

University of Dayton Review

Volume 25
Number 1 *Final Issue of University of Dayton
Review*

Article 4

12-1-1997

Self-Love and Social Are the Same: Reflections on Autonomy, Autobiography, and the Responsible Self

Eugene R. August
University of Dayton

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ecommons.udayton.edu/udr>

Recommended Citation

August, Eugene R. (1997) "Self-Love and Social Are the Same: Reflections on Autonomy, Autobiography, and the Responsible Self," *University of Dayton Review*: Vol. 25: No. 1, Article 4.
Available at: <https://ecommons.udayton.edu/udr/vol25/iss1/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in University of Dayton Review by an authorized editor of eCommons. For more information, please contact mschlangen1@udayton.edu, ecommons@udayton.edu.

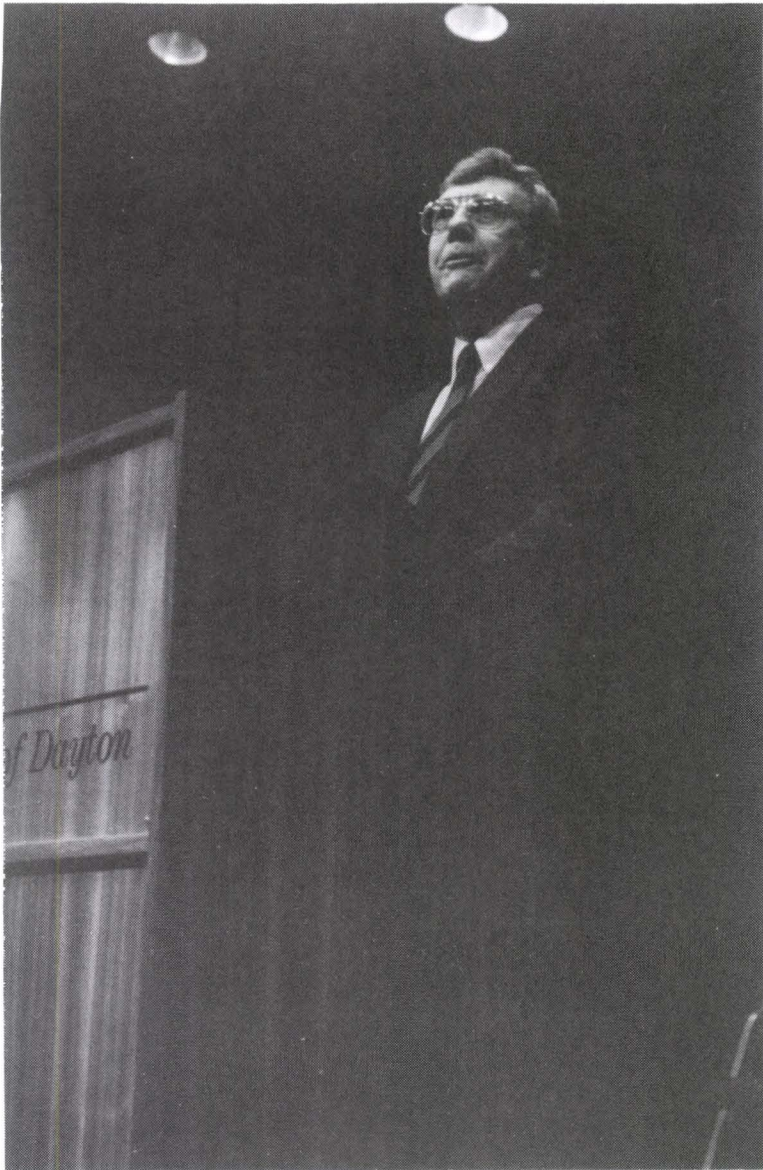


Photo: Mike Ryan

Eugene R. August
Alumni Chair in Humanities, 1993–1997

Published by eCommons, 1997

Self-Love and Social Are the Same: Reflections on Autonomy, Autobiography, and the Responsible Self¹

Eugene R. August

The title for this address—"Self-love and social are the same"—comes from the eighteenth-century poet, Alexander Pope. With a genius for compressing whole philosophies into a polished couplet, Pope wrote:

Thus God and Nature link'd the gen'ral frame,
And bade Self-love and Social be the same.

(*An Essay on Man: Epistle III*, lines 317-18, p. 535)

But, can self-love and social love (that is, love of others) really be the same?

I begin with this question for a specific, local reason. When the Humanities Base theme of autonomy and responsibility is raised in the classroom, students frequently misperceive the terms as opposites: they see autonomy *vs.* responsibility. As a result, classroom discussions of this theme often go nowhere because the discussants have defined autonomy as one's right to do as one pleases and responsibility as a restriction imposed by those in power. Attempts to explore issues such as abortion, gun control, same-sex marriage, and physician-assisted suicide quickly become mired in the mono-theme of a debate between individual rights and social repression. What is needed to get these discussions off dead center is a different framework for considering the issues, one that includes more complex understandings of autonomy and responsibility.

And that is what this keynote address attempts. I want to explore the possibility that individual autonomy and social responsibility are complementary, not contrary, terms.

The misperception that pits autonomy and responsibility against each other, however, is not confined to UD classrooms. It reflects a tension inherent in the human condition. As J. Bronowski writes:

It is a tightrope that man walks, between his desire to fulfill his wishes, and his acknowledgement of social responsibility. No animal is faced with this dilemma: an animal is either social or solitary. Man alone aspires to be both in one, a social solitary. (411)

Further, given the centuries-old struggle to achieve political and personal freedoms, it's easy to see why autonomous individualism and social responsibility have been polarized. This seems especially the case in America. The anti-social possibilities of American autonomy have been the subject of running commentaries from Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* to *Habits of the Heart* by Robert Bellah and his associates.

¹ The author gratefully acknowledges the help of Paul H. Benson and Fred W. Jenkins with parts of this address.

Look at a characteristically American document like Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Self-Reliance." "Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members" (92), Emerson declares, and "Whoso would be a man, must be a non-conformist" (92). In this document, society and individual are at war, and the individual must resist some claims of responsibility for others. Emerson writes:

Then again, do not tell me, as a good man did to-day, of my obligation to put all poor men in good situations. Are they *my* poor? I tell thee, thou foolish philanthropist, that I grudge the dollar, the dime, the cent I give to such men as do not belong to me and to whom I do not belong. (93)

Here Emerson begins to sound like Ebenezer Scrooge.

Since Emerson's day, an entire literature has grown up in America devoted to the seemingly inevitable antagonism between rugged individualism and mass conformity—with social responsibility taking a heavy hit. Consider, for example, the writings of Ayn Rand, who is scheduled to appear on our "Meeting of Minds" panel this evening. Rand's novels and manifestos have achieved a cult status among those who see individual and society as implacably at war. In *The Virtue of Selfishness* Rand bashes what she calls "altruism," and proclaims that the achievement of one's own happiness is a person's highest moral purpose (27). Although Rand allows that we have a responsibility to respect others' rights, personal sacrifice is unnecessary and unacceptable. "The principle of *trade*," she says, "is the only rational ethical principle for all human relationships, personal and social, private and public, spiritual and material" (31). In Rand's novel, *The Fountainhead*, it's a sure sign that someone is a hypocrite if that character contributes to charities.

More recent critics, however, have deplored an American autonomy that is unburdened by social responsibility. They point to such phenomena as "Me Generation" self-centeredness; the in-your-face-hostility known as "attitude"; the animosities of grunge, punk, biker, and gangsta rap youth culture; the obsession with self-esteem; the insistence upon rights without corresponding responsibilities; and the chip-on-the-shoulder antics of celebrities like Madonna and Dennis Rodman. Such pop icons, John Leo argues, canonize "the defiant outsider as an imperial self, a rebel with no stable identity, set in opposition to all known norms, rules, tradition, authority, and mainstream values." They epitomize what Leo calls "an aggressive political position celebrating radical autonomy and disparaging the claims of community and restraint."

If individual autonomy and social responsibility are so entirely incompatible, humanity is indeed in a bind. Self-love and social love are at loggerheads, and individual and community are sworn enemies. So, before we buy into this great division, let's take a second look at it.

In doing this, I must beg the indulgence of my colleagues in Philosophy and Religious Studies for what will be, for them, a non-specialist's simplistic dash through areas of thought which they have explored more thoroughly. I can only invite them to contribute their reflections to the on-going dialogue that this symposium seeks to create, both here in the Sears Recital Hall and at the dinners tonight and Thursday evening in the Kennedy Union.

Anyone attempting a talk with a vocabulary that includes *autonomy*, *responsibility*, *freedom*, *free will*, and *determinism* is walking through a mine field of loaded terms, any one of which can explode in confusion at any moment. *Autonomy*, for example, is a word of many meanings, but for today I will select three overlapping meanings.

First, autonomy as political freedom. In this sense, *autonomy* means national or group independence, the ability of a people to make their own laws.

Second, autonomy as free will. In the long-running debate between determinism and free will, *autonomy* means one's ability to will freely, without external compulsion. More, it means the ability to make one's will fully one's own. It means one is free to will what one wants to will or to have the will that one wants.

Third, autonomy as self law. This idea of autonomy is rooted in etymology. The word *autonomy* derives from the Greek words *auto* meaning self and *nomos* meaning law. In this view *autonomy* designates the self as a law unto itself. The self has its own laws and its own responsibility to itself.

One of the most intriguing expositions of moral self-law is found in Immanuel Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* (1785)—which even Kant admitted was a “horrible title” (59). In this work, Kant discusses the “Autonomy of the Will as the supreme principle of morality” (108). He declares, “Autonomy of the will is the property the will has of being a law to itself ...” (108). If I understand Kant correctly (and I wouldn't advise anyone to put money on this), the will is the source of moral law which it must then obey or else violate itself. Kant also argues that rational beings are an end in themselves, imposing an appropriate responsiveness or responsibility upon us. Kant sums up his “supreme practical imperative” thus: “Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end” (96). If I am reading Kant correctly, his “supreme practical imperative” requires the autonomous will to exercise responsibility towards oneself and others.

Kant did not locate the groundwork of morality in teleology, but other moralists have. “The term ‘teleology’ is connected with the Greek, ‘telos’, which is Aristotle's term for ‘goal’: a teleological explanation is one which appeals to goals or final causes” (Barnes 73). In this view, autonomy or self-law would be a law encoded within the self as a developing being seeking its own perfection or excellence.

During the past century, evolutionary theory has put an intriguing spin on teleological self-law. According to Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, for instance, evolution in humans has shifted from the biological to the spiritual plane (277-78). The autonomy of rational beings thus implies a moral responsibility that cannot be assigned to non-rational creatures.

Teleological autonomy often also implies a deepest self which the individual seeks to become. In this view, one discovers moral values within oneself as a developing human being. Such a vision of the self informs Pindar's enigmatic advice: “O find, and be, yourself!” (line 72; p. 149). How can we find and be ourselves, unless there is a more humanized self encoded in our being that we must actualize? If that is the case, then obeying the law of our deepest self is a responsibility to ourselves that we must honor or else be stunted or distorted.

So much for autonomy. Let's move on to responsibility. The word's etymology suggests responding appropriately to someone or something. *Responsible* derives from the Latin word *respondere*, to respond, and the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as "Answerable, accountable (to someone for something); liable to be called to account."

Responsibility, then, is a moral term—perhaps (as Bruce Taylor has suggested to me) the only Humanities Base term that is intrinsically a moral term. As Vigen Guroian writes:

Moral living is about being responsive and responsible toward other people. And virtues are those traits of character that enable persons to use their freedom in morally responsible ways. (4)

Expanding on Guroian, we can define *responsibility* as exercising our autonomous will so that we respond appropriately to God, to fellow humans, to other creatures, to our planet, and (above all) to our own deepest selves.

*

Before we consider further the question of autonomy and responsibility, we must confront a dragon at the gate. The dragon is one of the oldest of philosophic tangles: the question of free will vs. determinism. If we do not have a free will, how can we be either autonomous or responsible?

The question is not merely abstract; it can be intensely emotional. When James Boswell tried to provoke Dr. Samuel Johnson into disputing the question, Johnson replied irritably: "Sir, we *know* our will is free, and *there's* an end on't" (Boswell I.363). The topic, one suspects, was too painful for Johnson to dwell on, for unless the will is free, our ordinary understanding of responsibility becomes an absurdity and—indeed—our ordinary understanding of ourselves as human beings becomes untenable.

Just how emotionally devastating this problem can be became clear to me twenty-five years ago when I was writing a book on John Stuart Mill. I was working my way through Mill's massive *System of Logic*. Throughout the first five books of the work, Mill was emotionally in control. But when Mill tackled the issue of free will and determinism in the sixth and final book, I could feel the emotional tremors vibrating in his prose. Mill was confronting something that disturbed him deeply. A quick check of Mill's *Autobiography* confirmed the suspicion.

In 1826 Mill had experienced a "mental crisis" that left him intermittently despondent for years. "... [D]uring the later returns of my dejection," he writes, "the doctrine of what is called Philosophical Necessity weighed on my existence like an incubus" (*Autobiography* 101).

I felt as if I was scientifically proved to be the helpless slave of antecedent circumstances; as if my character and that of all others had been formed for us by agencies beyond our control, and was wholly out of my own power. ... I pondered painfully on the subject, till gradually I saw light through it. (*Autobiography* 101-102)

In *A System of Logic* Mill solved the problem by distinguishing between **Necessitarianism** and **Fatalism**. Necessitarianism is the belief that actions are the results of causes; Fatalism is the belief that all of a person's actions result from causes beyond the person's will. But, Mill proclaims, the individual "has, to a certain extent, a power to alter his character" (*Logic* 14):

His character is formed by his circumstances ... , but his own desire to mould it in a particular way is one of those circumstances, and by no means one of the least influential.
(*Logic* 14)

At the end of the discussion, one can almost hear Mill sigh with relief for having eluded the dragon of Fatalism.

But not everyone considers fatalism as a dragon. B. F. Skinner's 1971 best seller, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, might just as well have been titled *Beyond Autonomy and Responsibility*. Certainly, Skinner would be happy to move beyond both. His behaviorism or "operant conditioning" is a form of what Mill called Fatalism. Skinner writes: "It is the environment which is 'responsible' for ... objectional behavior, and it is the environment, not some attribute of the individual, which must be changed" (70).

Clearly, Skinner makes a strong case that humans are determined in many ways by forces beyond their control. As humans we are products of a genetic inheritance that we have not willed into existence. We are powerfully shaped by our cultural environment. People may act under addictions, mental illnesses, and various forms of compulsion. But Skinner goes the full distance: our behavior results *completely* from conditioning. Any insistence upon human freedom and dignity are anachronisms because there is no area in which moral choice can be made.

Skinner's behaviorism, however, has its own puzzles and problems, a number of which have been explored by Xavier Monasterio in his book *To Be Human*. As Monasterio writes:

According to [Skinner], our behavior is as fully the result of conditioning as the behavior of the rats he uses in his laboratory. This, however, does not prevent Skinner from inviting us to *choose* the sort of society we want to live in and to *behave in the appropriate way* to bring about such a society. But does this not amount to reintroducing the very freedom he denies us? (49)

It surely seems to. If "autonomous man" is a prescientific fiction, as Skinner claims, how can he then urge people to choose to control the environment in order to better it? Nor is it clear on what basis anyone could or would decide what a "better" society would be. Also distracting is Skinner's way of talking about the environment controlling humans and therefore being "responsible," while at the same time talking about humans controlling the environment but not being "responsible."

Skinner not only eliminates individual responsibility but seems to have eliminated the individual as well. As Monasterio writes:

Does Skinner really mean that there is no "I," no "Me" behind or inside or apart from my behavior?

Exactly. ... Your behavior is *yours* only in the sense that it is the behavior of this living creature rather than of another. But it is not yours in any other sense. First, because there is no *you* of whom the behavior could be predicated. Second, and no less important, because your behavior is not controlled by you but by the environment. (38)

Consequently: "No one can blame us for anything, for we are not responsible for what we do; it happens to us for reasons beyond our control" (39).

The nemesis of Skinner's behaviorism is what he calls "autonomous man." "We have moved forward by dispossessing autonomous man," Skinner proclaims, and then adds sadly, "but he has not departed gracefully" (16). Indeed, he seems not to have departed at all, for Skinner finds him alive and well in "political science, law, religion, economics, anthropology, sociology, psychotherapy, philosophy, ethics, history, education, child care, linguistics, architecture, city planning, and family life" (16-17)—and Skinner doesn't even mention literature and the arts in his list.

If autonomous man has not departed the scene, neither have the philosophers of free will. Indeed, in the twentieth century, some discussions of free will have taken an interesting turn that is especially pertinent to our topic of individual autonomy and social responsibility.

In a seminal 1971 essay, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," Harry G. Frankfurt distinguishes among first-order desires, second order desires, and second-order volitions (82-87). In what follows, I will wildly oversimplify Frankfurt's argument. An *agent* may have a first-order desire to perform an act, as well as a second-order desire not to perform the same act, but only a *person* has a "second-order volition" that one of the two desires be his or her will. To illustrate: an *agent* may have a first-order desire to take cocaine and a second-order desire not to take cocaine, but only a *person* has a "second-order volition" that the desire not to take cocaine be his or her will. So: only those capable of second-order volitions are what Frankfurt calls *persons*. Those capable of only first- or second-order desires he calls *wantons* (86). A *wanton* does not consider the desirability of his or her desires; a *person* does.

Frankfurt's argument and the enormous response it has sparked have important implications for revising common notions of autonomy and responsibility. For one thing, "freedom of will" as Frankfurt defines it does not mean freedom to act on passing whims. It means that one is free to will what one wants to will, or to have the will that one wants (90). It means, as Susan Wolf points out, freedom to act in accord with the deep self ("Sanity" 140-41). Wolf adds, however, an important *caveat*: in order for this deep self to be a responsible self, it must be sane, that is, capable of recognizing and appreciating reality and good values ("Sanity" 145-48). The responsible agent, she argues, must possess "Reason" that can identify and act on the True and the Good (*Freedom* 67-93).

Individual autonomy, then, is a more complex and personal matter than mindlessly doing one's own thing. It is a matter, as Pindar says, of finding and being our self.

*

Autonomy and responsibility as complementary concepts turn up everywhere in the Humanities Base common readings. Take, for example, our old friend *The Grapes of Wrath*. John Steinbeck's Depression-era novel depicts the plight of Oklahoma farmers as they are driven from their land by drought and corporate land grabs, and it follows the Okies as they migrate to an uncertain future in California.

Repeatedly in the novel, defining responsibility too narrowly in terms of the immediate family undercuts people's autonomy, in the sense of their personal and political freedom. Only when a person's sense of responsibility also extends to the larger communal family can autonomy be defended by group action.

This theme appears early in the novel when the farm corporations send in men driving caterpillar tractors to demolish the Okies' farm buildings and to level the contours of the land. One of the tenant farmers confronts a man driving a tractor:

"Why, you're Joe Davis's boy!"

"Sure," the driver said.

"Well, what you doing this kind of work for—against your own people?"

"Three dollars a day. I got damn sick of creeping for my dinner—and not getting it. I got a wife and kids. We got to eat. Three dollars a day, and it comes every day."

(ch. 5, p. 50)

The imperative that men must support their wives and children blocks them from serving as leaders of their people.

The situation begins to change, however, as the uprooted Okies migrate to California. Bereft of traditional laws and customs that shaped their lives, the migrants become aware of themselves as a political unit. Steinbeck writes:

One man, one family driven from the land; this rusty car creaking along the highway to the west. I lost my land, a single tractor took my land. I am alone and I am bewildered. And in the night one family camps in the ditch and another family pulls in and the tents come out. The two men squat on their hams and the women and children listen. Here is the node, you who hate change and revolution. Keep these two squatting men apart; make them hate, fear, suspect each other. Here is the anlage of the thing you fear. This is the zygote. For here "I lost my land" is changed; a cell is split and from its splitting grows the thing you hate—"We lost our land." ... This is the beginning—from "I" to "we."

(ch. 14, p. 206)

Identity widens from family to group, and group autonomy quickly emerges.

Steinbeck's use of terms like *node*, *anlage*, *zygote*, and *cell* hints at a biological determinism that he flirted with after becoming the friend of marine biologist, Edward F. Ricketts (Owens 82-88). This hint is further reinforced by the striking parallel that Steinbeck draws between a land turtle precariously crossing a highway and the Okies precariously migrating to California (ch. 3, pp. 20-22). But Steinbeck was too good an artist to succumb to an ideology that, taken too literally, would have

undermined the moral dimension of his story. Throughout the novel, numerous characters exhibit autonomy or free will as they struggle to make genuinely moral decisions, the chief of which is the decision to extend their responsibility beyond the immediate family to the larger community.

The Okies who camp along Highway 66 rapidly become autonomous or self-ruling by broadening their sense of responsibility. Steinbeck writes:

At first the families were timid Then leaders emerged, then laws were made, then codes came into being. ... The families learned what rights must be observed—the right of privacy in the tent; the right to keep the past black hidden in the heart; the right to talk and to listen; the right to refuse help or to accept, to offer help or to decline it; the right of son to court and daughter to be courted; the right of the hungry to be fed; the rights of the pregnant and the sick to transcend all other rights.

And the families learned, though no one told them, what rights are monstrous and must be destroyed These rights were crushed, because the little worlds could not exist for even a night with such rights alive. (ch. 17, p. 265)

The essence of these laws is responsibility not just for one's family but for the larger group.

A similar transformation occurs in Ma Joad and Rose of Sharon. "Use' ta be the fambly was fust," Ma Joad says near the end of the novel. "It ain't so now. Its' anybody. Worse off we get, the more we got to do" (ch. 30, p. 606). In the novel's final scene, Rose of Sharon, who has lost husband and child, becomes a Madonna of the people by offering her breast milk to a starving stranger. In the compelling imagery of this scene, responsibility is transformed into a maternal social love.

In addition, autonomy in this novel is more than responsibility for the community; it is also responsibility to one's deepest self. The novel's central story hinges on whether Tom Joad will find and be himself. His mother, Ma Joad, fears he will become a self-destructive lawbreaker. Tom, however, follows in the footsteps of preacher Jim Casy and becomes a leader of his people. In doing so, he assumes responsibility for others and actualizes his deepest self. As he tells his mother:

"Wherever they's a fight so hungry people can eat, I'll be there. Wherever they's a cop beatin' up a guy, I'll be there. If Casy knowed, why, I'll be in the way guys yell when they're mad an'—I'll be in the way kids laugh when they're hungry an' they know supper's ready." (ch. 28, p. 572)

Most likely, Tom will be killed just as Casy was, and he will survive—in the strange way that martyrs do survive. Indeed, it is but a short distance from Tom Joad's fictional "I'll be there" speech to Archbishop Oscar Romero's real life speech: "If they kill me, I shall rise in the Salvadoran people."

*

Although themes of autonomy and responsibility can be found in novels like *The Grapes of Wrath*, one literary genre owes its very existence to autonomy and

responsibility. I am speaking of autobiography. The remote origins of autobiography are inextricably linked to autonomy and responsibility.

The word *autobiography* begins with the same prefix as *autonomy*, that is, *auto*, meaning self. *Bio* comes from *bios*, the Greek word for life, and *graphy* refers to writing. So *autobiography* refers to self-life-writing, a writing of the life by the self. Thus, autobiography has three requirements: a writer, a concept of the individual self, and a life-story with a beginning, a middle, and an implied (at least) ending.

In the history of autobiography, St. Augustine's *Confessions* is a landmark text. In the course on autobiography that I taught last term, I began the class with the *Confessions*. As preparation for the course, I researched the literary roots of Augustine's work. I wanted to know what tradition Augustine was drawing upon when he wrote his great spiritual autobiography.

I found the answer to this question in Georg Misch's *A History of Autobiography in Antiquity*, first published nearly a century ago. This two-volume study closes with Augustine's *Confessions* as the culmination of a tradition that began more than 2,000 years earlier in ancient Egyptian funerary writings. "Out of the concern of the living person for his life after death," Misch writes, "there spread among the Egyptians, in connexion with the religious observances intended to ensure the continued existence of the departed, the custom of autobiographical writing" (I.20).

Just when funerary writings began to take on a self-justifying autobiographical character is disputed: Stephen Quirke estimates that the change occurred sometime after 1800 B.C. (162). According to Misch, there "entered into the peculiarly Egyptian practice of the cult of the dead the idea of man's responsibility, and as the outcome of this idea the elaboration of a written form of self-justification" (I.28). Thus, autobiography begins in confession. "In the new tradition," Quirke writes, "the judgement of the dead was not the trial for one incident as in a modern lawcourt but an assessment of the entire being, the entire earthly life, of an individual" (162). The Egyptian autobiographer sought to take stock of his or her life as a whole, and to vindicate his or her moral character. Later, the autobiographical confession was called an *apology*, that is, a defense or justification of one's life. Already one can see the origins of Socrates' defense of his moral character in the *Apology*, of Augustine's and Rousseau's *Confessions*, and of Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*.

Significantly, ancient Egyptians justified themselves before gods and humans in terms of responsibility to others. Here, for example, is a great land owner from the thirteenth dynasty vindicating himself:

No minor have I oppressed, no widow afflicted, no peasant or shepherd evicted or driven away; from no master of five hands have I taken his men for the corvée. No one suffered want in my lifetime, no one went hungry in my day; for when there was dearth I had all the fields in the region tilled Thus I saved the lives of its inhabitants. I gave away whatever food the region produced, so that there was no one hungry in the land. I gave the widow as large a portion as the woman who had a husband. I did not prefer the great to the small in aught that I gave. And when the inundations

August: Self-Love and Social Are the Same: Reflections on Autonomy, Autob

of the Nile were abundant and the farmers rich in all things,
I did not impose a new tax upon the fields.

(qtd. in Misch I.27-28)

Here, centuries before Plato and Augustine, is the awareness of the self as a moral being that, in order to fulfill itself, must obey a law that entails responsibility to the self and others.

In these autobiographical inscriptions, the writer seeks to win from the gods of the dead a new life of greater freedom. The exhilarating freedom associated with political autonomy has its counterpart, then, in an inner freedom achieved through personal autonomy.

Thus it happens that all spiritual autobiographies contain one or more “conversion experiences” or “liberation experiences.” When the person’s struggle to obey the law of the deepest self is resolved successfully, the person experiences a surge of freedom, even when obedience to the deepest self requires great sacrifice. Augustine is a classic example. After years of resistance, he yields to God’s will and experiences tremendous freedom. He writes: “Already my mind was free of ‘the biting cares’ of place-seeking, of desire for gain, of wallowing in self-indulgence, of scratching the itch of lust” (155).

Down through the centuries, this liberation experience has been echoed in other autobiographies. Jane Addams’s *Twenty Years at Hull-House* tells how Addams broke free from the doubts that hindered her from working among the poor of Chicago. The liberating incident occurred in Spain in 1888 when she was 27 years old. With some friends, Addams had attended a bullfight where “greatly to my surprise and horror, I found that I had seen with comparative indifference, five bulls and many more horses killed” (51-52). She tells that later that evening “the natural and inevitable reaction came, and in deep chagrin I felt myself tried and condemned, not only by this disgusting experience but by the entire moral situation which it revealed” (52). Suddenly able to obey the law of her deepest self, she makes up her mind: “next day, whatever happened, I would begin to carry out the plan, if only by talking about it” (52). Suddenly she feels liberated: “I had confidence that although life itself might contain many difficulties, the period of mere passive receptivity had come to an end, and I had at last finished with the everlasting ‘preparation for life,’ however ill-prepared I might be” (53).

*

In Jane Addams’s case, as in nearly all other cases, the exalted moment of liberation is preceded and followed by years of struggle, hard work, and (often enough) anguish. Finding and being ourselves does not come automatically, and it always comes at a price. Sometimes the price is life itself.

That is why segments of this symposium retell through films the parallel stories of Archbishop Oscar Romero and lay missionary Jean Donovan, both of whom were murdered in 1980 in El Salvador. Initially, neither seemed a likely candidate for martyrdom. Romero the scholarly priest and Donovan the favored child of affluent parents seemed destined for sheltered lives. But both found their deepest selves when confronting the poverty and repression of others, and both risked their lives rather than betray the self-law of responsibility to others.

The same pattern is found throughout history in the lives of heroes and martyrs. It is found in the life and death of Socrates. Rather than abandon his responsibility as Athens' intellectual and moral gadfly, a responsibility assigned him by the gods themselves, Socrates chose death. But in the mysterious way that martyrs have, he also chose life—not only the earthly immortality that has kept his name alive for 2400 years, but another kind of immortality. In his last words to the Athenian assembly that had condemned him to death, Socrates says: "You too, gentlemen of the jury, must look forward to death with confidence, and fix your minds on this one belief, which is certain: that nothing can harm a good man either in life or after death, and his fortunes are not a matter of indifference to the gods" (Plato 76).

In the Hebrew scriptures, humanity's story begins with denials of responsibility. Adam blames Eve, Eve blames the serpent for disobeying the divine command. Cain asks: "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4:9). The answer, of course, is yes, but in asking the question, Cain denies both his responsibility for his brother and his very identity as his brother's brother.

The Christian story begins in the acknowledgement of responsibility and autonomy. At the Annunciation, Mary's "I am the handmaid of the Lord" (Luke 1:38) is both an acceptance of responsibility and a declaration of identity, an affirmation of the deepest self responsive to the divine call. The same pattern is found in Jesus's ministry: by accepting the cross, Jesus accepts the burden of responsibility and defines himself as savior.

Questions of autonomy and responsibility, then, are not only questions of individual freedoms and social control. They are also questions about whether self-love and social love are the same. They are questions about whether we are our brother's keeper, about who is our neighbor. They are also questions about our very identity—who we really are and what it means to be human. They are questions about individuation, about how one finds and becomes oneself. They are moral questions that Jesus crystallized into a single question: "What does one gain by winning the whole world, at the cost of one's own true self?" (Luke 9:25).

Alumni Chair in Humanities

WORKS CITED

- Addams, Jane. *Twenty Years at Hull-House, with Autobiographical Notes*. 1910. Urbana: U of Chicago P, 1990.
- Augustine, Saint. *Confessions*. Trans. Henry Chadwick. New York: Oxford UP, 1991.
- Barnes, Jonathan. *Aristotle*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1982.
- Bellah, Robert N., Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1985. Rpt. New York: Harper, 1986.
- Boswell, James. *Boswell's Life of Johnson*. 1791. 2 vols. London: Dent, 1958.
- Bronowski, J. *The Ascent of Man*. Boston: Little Brown, 1973.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "Self-Reliance." 1841. *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Representative Selections*. Ed. Frederic I. Carpenter. New York: American Book Co., 1934. 89-113.
- Frankfurt, Harry G. "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person." *Journal of Philosophy* 48, no. 1 (Jan. 1971): 5-20. Rpt. *Free Will*. Ed. Gary Watson. New York: Oxford UP, 1982: 81-95.
- Guroian, Vigen. "Awakening the Moral Imagination: Teaching Virtues Through Fairy Tales." *The Intercollegiate Review* 32, no. 1 (Fall 1996): 3-13.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. 1785. Trans. H. J. Paton. 3rd ed. London: Hutchinson, 1956. Rpt. New York: Harper, 1964.
- Leo, John. "Dennis the Day-Glo icon." *U.S. News and World Report* 3 February 1997: 17.
- Mill, John Stuart. *Autobiography and Other Writings*. Ed. Jack Stillinger. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969.
- . *On the Logic of the Moral Sciences. A System of Logic: Book VI*. 1843. Ed. Henry H. Magid. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965.
- Misch, Georg. *A History of Autobiography in Antiquity*. Trans. E. W. Dicks and Georg Misch. 3rd ed. 2 vols. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1951. [Originally published as *Geschichte Der Autobiographie*, Leipzig and Berlin: B. G. Teubner, 1907; 2nd ed., 1931; 3rd ed., Berne: A. Francke AG., and Frankfurt: Gerhard Schulte-Bulmke, 1949, 1950.]
- Monasterio, Xavier O. *To Be Human: An Introductory Experiment in Philosophy*. New York: Paulist P, 1985.
- Owens, Louis. *The Grapes of Wrath: Trouble in the Promised Land*. Boston: Twayne, 1989.
- Pindar. "Pythian II: For Hieron of Syracuse." *The Odes of Pindar*. Trans. C. M. Bowra. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969. 146-151.
- Plato. *The Apology. The Last Days of Socrates: Euthyphro, The Apology, Crito, and Phaedo*. Trans. Hugh Tredennick. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1959. 45-76.
- Pope, Alexander. *An Essay on Man*. 1733-34. *The Poems of Alexander Pope*. Ed. John Butt. New Haven: Yale UP, 1963. 501-47.
- Rand, Ayn. *The Fountainhead*. New York: Bobbs Merrill, 1943. Rpt. New York: New American Library-Signet, n.d.
- , with Nathaniel Branden. *The Virtue of Selfishness: A New Concept of Egoism*. New York: New American Library, 1964.
- Skinner, B. F. *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*. New York: Knopf, 1971. Rpt. New York: Bantam/Vintage, 1972.
- Steinbeck, John. *The Grapes of Wrath: Text and Criticism*. 1939. Ed. Peter Lisca. New York: Viking, 1976.

- Teilhard de Chardin, Pierre. *The Phenomenon of Man*. 1955. Trans. Bernard Wall. New York: Harper, 1959, 1961.
- Tocqueville, Alexis de. *Democracy in America*. 1835, 1840. 2 vols. Trans. Henry Reeve and Francis Bowen. Ed. Phillips Bradley. New York: Random House-Vintage, 1945.
- Watson, Gary, ed. *Free Will*. New York: Oxford UP, 1982.
- Wolf, Susan. *Freedom Within Reason*. New York: Oxford UP, 1990.
- . "Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility." *Responsibility, Character, and the Emotions: New Essays in Moral Psychology*. Ed. Ferdinand Schoeman. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988. Rpt. *The Inner Citadel: Essays on Individual Autonomy*. Ed. John Christman. New York: Oxford UP, 1989. 137-51.

August: Self-Love and Social Are the Same: Reflections on Autonomy, Autob

Meeting of Minds

Photographs by
Laurence Burgess

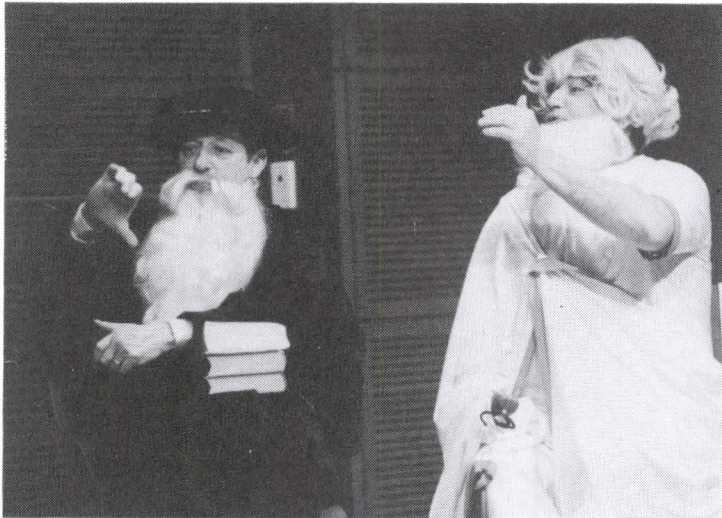


Thomas Merton (Rev. Joseph Kozar, S.M.),
Ayn Rand (M. Therese Lysaught), and James Farrelly, moderator

Published by eCommons, 1997

22 *The University of Dayton Review*, Winter 1997–98 Volume 25 No. 1

Jane Addams
(Marilyn Fischer)



John Calvin (William Anderson) and **Socrates** (Raymond Herbenick)

