been set up as an idol.”⁶ Once again, the matter is not only behavioral but very like the intense energy of a self-centered desire driven to hubris and described by Luther as a “wickedness not accomplished in the raw flesh but in the spirit.” It is a vice “so deceiving, so slippery to grasp, and so insidious” that it is “more grievous in God’s eyes than murder and adultery.”⁷ Rather than simply identifying sin, original or otherwise, as a perversity of moral action unable to do

² Martin Luther, “Treatise on Good Works,” trans. W. A. Lambert, rev. by James Atkinson, in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 44, *The Christian in Society*, James Atkinson, ed., Helmut T. Lehmann, gen. ed., (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 46.

³ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁴ Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther’s Theology, Its Historical and Systematic Development*, trans. and ed. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 250.

⁵ Luther, *Treatise on Good Works*, 42.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.

good, Luther is emphasizing a radically distorted egoism, a self-idolizing power that is at the heart of our knowing and awareness that permeates our intellectual, emotive and behavioral responses. Remarking on Genesis 8:21, “Man’s *heart and mind* incline always to evil,” Luther notes that this leads to pride, disobedience, anger, hatred, covetousness. He states: “To sum up, in all that he does or leaves undone, he rather seeks his own advantage and his own way. He seeks his own honor, rather than God’s and that of his neighbor. Therefore, all his works, all his words, all his thoughts, all his life are evil and not godly.”⁸ Those good works that veil a self-love are but an occasion for a pride and self-presumption which Luther, according to Bernhard Lohse, represents as *homo incurvatus in se* (the person turned in upon the self).⁹ This aberrant inward turning desire, as Lohse notes, is that which inclines persons “to haughtiness, unchastity, lust of the flesh and all sins such as we find now.”¹⁰ This aberrant desire is a definitive part of the emphasis in the *Treatise on Good Works* where Luther writes of the uncontrolled and misdirected desire which powerfully influences all our knowing, willing and acting and is also manifested in the intensity of a lust which “rages in all our members” infesting our thinking, hearing and seeing as well as doings.¹¹ With respect to faith, this desire allies with doubt to produce an anxiety that drives persons in the misguided attempt to influence God with good works; though such a person “is like a prisoner, more than half in despair, and often makes a fool of himself.”¹² On this account, there is acknowledgement of the perversity of the will but it is coupled with a blindness of mind which together make up the basic evil of an egoistic vanity that Luther describes in terms of an aberrant desire turned in on itself and manifested in anxiety, lust and power. This self-

⁸ Ibid., 72, 73.

⁹ Lohse, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 251.

¹⁰ Ibid., 252. Lohse is citing from WA 283, 3, 13-17.

¹¹ Luther, *Treatise on Good Works*, 104.

¹² Ibid., 27.

idolizing desire is at the heart of our knowing and awareness and permeates our volitional, cognitive and emotive responses, which are central to the image-creating work of attention. It is intrinsic to moral agency and the motive energy to change and its impact on moral action is clear: “it is quite impossible for us to conceive a good work out of our own resources, to say nothing of attempting or fulfilling them.”¹³

Luther’s conception of an intense self-centered desire turned in on itself intensifies the now urgent query: how is the moral agent to transcend this egoism and appropriate the reality of God as moral and spiritual source in moral change? In the *Treatise on Good Works* at least two considerations are relevant to this question: the first of these pertains to Luther’s use of imagery while the second addresses the skills of *askesis*. The first resolution recognizes that the problem of egoism is not identified as only or simply a problem of the perversity of a will unable to will the good. Rather, Luther’s moral psychology locates egoism at the source of the cognitive image-creating processes of human consciousness. This noetic dimension of the human moral fault directly affects faith as an agency of change because Luther’s account includes *the work of attention* with its disciplined practices of cognition such as considering, believing, desiring and regarding. In this respect, the central shift in Luther’s moral thought from will to attention, from outward conduct to inward knowing, acquires a certain normative force in the account of egoism. An important moral issue now becomes the acquisition of clarity and direction of faith as a condition for right action.

The significance of this point can be clarified by attending to those passages in the *Treatise on Good Works* where Luther associates faith with many and varied images which appear to have the function of directing faith to an object of attention beyond the confines of ego-centered experience. Moral change, in part, can be

¹³ Ibid., 104.

construed as a redirection of desire wherein attending (considering, regarding, believing) undergoes a shift in attachments. If this account of Luther's use of language and imagery is in order then there is some clarification of the way in which the images and fantasies of conscious life function to direct faith with desire toward an object of attention beyond the enclosed world of the ego.

Images and Faith

The notion of a continuum or scale has been useful in showing the distinction between a 'good' use of faith and a 'bad' use, both of which are implicit in the Luther's contrast between "false, pretentious, pharisaic good works done without faith" and "the right, true, genuine, real works of faith."¹⁴ The contrast is not only about 'works' for mention is also made of an associated continuum of different states or qualities of mind: pretence, ostentation and deception are associated with "outward works" at one end of the scale and the firm genuine confidence associated with "inward trust" at the other end.¹⁵ In between there are gradations or what one of Luther's interpreters calls "degrees of faith" characterized in terms of the object of faith.¹⁶ In the *Treatise on Good Works*, however, the gradations appear to pertain to the state or quality of mind as, for example, in section 7 of the exposition of the First Commandment. Here, Luther represents faith on a continuum of states, not dissimilar from a hierarchy of levels of knowledge, with a "slight and weak" faith at one end and a "highest" stage at the other end with a mid-point of "dim faith." Moral

¹⁴ Luther, "*Treatise on Good Works*," 29.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 32, 33.

¹⁶ Walther von Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, trans. Herbert J. A. Bouman (Belfast: Christian Journals Limited, 1976), 61. The author proposes three "degrees" of faith oriented to the object of faith: "The first is directed to signs and wonders, the second is deprived of these props and directed only to the Word, and the third, the perfect faith, is no longer dependent on the external Word but it a constant inner readiness to do God's will." See page 96.

change appears to be still understood as a change from one state or quality to another but now Luther specifies this in specific and related images. For example, his description on the 'scale of faith' begins with a "slight and weak" faith exercised with "great effort and a doubting and unwilling heart."¹⁷ This fragile faith is said to know nothing of the rising of "the sun of righteousness" and belongs to those who "have followed a hard and bitter road" but have not acknowledged God's way.¹⁸ Presumably, this is the faith that is weak and unrealistic in the way that it generates egoistic fantasies of the self that Luther characterizes with epithets such as "pretentious," "ostentatious," and "pure deception" in later sections.¹⁹ More importantly, however, this is a quality of faith in which cognition associates with false pictures, those in which "to all appearances God is honored, but in reality the self has been set up as an idol."²⁰ Mid way in the scale is a second grade that Luther identifies as a "dim faith" where the presence of God is hidden and faith is exercised in a way that individuals takes offense at their suffering, lapse into the projection of blame and take refuge in the belief that God has forsaken them. The image generated, according to Luther, is that of God separated from the person "like a wall of a fortress" and yet "through the window of dim faith he permits himself to be seen." These types of persons do good works but are "quite unaware of their serious unbelief" and when suffering comes they place blame on God, the devil or other people.²¹ Beyond this phase and at the upper terminus of the scale is what Luther describes as "the highest stage of faith" sustained by authentic inner trust and a good firm confidence even when God shows himself in a wrath that evokes the Psalmist's image: "O Lord,

¹⁷ Ibid., 27, 28.

¹⁸ Ibid., 28.

¹⁹ Ibid., 32.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 28.

rebuke me not in thy anger.” At this stage God is hidden among the sufferings yet is there and “ready to help in grace”. These persons exercise faith in the sense that they genuinely believe ‘in spite of’ the empirical evidence and trust that God is well-pleased with them; they truly discern merit in their many sufferings and trials which, when borne with this kind of faith, excel all works of faith.²² The distinction between faith at the “highest stage” and one that is “slight and weak” is not absolute; both represent states within consciousness that relate to its image-creating capacities. From a more normative perspective, Luther appears to conceive of deception and faith as opposites in the sense that deception fantasizes in generating narrow and false pictures (“the self has been set up as an idol”) while faith with a confident freedom moves in courageous action to “expect God’s goodness and grace” in the darkest temporal sufferings. Moral change involves the transition from external appearances and deception to an inner faith, through the progressive discarding of false images and the adoption of new, more truthful ones. “Truth” in this context is keyed to the release of the self from the domination of the ego and the way it construes reality. In this more normative vein, it would seem that the work of attention in the exercise of faith is like a moral discipline in the sense that it involves the capacity to picture what is quite other than oneself, especially to envisage and make real to oneself the existence and being of another person as in Luther’s example of the marital relation. In contrast to the self-enclosed world of deception and fantasy, faith explores the world beyond the constructions of the ego where we address a world other than ourselves.

The notion of a continuum in different states of consciousness is useful in that it articulates the differentiation of fantasy and faith in Luther’s view. The more obvious feature, however, is found in the creative use of a variety of images; indeed, at every phase of the process, the significance of images is evident in Luther’s analysis. As previously noted, fantasy and faith are opposites on the scale in that

²² Ibid., 28, 29.

fantasy generates false pictures (“the self is on the throne”) or we have no vision or sight since “the sun of righteousness has not risen.” In terms of images of sight and vision, there is the picture of the one, who looking through the window of “dim faith,” is permitted to ‘see.’ Finally, there are those who at the “highest stage of faith” actually ‘see’ in their sufferings and afflictions “pure and precious merits.”²³ This kind of genuine faith is imaged as the grace, freedom and confidence of a true child of God.²⁴ Indeed, what is significant about the process of growth to genuine faith in Luther’s account is that it seems to be consistently described in correlation to the abandonment of images that are “false,” and the adoption of more “truthful” (and biblical) ones where truth is understood to relate to the removal of the domination of egoism and its power to construe reality.²⁵ Such images reflect a continuum of differing states of consciousness not unlike a hierarchy of levels of knowledge where images are used to express differing levels of intellectual awareness that are coincident (or not) with levels of moral awareness. The moral agent moves through this continuum with a growing awareness of what is true and what is false; what is deception and what is reality. There is continuous learning since “a man must practice,”²⁶ according to Luther; but it is a learning and discovery depicted in terms of the adoption and discarding of images as the process of a changing quality of consciousness that eventually leads to the union of faith and love imaged in a quality of relationship like that of the marital union. Progress in moral understanding on this account takes place through the agency of faith in the work of attention, which progressively learns to discriminate the false world of appearances and deception

²³ Ibid., 28.

²⁴ Ibid., 33. The phrase actually used is “true, living children of God.”

²⁵ Stanley Hauerwas with David Burrell, *From System to Story: An Alternative Pattern for Rationality in Ethics*, in Stanley Hauerwas with Richard Bondi and David Burrell, *Truthfulness and Tragedy, Further Investigations in Christian Ethics*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 35.

²⁶ Luther, *Treatise on Good Works*, 54.

from the “right, true, genuine, real works of faith.”²⁷ Images, in Luther’s account, appear to be focal points around which various cognitive processes are oriented and the quality and kind of images to which we attend are profoundly tied to our cognition and volition; our thinking, choosing and acting. In this respect, it is also significant that many of the images used by Luther are biblical and conveyed in sentential frames which are potentially revelational in that they signify the divine *res* in ways hidden to human cognition. But the actual revelatory uptake occasioned with such images profoundly affects the believer’s understanding, emotion and capacity to act.²⁸

The foregoing account of the use of images is not unrelated to Luther’s recognition of the formative power of language, a feature noted previously.²⁹ The emphasis now appears to be the manner in which moral reflection is itself molded in the structures of language and consciousness. The process of change is presented by Luther as a change that takes place in, with, and through the rich and continuous stream of imagery; the substitution of different value terms and metaphors in the case of the participant at mass. All of which, when taken together, function to articulate a normative understanding of moral change originating in revelation. An “ethics of faith” apparently includes the capacity to image what is other than oneself as well as what is real to oneself. The phenomenon of describing by using moral epithets serves to provide alternative images and refocus one’s attention. This is already evident in Luther’s description of the participant at mass as involved in the act of “praise and thanksgiving” rather than “petty prayers,” a “comforting, rich” testament rather than “arid and hard.” *Eucharistia* is a union of faith and love described as a state where “the heart must grow warm and melt in the love of God;” it is praise and thanksgiving, the

²⁷ Ibid., 28.

²⁸ Risto Saarinen, “The Word of God in Luther’s Theology,” *Lutheran Quarterly* n.s., 8, (1994): 35, 37.

²⁹ The full discussion is found in the section “Moral Language” in Chapter Two, p. 19ff.

kind of grateful thanks that a man has “when a good friend has presented him with a thousand or more gulden.” This is contrasted with the situation in which Christ fares like those who make several persons rich by their testament and then “these beneficiaries never think of them, or praise or thank them.”³⁰ These are images in ordinary discourse originating in the common vernacular and using the resources of one’s own temperament and imagination. Even as subjective aspects of the participant’s moral perception, however, they do not inhibit clarity; rather they are the condition required for focused attention. They are figures of speech tied to our experience of the world which provide an extended application of accepted concepts. It is a perceptive attention that transforms accuracy into discernment. Moral language has a central and creative role in the use of images that refocus attention. Realistic attention is not merely a simple empirical apprehension of “the facts”; it is the outcome of an interpretive interaction or engagement between mind and world mediated by moral language and individual perception; a more complex interpretive activity in which the language of imagery mediates the world of fact to faith

Luther’s view certainly requires the redirection of desire in overcoming the radical and self-destructive egoism that resists moral change. This is a task that may be conceived of in a way that requires the cultivation of forms of attention designed to break the hold of the ego-driven psyche and foster attachments to that which lies beyond and apart from the deceptive image-making fantasy mechanisms of the naturally selfish consciousness. If so, then the transformation of consciousness requires an object of attention *outside* consciousness to refocus and redirect desire away from the self. But this appears to contradict a previous construal of Luther’s position, namely, that conscience is a norm of the good internal to human consciousness. The difficulty can be understood as one of reconciling Luther’s clear suspicions of the machinations of the egoistic psyche with the traditional understanding of God as the only true moral source outside consciousness. A

³⁰ Luther, *Treatise on Good Works*, 56.

response to this conundrum which is compatible with Luther's analysis is to simply affirm that God, who is alone the true moral source beyond consciousness, in fact works through the energies of consciousness to effect moral change from within. This is the response to which we now turn.

Spiritual Discipline

If the central impediment to moral and spiritual life is the dominating egoism of the psyche as previously noted, then *how* is the agent to transcend this and appropriate the reality of God as moral and spiritual source for change? This question is not about the 'objectivity' of a moral criterion but about *how an agent can create the conditions required to access* moral and spiritual resources. The difference is important for the quest for a moral criterion of this sort will typically involve an appeal to moral sources existing "outside" us in an objective order, often in a metaphysical world. It is the case that consciousness is related to reality but not in linear fashion. That is, it is indeed the case that Luther is a realist in the sense that "reality" and God are understood to exist "outside" of us and this is the usage understood in his exposition of the Third Commandment as an elucidation of the self in relation to God, that is "how we should relate ourselves to God in works."³¹ This is a form of realism in which there is no question of there being an antecedent moral and theological framework independent of the human mind and will which is indispensable for an understanding of the self. This is no simple naïve realism, however, for it is Luther's view that this reality is mediated in and through human conscious action. In the case of Luther's example of the participant at mass, appeal to whatever is alleged to be ultimately real, good and true is exemplified historically in the words of institution, in this case the sayings and acts of the historic Jesus. However, these also are subject to human interpretation suggesting that there is an important aspect in which a realist

³¹ Ibid., 53.

sense of an objective moral order is dependant upon our own powers of construction. This element of human subjectivity is clearly identified by von Lowenich: “The knowledge of God and faith have a psychological side. Nothing that affects our inner self can evade psychological mediation.”³² One contemporary writer, Charles Taylor, interprets this phenomena as part of the movement known as “internalization” or “localization” which is the process whereby moral sources, previously understood to exist “outside” us in an objective metaphysical order, are now seen to depend on a moral agent’s own powers of construction or inner perceptual activities.³³ The sense of an objective moral order is not denied, but is here understood in correlation to our own powers of construction, our own inner motivations, or in the power of language as a medium of revelatory insight. This is not, however, to claim that Luther has initiated an anthropological orientation in theology in the sense of claiming that the vocabulary of consciousness was interchangeable with the discourse of theology.³⁴ Neither Luther nor Taylor’s comments substantiate this view. Taylor does indicate that we explore the order in which we are set with the aim of identifying moral sources through “personal resonance.”³⁵ But this observation appears in the context of what he refers to as the “reflexive” turn of thought, by which he means that our access to moral sources “outside” the self can only take place through language that resonates within the self; an objective moral order now comes “inseparably indexed to a personal vision.”³⁶ William Schweiker accurately notes that this reflexivity has always been a traditional feature of the logic of theological discourse and it is a sound

³² Walther von Loewenich, *Luther’s Theology of the Cross*, 58.

³³ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, (Cambridge Harvard University Press, 1989), 180.

³⁴ Ingolf Dalferth, “The Visible and the Invisible: Luther’s Legacy of a Theological Theology,” in S. W. Sykes, ed., *England and Germany, Studies in Theological Diplomacy*, (Frankfurt: Peter D. Lang, 1982), 32.

³⁵ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 188, 512.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 510.

characterization of the approach to Luther's analysis in the *Treatise on Good Works*.

He states,

“This radical reflexive kind of inquiry into self/other began in Christian thought with St. Augustine's claim that in reflecting on his thinking, feeling, and willing, he was directed beyond himself to God, a direction manifested pre-reflectively in his spiritual restlessness and desire for peace. Modern theologians in this tradition have struggled to make the same point against the critics of religion. As Søren Kierkegaard put it, when the self relates itself to itself it also has a relation to the power that establishes the self. This power is God. And Friedrich Schleiermacher, father of modern hermeneutics, says that the feeling of immediate self-consciousness is also a feeling of absolute dependence on a “whence,” the divine.”³⁷

What is interesting about this view that relates to Luther's mode of analysis is the claim that in coming to self-awareness, the self in its most basic activities is not simply involved in an enclosed human subjectivity. This is because consciousness in reflecting on itself bears witness not only to itself but also to *another*. The view is that God, who alone is reality and goodness, is discovered through the medium of consciousness; at the same time, the act of reflexivity reveals that God is beyond--that which transcends all consciousness. By turning to an analysis of the discourse of inwardness as Luther does, we become aware not simply of our own powers but also accede to a condition of thought that surpasses subjectivism. This means that God, understood as the source of reality and goodness, is not simply identifiable with the subjective preferences of the agent since subjectivity understood this way is but the *medium* for our access to moral sources. Nor is the sense of an objective moral order being denied but rather, understood in correlation to

³⁷ William Schweiker, *Power, Value, and Conviction, Theological Ethics in the Postmodern Age*, (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1998), 80.

our own powers of construction and activities of knowing, yet retaining the power of the appeal to the transcendent. In order to clarify how this might be the case, attention is directed to how these insights form a “reflexive” approach to Luther’s doctrine of *askesis*.³⁸ *Askesis* is used here to name those spiritual disciplines, inner activities of thought and will which are intended to cultivate those habits of mind conducive to a life of faith.

Given a reflexive approach, the chief aim of *askesis* is to carefully cultivate moral sources that enable the reordering of the selfish desires of the ego-centered consciousness. The goal is the achievement of a spiritual and moral condition in which one’s desires and hence one’s actions are properly oriented to the objective good, viz., God as the ultimate source of goodness and spiritual life. This is mediated through the idea of personal resonance, that is, through the unique consciousness of the human agent. The assumption is not that there is a metaphysical connection between human reason and the rational order of the cosmos depicted in a scholastic metaphysic, but that there is a correlation between consciousness and God as the ultimate good that can only be accessed through consciousness itself. In sum, God as supreme reality and goodness is accessed in the very texture and quality of our conscious faith. This is the good that resonates in the consciousness of individuals, and thus is mediated through human particularity and experience.

Luther’s view in part exemplifies this reflexive approach in that it identifies the spiritual and moral condition that is the goal of *askesis*. Subsequent to his exposition of the mass, Luther addresses those spiritual disciplines uniquely involved in the

³⁸ Antonaccio, Maria, “Contemporary Forms of *Askesis* and the Return of Spiritual Exercises,” *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics*, 18 (1998): 69-92. In what follows I am indebted to the observations of Antonaccio whose article applies the reflexive model to various philosophical approaches to *askesis*. A modern rendition of the value of the spiritual disciplines from an evangelical perspective is that found in Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines, Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988).

process of growth and development of faith when we “gather in church, see mass, hear God’s word and offer common, single-minded prayer together.”³⁹ In sections 17 to 25 of the exposition of the Third Commandment Luther addresses the more serious disciplines associated with the abstemious life. These include fasting, vigils, prayer and penances in addition to “discipline we receive at the hands of others” who cause us unrest, anger and suffering.”⁴⁰ Both forms of *askesis* intend to address the central fault of the moral and spiritual life which, given Luther’s view, is the intensely self-centered egoism of the human psyche that, in self-protective fashion, fabricates pretentious good works to find favor with God freely indulging in deception and illusion. The goal of both forms of *askesis* according to Luther is also that of the Third Commandment understood in its “spiritual intention” or its “much deeper meaning which embraces the whole nature of man.”⁴¹ This intention is about a condition of inner “spiritual rest”⁴² in which one’s desires and hence one’s actions are rendered dormant to enable an effective orientation to the objective source of spiritual life and goodness. This condition is named as one of patience and peace realized when we “*cease* from our labor and trade but much more – that we let God alone work in us and that in all our powers do we do nothing of our own.”⁴³

The condition of spiritual rest involves the discipline of a training that is accomplished, in part, by the one who practices cessation, who identifies, resists and distracts herself from the many and varied desires that “appear in such an attractive, subtle and desirable form.”⁴⁴ Here, the initial movement in the way an agent

³⁹ Luther, *Treatise on Good Works*, 72.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 72.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 73.

addresses egoism is to resist or avert; that is, one detaches as the self moves away from an enslaving self-involvement with a person, object or situation. One's resistance to the aggressive acquisitiveness of desire is then accompanied with an act which is "to make a total commitment, [and] commend himself to God's governance."⁴⁵ This action is to redirect an agent's attention to a new vista of perception is presented by Luther in a biblical image of a "kingdom" which in turn evokes other new images of authority or power that foster a dispossession of the self and the presence of new horizons for differing commitments. There can now come about a new source of expectation, hope and desire as consciousness is altered by attention to what is beyond the life of anxious grasping desire. Learning to use the skills of attending and intending involved here are acknowledged by Luther as an exercise of faith and regarded as the "best training" because "we let our own works go and let our reason and will lie dormant, resting and commending ourselves to God in all things, especially when they appear spiritual and good."⁴⁶ The sustained using of these skills is an important kind of moral discipline requiring patience, endurance and concentration; it is a disciplined attention to an object that stands outside the usual limits of consciousness. The "work" of attending in this context progressively manifests something that exists independently of the moral agent and attention will find fulfillment in a new awareness. The point of this sustained involvement with the skills of attending will progressively lead the moral agent away from self involvement to that which is alien; that which consciousness cannot envelop, deny or make unreal. This is a form of re-perception of reality that enables the moral agent to engage in self-evaluation as he or she is forced to reassess his or her own limited capacities in light of a new standard provided by unfamiliar subject matter.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Sustaining attention before an ever encroaching egoism will require other disciplines of “fastings, watchings, and labor.”⁴⁷ to subdue the egoistic conditioning of ordinary socialization which deaden one’s capacity to resist, refocus and receive. Rather than simply repressing feelings, these disciplines serve to bring to bay the inner distractions and disturbances that disrupt the freedom to engage the repose of calm. But there is always strife and conflict as spirit resists anger and pride in the neutralization of the dominant and energetic egoism of our nature described as the “dominion of Adam.”⁴⁸ Luther is accurate in describing this aspect of moral and spiritual change as requiring intention and effort in pursuing the training where skillful disciplines re-order wayward desires and passions, eventually bringing the individual to “a pitch of peace and poise.”⁴⁹ It is precisely this repose of peace which insures orientation, that is, the appropriate condition required to access resources for moral and spiritual life: “The highest and first work of God in us and the best training is that we let our own works go and let our reason and will lie dormant, resting and commending ourselves to God in all things especially when they appear spiritual and good.”⁵⁰ It is in this ‘space’ that a person ceases to rule her own life and “there is nothing but godly happiness, joy, and peace, and all other works and virtues as well.”⁵¹

If Luther’s view of *askesis*, then, is construed with the help of Taylor’s view of reflexivity, then we can view spiritual disciplines as a way to cultivate moral sources so as to enable the reordering of the selfish desires and passions of the egoistic consciousness. On this view, the source of goodness is not simply conceived of as

⁴⁷ Ibid., 72.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 77.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 74.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 77, 78.

existing objectively outside of us in the order of the cosmos; it is also located in the texture of the agent's consciousness. This is not to claim that the good is identifiable with the subjective preferences of the agent; it is to claim that consciousness with the instrumentality of faith is the medium rather than the source and content of the moral good.

This reflexive account of the relation of consciousness generally, and faith in particular, to the ultimate source of goodness synchronizes with the theme of moral change so central to the notion of *askesis*. In Luther's view, the agent's orientation to the good is continually distorted by the egoism of the psyche. The purpose of spiritual discipline is to purify the psyche of egoism by reorienting its desire towards God, the world and other persons. This is a 'dispossession' of the self and an outcome of disciplined attention to the reality that exists outside the self; spiritual exercises breaks the hold of egoism and releases the self to access a more accurate apprehension of the world and of other persons. In this way *askesis* achieves a relation to the good that transcends the self by overcoming egoism; nevertheless, this good resonates within the self because *askesis* draws on the resources of the agent's own consciousness, imagination and vision in order to perfect his or her orientation to the good.

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