

ASCETICISM

Edited by

Vincent L. Wimbush

Richard Valantasis

With the assistance of

Gay L. Byron

William S. Love

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Oxford New York

Auckland Bangkok Buenos Aires Cape Town Chennai
Dar es Salaam Delhi Hong Kong Istanbul Karachi Kolkata
Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Mumbai Nairobi
São Paulo Shanghai Singapore Taipei Tokyo Toronto

and an associated company in Berlin

Copyright © 1998 by Oxford University Press, Inc.

First published in 1998 by Oxford University Press, Inc.
198 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10016

www.oup.com

First issued as an Oxford University Press paperback, 2002

Oxford is a registered trademark of Oxford University Press

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise,
without the prior permission of Oxford University Press.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Asceticism / edited by Vincent L. Wimbush, Richard Valantasis.
p. cm.

Essays originally presented at an international conference on the
Ascetic dimension in religious life and culture, held at Union
Theological Seminary in New York, Aug. 25-29, 1993.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-19-508535-3; 0-19-515138-0 (pbk.)

1. Asceticism—Congresses. I. Wimbush, Vincent L.

II. Valantasis, Richard, 1946—

BL625.A836 1995

291.4'47—dc20 94-17642 CIP

3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

Printed in the United States of America
on acid-free paper

F
J
A
C
✓ I
V

Part 1 C
1
2
3
4
5
6

Part 2 C
✓ 3
4
5
6

INTRODUCTION

Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis

Historical Sketch of the Study of Asceticism

Because it is a universal phenomenon, in evidence in ancient as well as modern societies, and because it is often a dramatic, even controversial, part of religions and cultures, asceticism has long been the subject of popular and intellectual interest. In antiquity, various cultures usually registered such interest in homilies, philosophical or theological treatises, popular meditations, rituals, ecclesiastical canons, diatribes, letters, revelations, panegyrics, vitae.¹ Numerous discussions about the importance of asceticism and debates about the superiority and imperative of different forms of renunciation can be found in these and other genres of literature of Eastern and Western religious traditions.

As is the case with most complex phenomena, however, the detailed description and sustained criticism of asceticism began in the modern period, in particular in the nineteenth century. Histories (often a part of the history of the ethics or theologies or ethos of a particular religious or cultural tradition), exegetical studies (many texts belonging to the genres mentioned above); ethnographic studies; systematic theologies; dictionary and encyclopedia articles; philosophical and cultural critical essays, even primitive psychological and psychiatric studies—these are among the types of scholarly writings appearing in the modern period in the West that have had asceticism as their subject.

What is striking about the scholarship from the modern period, including even recent writings from the 1980s, is its tendency to be neither comprehensive in historical development nor cross-cultural in scope and methodology. Few works have had as their aim and focus the origins and development of the whole complex and range of phenomena that fall under the rubric "asceticism." Even fewer works have had as their focus the cross-cultural framework essential for a sustained critical perspective. Most works on asceticism have focused upon particular religious traditions, particular cultural systems, particular historical periods, exemplary individuals and texts, or particular behaviors. Most works—especially, but not limited to, those of Western theology—have also tended to reflect strong, not very subtle biases either in favor of or against a particular tradition or set of practices.

Is this necessary?

Others have tended to reflect modernity's "secular" intellectual and popular understandings of, and prejudices against, the ascetic impulse as expressive of the irrationality, traditionalism, or fanaticism of the religious life. Examples are too numerous to detail; a selective summary treatment follows, in order to establish the general thrust of modern Western scholarly treatment of asceticism.²

In nineteenth-century England and Germany works appeared that focused upon asceticism as a legacy of pathology, especially regarding sexuality (*perversio vitae sexualis*), that had to be addressed and overcome if a healthy social order were to be sustained. Johannes Baptista Friedrich's *System der gerichtliche Psychologie* (1852), Henry Maudsley's *The Pathology of the Mind* (3d ed., 1879), Richard von Krafft-Ebing's *Lehrbuch der Psychiatrie* (1879) and *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1887) are examples of such works. Friedrich Nietzsche's better-known works (especially *Beyond Good and Evil*, and *On the Genealogy of Morals*), although they were in nature more historical-interpretive and philosophical than proto-social-scientific, were better known because they squared with the sensibilities among many self-styled "secular intellectuals" of the times.

If usage in the Protestant, English-speaking world is any indicator, popular understandings of asceticism in the beginnings of modernity in the West were rather negative. *The Oxford English Dictionary*—no insignificant index of popular cultural sentiment in the English-speaking world—defines "asceticism" as "extreme" and "severe" abstinence: as "austerity." And the earliest English usage it cites—"Doomed to a life of celibacy by the asceticism which had corrupted the simplicity of Christianity" (Sir Thomas Browne, 1646)—reflects little restraint in its bias.

Whether in direct response to popular understandings and usages, to the tone and tenor of some of the scholarly works listed above, or to the larger and more complex world that was being discovered, a number of scholarly works in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries focused upon the histories of asceticism in particular religious and cultural traditions. Theodor Waitz's *Anthropologie der Naturvölker* (6 vols., 1859–1872) focused upon primitive practices and sensibilities; Sir Monier M. Williams's *Buddhism in Its Connexion with Brahmanism and Hinduism in Its Contrast with Christianity* (1889), Isidor Silbernagl's *Der Buddhismus nach seiner Entstehung, Fortbildung und Verbreitung* (1891), Thomas Ebenezer Slater's *The Higher Hinduism in Relation to Christianity* (1903), and Caroline A. Rhys Davids's *Buddhism* (1912), among others, began to shed light—however patronizing and refracted through Western traditions and sensibilities—upon Eastern traditions.

The literature on Judaism and Christianity from this period is voluminous. Among the many works that focused upon Judaism, Wilhelm Bousset's *Die Religion des Judentums* (2d ed.; 1906) was significant. So were Adolf von Harnack's *Das Mönchtum* (1881; trans. *Monasticism*) and Otto Zöckler's *Askese und Mönchtum* (2d ed.; 1897), which traced the history of asceticism (more precisely monasticism), in Christianity. John Mason Neale's *History of the Eastern Church* (5 vols., 1850–1873), J. Mayer's *Die christliche Askese: Ihre Wesen und ihre historische Entfaltung* (1894), Christoph Ernst Luthardt's *Die Ethik Luthers in ihren Grundzeugen* (2d

ed., 1875), and Newman Smythe's *Christian Ethics* (1892) prefigured the interpretive histories of Christian asceticism in the modern period of scholarly investigation.

In the late twentieth century, many more sophisticated histories and critical interpretations of particular traditions and practices appeared. Peter Brown's *Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (1987) has clearly become the standard historical-interpretive work on early Christianity. It represents the apex of that tradition of Western scholarship that emphasizes the command of primary sources. English professor Geoffrey Harpham's *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism* (1987) and philosopher-theologian Edith Wyschogrod's *Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy* (1990) are provocative examples of the heightened interest in asceticism among postmodernist critics. Although they are not strictly works of history, their treatments of ancient texts have enormous historical-interpretive implications.

The names and works above are highlighted not only because they are better known by the editors but also because they can show how scholarship focused on the ascetic impulse crosses disciplines, fields, and religious traditions. Scholarship on asceticism reflects the late twentieth-century humanist emphasis on comprehensiveness of scope and sophisticated engagement of a number of methods and approaches.

A number of such treatments on the ascetic in particular traditions beyond Christianity have appeared recently: the works of Ross Kraemer, Stephen Fraade, and Daniel Boyarin on Judaism; Patrick Olivelle, Vasudha Narayanan, Walter Kaelber, and Wendy Doniger on Hinduism; Robert Thurman, Steven Collins, and Stanley Tambiah on Buddhism; Fedwa Malti-Douglas on Islamic traditions.

These lists are of course not exhaustive, even of the category created for purposes of the argument. And many other works on asceticism have appeared during the second half of this century that have tended to reflect the same basic scholarly skills in philology and historical interpretation—if not always the cultural critical perspectives and the profundity—represented in the works of the exemplars referred to above. Yet for all the comprehensiveness of scope and sophisticated analysis in their works, scholars interested in asceticism still generally do not talk to each other across disciplinary and field boundaries or across religious and cultural traditions.

The works of some female scholars whose focus is on women and the ascetic in particular cultural traditions may hold the promise of more cross-fertilization and daring methodological experimentation. Averil Cameron, Elizabeth Clark, Fedwa Malti-Douglas, Vasudha Narayanan, and other women scholars who share this focus have challenged longstanding assumptions, including the single-issue, single-motive interpretations of asceticism, that have focused primarily on males. Ultimately, perhaps, the acceptance of more complex phenomenological explanations will inspire conversation about the ascetic across the lines of gender, religious traditions, and academic disciplines.

We are clearly not yet at the point, however, at which such interpretation is common. There have been very few works that have argued for or provided a model for a consistently comparative, multicultural or multitradeational perspective in the study of asceticism. Many of the histories and critical treatments—especially those

written before the late twentieth century—have, it appears, assumed that the ascetic within a particular religious or cultural tradition was simple in character, and most have respected the artificially designated boundaries between particular religions or cultures (e.g., “Christian,” “Jewish,” or “Greek” asceticism and so forth). Even Peter Brown’s magisterial work refers often to “Christian asceticism,” as though it always clearly entailed something quite different in essence from other contemporary expressions. There is a striking lack of consistent comparative focus in historical-interpretive treatments on asceticism in the modern period in works both popular and scholarly. The collection of essays edited by Austin Creel and Vasudha Narayanan entitled *Monastic Life in the Christian and Hindu Traditions* (1990) is the only recent work to represent a truly comparative focus. And it should be noted—as the title itself indicates—that even this work limits itself to comparison between two traditions, and then only to a discussion of one manifestation or type of ascetic behavior within those two traditions.

Perhaps the popularity of a particular genre of scholarly writing, the “Lone Ranger project,” that is, the monograph or text by a single author, has influenced the lack of progress in the cross-disciplinary study of asceticism. Who, having spent a lifetime digging deeply into one text, historical personality, or tradition, would want to venture across those lines? But the early twentieth-century popularity of other types of scholarly writing suggested a move in a different direction. As a reflection of the transformation of many European and American colleges into complex comprehensive research universities, signaling the Western cultural quest for comprehensive knowledge about all phenomena, other genres of scholarly or “scientific” writing that have much relevance for the study of asceticism appeared in the twentieth century—the encyclopedia or dictionary article and the sourcebook.

Relevant examples are numerous. A fourteen-part entry—a general introduction followed by thirteen articles on various religious traditions—appears under the headword “asceticism” in James Hastings’s comprehensive *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (1909). *The Dictionnaire de spiritualité* (1937) contains an extensive treatment covering almost as many traditions under “ascète, ascétisme.” *The Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* (1950) and *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Handwörterbuch für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft* (1957), both including extensive entries under “Askese,” have represented the highest level of scholarship in international circles among scholars of religion for more than three decades.

Sourcebooks have also emerged containing documents that exemplify the wide range of types of ascetic pieties within specific cultural traditions. Owen Chadwick’s *Western Asceticism* (1958; rev. ed., 1979) and *Ascetic Behavior in Greco-Roman Antiquity: A Sourcebook*, edited by Vincent L. Wimbush (1990), include texts exemplifying types of ascetic piety within traditions and currents that have become Western culture. Patrick Olivelle’s *Samnyasa Upanishad: Hindu Scriptures on Asceticism and Renunciation* (1992); Yoshoko Kurata Dykstra’s *Miraculous Tales of the Lotus Sutra from Ancient Japan: The “Dainihonkoku hokekyo kenki” of the Priest Chingen* (1983) and *Bhagavati aradhana* (Jainist; 1978) provide access to other traditions. And, of course, there are other such texts.

Alt
in prov
of ascet
major c
compre
each co
plaguec
edged i
oration

The
Kaelber
Eliade
(tempt
course,
mately
or of th
in the b
of ascet
ments s
cross-cu

This
in the H
the nun
through
Japanes
is striki
though
did not l
ing at al
Hastings
nary in
to follow
that can
advance
the body
and all t
happens
The limi

But t
theology
parative
Hardma
gion (19
formulat
emerging

Although each of the above-named works is obviously valuable in its own right in providing greater access to the sources, none is comprehensive or representative of asceticism in all its diversity. There is no sourcebook on the ascetic that crosses major divisions in religious and cultural traditions. The degree of advancement in comprehensiveness and complexity within the particular tradition represented in each collection of texts only highlights the larger continuing problem that has plagued the study of the ascetic. But the complexity that now seems to be acknowledged in almost all recent studies of the ascetic has yet to result in extensive collaboration and conversation across traditions.

The most recent summary/encyclopedic treatment on asceticism, Walter O. Kaelber's article by the same title in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, edited by Mircea Eliade (1987), brings the problem into sharp focus. Kaelber's article makes an attempt to describe late twentieth-century scholarly consensus about asceticism. Of course, it registers mainly frustration about the lack of such consensus, and ultimately it does not provide a full explication either of problems and shortcomings or of their answers and resolutions. Yet Kaelber does argue—mostly in the glosses in the bibliography section—that the most serious shortcoming in the treatments of asceticism in the different types of writings, especially the encyclopedic treatments surveyed above, lies in the tendency to discuss the phenomenon without a cross-cultural theoretical framework.

This shortcoming and its consequences are dramatically displayed in the entry in the Hastings volume, still the most comprehensive, if flawed, treatment. Despite the numerous articles on different types of asceticism within different cultures throughout world history (Buddhist, Celtic, Christian, Egyptian, Greek, Hindu, Japanese, Jewish, Muhammadan, Persian, Roman, Semitic and Egyptian, Vedic), it is striking that there is no overarching theoretical framework in evidence. It is as though the contributors of the different parts never conferred with one another, did not know one another's works or working presuppositions, or were not focusing at all upon the same phenomenon or phenomena. Thomas C. Hall, author of Hastings's general introduction (and former professor at Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York), did not provide such a framework for the articles to follow. His introductory essay nevertheless reflects a bias; it is simply not a bias that can provide a springboard for significant cross-cultural learning. He subtly advances something of a bipolar typology: "disciplinary" (with the goal of training the body, will, and spirit) and "dualistic" (with the goal of escaping the evil body and all things associated with it). His bias toward the "disciplinary" type—which happens to resemble the modernist progressive Protestant ethos—is quite evident. The limited usefulness of such a perspective is obvious.

But the need for such an elaborate framework has rarely been discussed in theology and religio-critical works. There have been very few theoretical and comparative works that have had as their focus the interpretation of asceticism. Oscar Hardman's *The Ideals of Asceticism: An Essay in the Comparative Study of Religion* (1924) is one of the very few extant examples of the advancement of a fully formulated theoretical typology. It respects the comparative method that was emerging in the study of religion in the first third of the twentieth century, taking

into account ascetic practices in the Hindu, Buddhist, Jainist, Christian, and Islamic traditions as well as in the "pre-Christian" cultures around the Mediterranean.

Hardman typifies asceticism according to ideals or goals. The three types are (1) "the mystical ideal—fellowship," (2) "the disciplinary ideal—righteousness," and (3) "the sacrificial ideal—reparation." The mystical ideal has as its goal both divine "possession" and community ("sympathetic association"). The disciplinary ideal seeks "conformity" with, or consistent observance of, divine laws and order. The third ideal, the sacrificial, has as its goal the removal of all forms of pollution and evil through the sacrificial offerings of certain ethical behaviors.

Hardman's proposal, although an improvement upon all other treatments of asceticism at the time, is nonetheless fraught with difficulties. It clearly reflects a bias toward Christianity, even to the point of arguing for an evolutionary or developmental schema in the history of asceticism. Christianity is seen as the highest and purest manifestation of asceticism because of its "social utility," namely, its worldliness. All other types are inferior. It is not that Hardman lost sight of his bias; he clearly wanted to advance "Christian asceticism" as the "touchstone" for all asceticisms because of his understanding of what should be the social utility of religion and the shape of the social order. That his understanding of such things was influenced, even determined, by a type of Christian socialization is, of course, quite obvious; and it severely limits the usefulness of his typology.

★ The only other fully articulated proposal for a typology of asceticism that has been advanced is by German sociologist Max Weber.³ In his *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* and *Sociology of Religion*, especially, but also in other works, Weber advances four "ideal-types" of orientation—"innerworldly asceticism," "innerworldly mysticism," "otherworldly asceticism," and "otherworldly mysticism." The types represent different religious orientations to the world. The rather chiasmic character of the typology collapses easily into bipolar opposites—otherworldly mysticism, representing the extreme of exercising the least influence upon the sociopolitical order, and innerworldly asceticism, representing the other extreme, that of exercising the most influence upon the sociopolitical order. (The other opposites are seen as being of little importance to Weber's agenda.) In the latter type, the world is seen as opponent, but there is no attempt to escape from it; with the former type, an attempt is made to seek the divine in solitude, away from the challenges and responsibilities and pollution of the world.

★ Although Weber's typology would seem to have great potential for sustained cross-cultural study of ascetic responses, under closer scrutiny it proves to be problematic and of limited usefulness. Quite evident is Weber's bias toward "innerworldly asceticism," on account of its ethos that encourages positive orientation to the world. Because Weber's major concern was to account for the emergence of "bourgeois capitalism," because his categories are advanced as "ideal-typical constructions," and because only the ethos of "innerworldly asceticism" is argued to have been capable of giving birth to "bourgeois capitalism," the other types are seen as derivative. This raises the question about whether the typology has general usefulness beyond explaining the origins and historio-evolutionary development of Western Protestant social and political sensibilities and orientations.

W
theor
not fo
in the
fore,
Th
the in
James
Dume
pretat
asceti
with

So we
ration
is imp
comp
are le
prejud
a shai
ceticis
behav
as a c
loaded

It
level c
learn
cultur
acade
ied qu
demic
the be
eviden
frey F
mean
differ
now c
foods
moder
respon
suppo
specti

Weber's students have made use of his typology for a number of arguments and theories. But there has been little advancement upon the typology itself, certainly not for the purpose of providing a framework for a more cross-cultural perspective in the exploration of the phenomenon of asceticism. Weber's contribution, therefore, remains provocative, but flawed and problematic.⁴

There are, of course, other theoretical, cross-cultural works that are relevant for the interpretation of asceticism but do not focus upon it. Emile Durkheim, William James, Gerardus van der Leeuw, and, more recently, Shmuel Eisenstadt and Louis Dumont, among others, provide provocative theses and frameworks for the interpretation of religion itself that also have great potential for the interpretation of asceticism. But in every case it is necessary to qualify arguments and suppositions with reference to asceticism because of limitation of scope or conceptualization.

Problems in the Study of Asceticism

So we are left in the late twentieth century with a long history of scholarly exploration of asceticism that is as frustrating and confusing, as naive and limiting, as it is impressive in scope, productivity, diversity, and depth. We are still without a comprehensive theoretical framework for the comparative study of asceticism. We are left not only with a legacy of academic and popular culture-specific biases and prejudices regarding the origins, essence, and value of asceticism but also without a sharp delineation of the problematic issues that are behind the reference to "asceticism." Is it, can it be, a reference to one thing, one sentiment, worldview, set of behaviors? If multiple meanings and functions are granted, with what are we left as a common thread? Is another rubric needed? Is "asceticism" as a rubric, too loaded? Does it point too quickly to closure on a certain conceptual front?

It is most difficult for serious students of the phenomenon to engage in high-level conversation with one another across religious and cultural divisions, so as to learn about the different aspects and nuances of asceticism registered in different cultures and historical periods. The stumbling blocks are strong. In the current academic/intellectual climate—as the arguments above suggest—asceticism is studied quite intensely, to be sure, but, for the most part, only within particular academic guilds and with a view to the limitations of their presuppositions, and without the benefit of a broad cross-cultural view. In Western popular culture there is much evidence that asceticism has been rediscovered as a positive phenomenon (see Geoffrey Harpham, *Semeia* 58, 1992). An explosion of different manifestations and meanings rechanneled from traditional religious communities is evident. The many different forms and aspects of contemporary modern and postmodern existence are now often expressed through preoccupations with diet control (non-fat, low-calorie foods); with fitness; with vacations turned into retreats, monastery style; and with moderation—sometimes even abstinence—in sexual relations. But how are these responses to be interpreted, or to be accounted for? How do they square with the supposedly secular cultures of the late twentieth century? With what critical perspectives can we come to understand the sensibilities, the *mentalité*, behind these

responses? What is it about particular religions, societies, and cultures that makes certain ascetic impulses so important today? What is it about religious life in general, and about every historical cultural formation, that makes asceticism so significant? Was Durkheim (*Elementary Forms of Religious Life*) correct in arguing that asceticism is a "necessary" part of every religion and culture? Is Geoffrey Harpham (*The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism*) more than just provocative in arguing that asceticism is "subideological," "a primary transcultural structuring force," a kind of "MS-DOS" of cultures because, given the tension it always creates within a culture, it "raises the issue" of culture?

No one individual, no one field or discipline can grasp the totality and complexity of these and other historical, philosophical, phenomenological, theological, culture-critical questions and issues. These provocative questions and arguments cannot be addressed except by sustained collaborative effort, supported by a broad historical and comparative perspective. As the foregoing has indicated, the few modern attempts to understand the ascetic impulse in religious life and culture in general are dated; and they have been neither comprehensive nor based directly upon a significant degree of comprehensive historical and comparative work. This remains a significant weakness in the history of the study of asceticism.

The International Conference on Asceticism that provided the impetus for the essays collected in this volume was designed as a forum for scholarly exchange about asceticism as a complex, universal phenomenon in the histories of religion and culture. Given the narrowness and biases in the history of scholarship on asceticism, given the current general diffusion but academic disciplinary compartmentalization of scholarship, and given the need to understand more about the functions of the ascetic impulse in religious life throughout history and across worlds and cultures, it was deemed important to facilitate direct, face-to-face exchange on the topic between scholars of different disciplines and fields.

Arising out of conversations and debates among scholars of early Christianity and late antique religions in particular, the objective of the conference was to encourage and model a significant degree of interdisciplinary and cross-cultural discussion that could provide broader, critical perspectives from which many different types of questions about the ascetic in religious life and culture could be pursued. It was thought that the conference, if successfully convened, would neither begin nor conclude with the new definition or conceptualization or meaning of the ascetic; rather, it would seek to explode all simple notions about asceticism, including the notion that it has to do simply with the negative and simply with the distant past. The conference in fact began and ended with strategic possibilities or models for the reconceptualization of the ascetic, first in particular religious and cultural formations, and then in religious life and culture in general. In short, we wanted to experiment, to try something that had not been done before. We wanted to test whether and to what degree it would be possible to have among scholars of various persuasions and predilections and disciplinary camps sustained discussions about "asceticism"; or whether we would need to conclude that the term "asceticism" has no significant referent, having come to mean too many things to too many for too long a period of time to be meaningful and to warrant comparative study in the

present.
that it v
emphas
or accu
remote,
bounda
and ana
compar
could n
the exp

The con
for such
are incl
to majo.

The
persuasi
understa
major p
they ass
dialogue
accordir

1. origin
ideal;
2. politi
ramil
3. herm
mate.
lenge
4. aesth
ascet.
selve
sions

The pap
much fa
mention

The con
In order

present. The whole effort was understood to be something of a gamble; we knew that it would leave us vulnerable on many different fronts—not enough of some emphases here, too much of other emphases there, not enough of the scope or depth or accuracy that an expert in any area would demand. Yet the possibility, however remote, that the discussion of a phenomenon so complex could traverse the usual boundaries was too tempting to let go. Because we think that in the engagement and analysis of the ascetic we are not far from approaching a higher (viz., truly comparativist, multidisciplinary) understanding about the religious life itself, we could not restrain ourselves; we had to begin somewhere; we had to proceed with the experiment, no matter how many difficulties and questions remained.

Vision and Structure of the Conversation

The conference papers were explicitly structured so as to model and provide impetus for such experimentation. The four types of presentations from the conference that are included in this volume are (1) plenary addresses, (2) major papers, (3) responses to major papers, and (4) in appendix, short papers and a panel discussion.

The two general addresses set the stage for the dialogue to follow. They are very persuasive arguments for the scholarly reconsideration of asceticism in an effort to understand religious life and cultural formation, as well as their reformation. The major papers, twenty-four in number, were the focal point of the conference, and they assume the same importance in this volume: they model the interdisciplinary dialogue that was the original impetus for the conference. The papers are arranged according to four broad cross-cultural themes:

1. origins and meanings of asceticism, with focus on the motivations, impulses, ideals, socio-cultural matrices and explanations, for different asceticisms,
2. politics of asceticism, with focus on the sociopolitical locations, functions and ramifications (for different genders, classes, and ethnic groups) of asceticism,
3. hermeneutics of asceticism, with focus on the different types of sources—textual, material—and their representations, and presuppositions, methodological challenges, and possibilities for the interpretations of asceticism, and
4. aesthetics of asceticism, with focus on the different types of emotions that are ascetic practices, and on the responses evoked by the different practices themselves, or by different (literary, material, and other) representations or expressions of asceticism.

The papers herein are evidence that high-level dialogue about asceticism was very much facilitated by the four themes, in combination with the two general addresses, mentioned above.

Implications and Future Directions for Asceticism

The conference's most significant contribution rests in its modality: conversation. In order to demonstrate the power of this contribution it is important for the reader

to keep in mind the history behind the conference. For over seven years, a small group of scholars of late antique religion had been meeting to discuss the social functions of asceticism. Their discussions had been intense, their production great (a collection of Greco-Roman ascetical texts and a collection of essays on the discursive practices of asceticism), and the quality of their communication significant. This small group modeled the potential depth and breadth of scholarly discourse, in an amicable tone, sometimes with great difference of opinion but always with grace and respect. The international asceticism conference itself was the culmination of these earlier conversations. At the conference, scholars and practitioners representing widely divergent, multicultural, transhistorical, world-religious perspectives presented papers, responded to the papers, and discussed the implications of the formal presentations. It was often difficult to traverse the solid, clearly defined boundaries of disciplines, orientations, religions, cultures, and languages, but the conference participants persisted throughout in attending to the perspectives of others. For a brief time, the alterity in world religions became a meeting ground of scholars. The study of asceticism will never again be the same, because the conversation and mutual striving for understanding, knowledge, and appreciation of the "other" set the stage for continued, transformative, and collegial scholarly pursuit.

In addition to the quality of conversation and the collegiality of investigation inherent in the conference's modality, the substance of the conference has opened a number of future directions for the study of asceticism that revolve about the following topics: the categories of investigation, ethics, and the retrieval of the ancient ascetical arts from among the world's religious traditions.

Categories of investigation

Usually asceticism has been studied as site-specific, that is, as part of the structure of a particular culture, at a particular time in history, in a particular religion. The two plenary speakers generally, and the other papers more specifically, directed future studies toward a reassessment and revision of those specific categories of ascetical study. Kallistos Ware argued that the cultural construction of "asceticism" as purely negative must be discarded as lacking in nuance and as nonrepresentative of ascetical discourse itself. Withdrawal and self-denial were not thoroughly negative categories to those who practiced them, and, therefore, their positive and life-giving aspects must be discovered and articulated. The study of asceticism must, Ware insisted, also direct particular attention to the stated subject of asceticism, the theological and spiritual content of ascetic texts. It must be taken seriously, especially by scholars who value their objectivity and secularity, because without a thoroughgoing study of such categories as demons, the reality of God, and the efficacy of prayer the ascetics themselves remain invisible. The study of asceticism, crossing as it does the boundaries of culture, religion, and chronology, opens the proper subjects of ascetical practice and theorizing to academic and public scrutiny first, on their own terms and then later as part of other discursive practices.

Edith Wyschogrod directed attention toward the epistemic and semiotic systems within ascetical practice. Her postmodern retrieval of asceticism, refracted through

the class
reappor
categori
become
and pra
looks to
looking
tation, c
gious di
cetical t
systems
specific
analysis
re[de]cc
specific
and no
or hum.
inhabit

Pluralis

The sar
as a pr
that us
and plu
groed in
By seve
about p
who liv
tred, bi
ethics c
person:
avoida:
tice no
practic
modern
in that
tures e
sions a
format
erence
and ot
incarn:
and hi
suadin
ascetic

the classical and Christian systems constitutive of ascetical ethics, points toward a reapportionment of categories, to which Kallistos Ware would direct attention. The categories important to the society coeval with the ascetics under study cannot become the categories our contemporary society adopts for its own ascetical theory and practice. The postmodern retrieval particularizes and universalizes, in that it looks to site-specific and fully embodied ascetical expressions while simultaneously looking beyond the limitations and boundaries imposed by traditions of interpretation, chronological sequence, academic disciplines, cultural hegemonies, or religious divisions. This is not a contradiction. The assumptions of the historical ascetical texts to which Ware directs attention may be interpreted within the epistemic systems of their own historical periods and within the systems of analysis of a site-specific ascetical religion, but, knowing that that perspective does not exhaust our analysis or the retrievability of asceticism, the postmodern retrieval must re[de]construct the episteme within a world far more inclusive than the original site-specific asceticism. This world has vastly different problems and understandings and no longer readily coheres within traditional boundaries of discipline, religion, or human agency. Modernist, historicist, and postmodernist perspectives mutually inhabit the site-specific arena of asceticism and the postmodern world.

Pluralist ethics

The same situation that scholars addressed in an international conference appears as a practical problem in postmodern living. Ethics, the modern and secular term that usurped the place of historical asceticism, functions in a similar traditionalist and pluralist polarity. The root of asceticism remains ethical formation (as Wyschogrod indicates) and ethics cannot function without addressing personal formation. By severing ethics from its ascetical roots, postmodern society loses its memory about personal and corporate development, finds itself incapable of molding people who live ethically, and remains paralyzed in addressing questions of violence, hatred, bigotry, and abuse. The ancient Western ascetical interest in developing an ethics of behavior, beginning in the classical Greek period, revolved around the personal development of particular virtues, and the personal strategies for the avoidance of vice constitute the primary focus of ascetical practice. Ascetical practice not only developed the theory of virtue and vice but trained societies in their practice. In historically isolated and geographically separated cultures (that is, in modern and premodern societies), this ethical formation appeared to be universal, in that the ascetical systems operative both in the dominant culture and in subcultures emerged from a particular symbolic universe and anthropology. The discussions at the conference, however, established that ascetical formation, like ethical formation, cannot be postulated in a monolithic, universalist fashion without reference to other systems in other religious environments, other historical periods, and other world cultures. Ethics (as asceticism) cannot remain in its premodern incarnation as a set of rules imposed upon social beings to perpetuate a dominant and hierarchically imposed morality. Ethics must develop the rhetorical art of persuading groups of people of the ethical imperatives of contemporary living and the ascetical art of teaching social beings the means of developing and nurturing a

particular moral and ethical modality. Critical ascetical study may provide a fulcrum for lifting ethics from its monolithic foundationalist bedrock to the mountains of discursive interactions. It may be that one direction for developing an ethics reflective of the pluralist world of nations, cultures, and religions can emerge from the comparative study of asceticism; for asceticism, in its pluralist orientation, informs ethics and guides ethical discourse toward a polyvalent, multicultural, and simultaneously site-specific and universally conversant discourse.

The immediate import of such an ascetical orientation toward ethical formation is nowhere more evident than among the youth in our urban centers. Cities have become centers for formation in violence, as the member of any gang in the United States or racial supremacist group in Europe will attest, so that any young person willing to submit to the intense formative experience of entering a gang or a racist group will easily become capable of inflicting violence and acting out hatred. This constitutes an asceticism of violence, an ethics of destruction. Since most prior generations have matured with at least the common guiding illusion of a monolithic system of reality, social organizations have never really been forced to develop ethics in a pluralist environment, nor have participants been instructed in the formative practices of their ethical behaviors. The refusal of a pluralist, ascetical ethics has simply ignored the formative aspect of ethics and morals, leaving the primary formation to others. Ethical and moral formation happens consistently in every society, and yet that formation has not been scrutinized, analyzed, or questioned in any significant way. The cities throughout the world have become armed camps of youths alienated from each other, from other social organizations, and from the political and religious institutions around them, and yet fully capable of a formation toward violence and hatred. Without intensive study of ethics, of personal formation in a pluralist society, this trend will only continue. The categories of ethical formation, however, must not simply invoke one system (whether Christian, secular, Hindu, Buddhist, animist, or whatever), but must emerge from a comparative study of cultures and religions in dialogue, that is, from the postmodern realities of contemporary living.

in this necessary
have a good
example of a
ascetic has
the element
of an agenda

Renewal of the *ars ascetica*

The final area of redirection that emerged from the conference is the ancient theological discipline of asceticism, the *ars ascetica*, the study of the ascetical systems within world religions, in ancient societies, and in Eastern, Western, and world Christianity. The renewal of these ascetical arts, however, emerges from the refraction of asceticism through the postmodern prism: it is not simply the clothing of ancient practices in modern garb, but the refashioning of probably the most ancient of all the arts and the designing of new systems for global human development. This renewal would be advantageous from three perspectives: those of anthropology, spirituality, and interfaith dialogue.

Anthropology. An issue that has plagued modern academic study in many disciplines is the question of social construction versus essentialism. How are human beings essentially the same (across cultures and across historical periods), and how are they primarily socially constructed? These questions cannot be answered with-

out diach teaching, social and theology, that reflect through lives, in r tions, and man exist sion is co humanity easily un also take man beir and genc poverty), would q theories :

Spirit conversa like that ing to m studies i transce caracte sensibilit that atte religious tion abo uously ti reach ac quire th well as i tions. In the com compar tablishe start no structio of the fu it seeks.

Inter wildly d the relig theorist

out diachronic, synchronic, and cross-cultural studies focused, as is most ascetical teaching, on the regulation, meaning, and significance of the body within its specific social and cultural location. Asceticism looks at the body enmeshed in physiology, theology, regulatory practices, social environments, and the other semiotic systems that reflect social and cultural meaning. In the process of comparing asceticisms through historical progressions, in cultures different from the one in which one lives, in religions with widely divergent understandings of subjectivity, social relations, and the symbolic universe, aspects illuminating what perdures through human existence and what changes emerge more carefully. The myopia of the discussion is corrected by the lens of comparative study, and the human being—indeed, humanity—may emerge from the nexus of embodied particularity as a subject more easily understood in essence and in social construction. Asceticism, however, must also take up within its anthropology the categories of gender, race, and class. Human beings, implicated in the structures of their society, their architecture of race and gender, and their social complexes of power (or weakness) and wealth (or poverty), cannot be naively constructed; even the most optimistic of ascetic masters would question such naiveté. The development of sophisticated anthropological theories including gender, race, and class becomes, therefore, essential.

Spirituality. The question of “spiritual formation” emerges as a corollary to this conversation about anthropology and ethics. The modern interest in “spirituality,” like that in ethics, must involve postmodern discourse about asceticism. In attempting to move to a place within the human being where “spirit” and “body” cohere, studies in spirituality perpetuate the body/spirit dichotomy that they attempt to transcend. In addition to its dualist propensities, spirituality ignores the particular characteristics of people of different ages, different cultures, and different religious sensibilities in its construction of a “humanity” that transcends all difference and that attempts to circumvent religious traditions in order to arrive at the “authentic” religious experience undergirding all human religious expression. In the conversation about asceticism, however, such constructions appeared as uninformed, ingeniously triumphant, and universalist in orientation. Although it is not impossible to reach across barriers and to traverse boundaries, such bridging and crossings require the careful articulation of differences as well as similarities; congruences as well as incongruities; and inappropriate comparisons as well as suitable correlations. In other words, in the comparative study of asceticism, the common tradition, the common spiritual goals and methods, rest firmly on a foundation of critical, comparative, historical, and cross-cultural difference. This difference cannot be established without beginning free of the assumption of prior polarities. One should start not with language contingent upon spirit/body but with language and constructions expressive of the practices, relationships, and symbolic constructions of the full human. Asceticism opens the study of spirituality to the unitive function it seeks.

Interfaith dialogue. The postmodern religious world paints reality with the most wildly diverse colors. Moving from the confines of university religious studies to the religious experience of people throughout the world, a religious practitioner or theorist discovers the complex of differences lurking behind geographical, histori-

cal, cultural, and religious boundaries. The sheer complexity of diversity makes clarity elusive; the sheer volume of religious experience makes commonality seem impossible. And yet, after digging about for a few days in the teeming richness of diversity in a scholarly setting, familiar patterns of behavior emerge (fasting, social withdrawal, continual prayer), similar metaphoric patterns develop (marriage to the divinity, distrust of the body, valuation of the intellect), and correlative theological formulations appear (ascent to the divine, avoidance of evil, regeneration). Asceticism, as a system of formation for religious behavior and thought, lays out the potential for communication about the heart of religious differences from within the center of the religious experience. Comparative asceticism assists in laying out the terms, modalities, structures, and practices of religious experience so that others, from another era of history and in another part of the world, may look in and begin to understand. For the postmodern religious discourse, the study of asceticism may provide the space and method for discussing religious differences without needing to discount them in order to find commonality.

Suggestions for Reading These Proceedings

The greatest asceticism for scholars, however, is what we call the "asceticism of appreciation." It is a frustrating and difficult conversation when the conversants gather from widely divergent places, all speak a different language, all employ disparate categories and systems of analysis, and all find the discourse of outsiders baffling. To gather essays written by scholars of religion, as well as by anthropologists, philosophers, ethicists, and literary critics and at the same time to represent many of the world's religions and explore the development of religion through the whole history of human existence, is to gather a Babel of viewpoints and to court frustration. Disciplined, appreciative reading of such diverse submissions itself constitutes an asceticism. This asceticism of appreciation seeks out the expression of difference as fruitful ground for understanding, while holding in abeyance (resisting the desire, to use the Western formulation) the need to find one's own categories and perceptions mirrored in the other. By the end of the conference, scholars who had never been exposed to such differences began to find, ever so hesitatingly at first, a common ground for their study.

The essays that follow reflect rich and frightening diversity. For the purposes of this volume, the responses to the papers reflect the forging of a common language and common categories. They should be read first, as the initial guide through the individual essays, and they will stimulate other directions when reread after the individual essays. Since the matrix of the conference was a specific quality of conversation amid a wide range of scholars and fields, and since it is our desire to stimulate further conversation within the academic study and religious practice of asceticism, the editors have included all of the formal papers of the conference: these papers reflect the state of ascetical studies with all its attendant strengths and weaknesses, and they provide the foundation for further study and debate by presenting the wealth of perspectives on the subject. By working through the essays

with an :
asceticist

NOTES

1. In add
be con
And s
and R
pyri);
edito
"Thre
Mon
lenge
2. See tl
of Re
abou
3. We a
from
ascet
(#22
Con
Bibl
4. See
wor
Stat
tisc
dell

with an asceticism of appreciation, we hope to advance significantly the study of asceticism and the ascetic dimension in religious life and culture.

NOTES

1. In addition to the range of literary expressions, non-literary types of evidence must also be considered as sources for asceticism. See Yizhar Hirschfeld's essay (#19) in this volume. And see also his "Life of Chariton: In Light of Archaeological Research," pp. 425-447; and Robert F. Boughner and James E. Goehring, "Egyptian Monasticism (Selected Papyri)," pp. 456-463, in *Ascetic Behavior in Greco-Roman Antiquity: A Sourcebook*, edited by Vincent L. Wimbush (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990). Goehring's article entitled "Through a Glass Darkly: Diverse Images of the APOTAKTIKOI(AI) of Early Egyptian Monasticism" (*Semeia* 58 [1992]: 25-45) speaks directly to the larger interpretive challenges.
2. See the extensive and still very useful entry on "Asceticism" in Hastings's *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (1909). Although dated in many respects, it contains information about valuable contributions from the nineteenth century.
3. We are indebted to our friend and colleague Walter Kaelber for insights and suggestions from formal papers read and from many informal conversations about Max Weber and asceticism in general, asceticism and typologies in particular. See his response-essay below (#22); and his paper entitled "Understanding Asceticism: Methodological Issues and the Construction of Typologies," read at the American Academy of Religion / Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, held in Boston, December 1987.
4. See the advancement upon Weber especially regarding socio-religious problems in the works of S. N. Eisenstadt, ed., *Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986); and Hans G. Kippenberg, *Die vorderasiatischen Erloesunreligionen in ihrem Zusammenhang mit der antiken Stadtherrschaft: Heidelberg Max-Weber-Vorlesungen 1988* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991).

The Way of the Ascetics: Negative or Affirmative?

Kallistos Ware

An Entry into Freedom?

"Asceticism means the liberation of the human person," states the Russian Orthodox philosopher Nicolas Berdyaev (1873–1948). He defines asceticism as "a concentration of inner forces and command of oneself," and he insists: "Our human dignity is related to this."¹ Asceticism, that is to say, leads us to self-mastery and enables us to fulfill the purpose that we have set for ourselves, whatever that may be. A certain measure of ascetic self-denial is thus a necessary element in all that we undertake, whether in athletics or in politics, in scholarly research or in prayer. Without this ascetic concentration of effort we are at the mercy of exterior forces, or of our own emotions and moods; we are reacting rather than acting. Only the ascetic is inwardly free.

The Roman Catholic Raimundo Pannikar adds that asceticism frees us in particular from fear: "True asceticism begins by eliminating the fear of losing what can be lost. The ascetic is the one who has no fear."² The prisoner Bobynin, in Alexander Solzhenitsyn's novel *The First Circle*, expresses a genuinely ascetic attitude when he says to Abakumov, the Minister of State Security, "I've got nothing, see? Nothing! . . . You only have power over people so long as you don't take *everything* away from them. But when you've robbed a man of *everything* he's no longer in your power—he's free again."³ How much more free is the one who has not been robbed of everything but with ascetic freedom has given it up by his own choice!

While Berdyaev regards asceticism as an entry into freedom, another Russian Orthodox thinker, Father Paul Florensky (1882–1943), links it with beauty: "Asceticism produces not a *good* but a *beautiful* personality."⁴ He would surely have welcomed the fact that our conference is devoting two of its sessions to the "aesthetics of asceticism." In the eyes of Jacob of Serug (c.449–521), the asceticism of Symeon the Stylite—altogether horrifying by our standards—made possible a revelation of the saint's beauty: "Good gold entered the crucible and manifested its

beauty." Even Symeon's gangrenous foot was from the spiritual point of view an object full of beauty: "He watched his foot as it rotted and its flesh decayed. And the foot stood bare like a tree beautiful with branches. He saw that there was nothing on it but tendons and bones."⁵

In Greco-Roman antiquity, ascetic practice was regarded equally as the pathway to happiness and joy. The Cynics saw rigorous self-denial as "part of *askēsis* (training) for happiness."⁶ Philo's Therapeutai assembled at great festivals "clad in snow white raiment, joyous but with the height of solemnity,"⁷ and celebrated the feast by dancing together. The same joyful note re-echoes in the *mimrā* attributed to St. Ephrem the Syrian (c.306–373), *On Hermits and Desert Dwellers*:

There is no weeping in their wanderings and no grieving in their gatherings;
the praises of the angels above surround them on every side.

There is no distress in their death, nor wailing at their departing;
for their death is the victory with which they conquer the adversary.⁸

Freedom, beauty, joy: that is what asceticism meant to Berdyaev, Florensky, and the Syrian monks. But most people in our present-day world have a radically different perception of what asceticism implies: to them it signifies not freedom but submission to irksome rules; not beauty but harsh rigor; not joy but gloomy austerity. Where does the truth lie? The case against asceticism is often stated, and is thoroughly familiar to all of us. Rather than restate it once again, let us try to discover what can be said in defense of the ascetic life. This we can best do by considering two basic components in ascetic practice—*anachōrēsis* (withdrawal) and *enkrateia* (self-control). Our primary questions will be:

1. Does *anachōrēsis* mean simply a flight in order to escape, or can it sometimes signify a flight followed by a return? What if, in fact, there is no return?
2. Does *enkrateia* mean the repression or the redirection of our instinctive urges? Does it involve "violence to our natural appetites" (Durkheim) or their transfiguration?

Obviously these are not the only questions to be asked about asceticism, and in seeking to respond to them I make no claim to provide any overarching cross-cultural framework. My answers will be given, not as a sociologist, but as a theologian and church historian, specializing in Greek Christianity. But the questions themselves have a wider scope, for they are applicable to the Christian West as well as the Christian East, and to non-Christian as well as Christian traditions.

A Flight Followed by a Return?

In itself *anachōrēsis* can be either negative or positive, either world-denying or world-affirming. Often it is the world-denying aspect that seems to be dominant. When Abba Arsenius asks, "Lord, guide me so that I may be saved," he is told: "Flee from humans, and you will be saved."⁹ Arsenius's motive here seems to be

exclusive
fellow hu
high-ran
prayers,
memory
When ask
that is on
be both v
he has ar
carius of
what tha
monk, sc
himself a
suggest tl
the First
did this c

Yet tl
a flight i
seen in p
356), att
Antony
extreme
to speak
point. H
the rema
apart fro
the worl
indeed "
under hi
a physici
recounti
practice
strikingl
staretz Z
Karamaz

Here
to be no
contact v
his pastc
Antony I
our neig
if we can
Antony's
This
course o

exclusively his own salvation, and this involves an avoidance of all contact with his fellow humans; he does not appear to be interested in trying to help them. When a high-ranking Roman lady comes to visit him and asks him to remember her in his prayers, Arsenius answers brusquely: "I pray to God that he will wipe out the memory of you from my heart." Not surprisingly, she departs much distressed.¹⁰ When asked by Abba Mark, "Why do you flee from us?", Arsenius gives an answer that is only slightly more conciliatory: "God knows that I love you, but I cannot be both with God and with humans."¹¹ There still seems to be no suggestion that he has any responsibility to assist others and to lead them to salvation. Abba Macarius of Egypt is equally inexorable. "Flee from humans," he says; and, when asked what that means, he replies: "It is to sit in your cell and weep for your sins."¹² A monk, so it appears, has no duty toward his neighbor; he must simply think about himself and repent his own offenses. Texts such as these, taken in isolation, certainly suggest that monastic *anachōrēsis* is something introspective and selfish. When Paul the First Hermit withdraws into total and lifelong seclusion, what possible benefit did this confer on society around him?¹³

Yet this is not the whole story. In other cases the ascetic undertakes, not simply a flight in order to escape, but a flight followed by a return. This pattern can be seen in particular in the immensely influential *Life of St. Antony of Egypt* (231–356), attributed (perhaps correctly) to St. Athanasius of Alexandria.¹⁴ At the outset Antony withdraws gradually into an ever increasing solitude, which reaches its extreme point when he encloses himself for two decades in a ruined fort, refusing to speak or meet with anyone. But when he is fifty-five there comes a crucial turning point. His friends break down the door and he comes out from the fortress. During the remaining half-century of his long life, Antony still continues to live in the desert, apart from two brief visits to Alexandria. Yet, even though he does not go back to the world in an outward and topographical sense, on the spiritual level he does indeed "return." He makes himself freely available to others, he accepts disciples under his care, and he offers guidance to a constant stream of visitors, serving "as a physician given by God to Egypt," in the words of his biographer.¹⁵ Palladius, recounting the story of Eulogius and the cripple, provides a vivid picture of how in practice Antony exercised this ministry of spiritual direction.¹⁶ His description is strikingly similar to the account—written fifteen centuries later—of the Russian *staretz* Zosima surrounded by the pilgrims, in Dostoevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov*.¹⁷

Here, then, in St. Antony's case, there is a flight into the desert which turns out to be not world-denying but world-affirming. Although he begins by avoiding all contact with his fellow humans, he ends by accepting great numbers of them under his pastoral care. If the portrait of him given in the *Apophthegmata* is to be trusted, Antony felt an intense compassion for others, a direct sense of responsibility. "From our neighbor is life and death," he said; "if we gain our brother, we gain God, but if we cause our brother to stumble, we sin against Christ."¹⁸ Such is the pattern of Antony's life: silence gives place to speech, seclusion leads him to involvement.

This same pattern—of a flight followed by a return—recurs repeatedly in the course of monastic history. It marks the life of St. Basil of Caesarea in fourth-century

Cappadocia, of St. Benedict of Nursia in sixth-century Italy, of St. Gregory Palamas (1296–1359) in Palaeologan Byzantium, and of St. Sergius of Radonezh (c.1314–1392) and St. Seraphim of Sarov (1759–1833) in Russia. In all of these instances, the ascetic starts by withdrawing into seclusion and ends by becoming the guide and leader of others, a spiritual father¹⁹ or “soul friend.”²⁰ What is more, these two stages—solitude, followed by leadership—are not merely juxtaposed in time but are integrally connected with each other. It is precisely because they first withdrew into solitude that these ascetics were afterwards able to act as spiritual guides. Without the ascetic preparation that they underwent in the silence of the wilderness, St. Antony, St. Benedict, or St. Seraphim would never have been able to bring light and healing to others in the way that they did. Not that they withdrew in order to become guides and spiritual masters to their generation; for they fled, not in order to prepare themselves for any other task, but simply in order to be alone with God. When St. Benedict hid himself in a cave near Subiaco, he wanted simply to save his own soul, and had not the slightest intention of saving Western civilization. But his solitary quest for personal salvation did in fact exercise in the long term a profoundly creative effect on European culture. Often it is precisely the men and women of inner stillness—not the activists but the contemplatives, fired by a consuming passion for solitude—who in practice bring about the most far-reaching alterations in the society around them.

In the case of saints such as Antony, Benedict, or Seraphim, the flight was followed by a return. Yet what is to be said of the many ascetics who, after the model of the legendary Paul the First Hermit, never actually “returned” but remained to the end in solitary isolation? Were their lives entirely wasted? Was their *anachōrēsis* simply negative? Not necessarily so; it all depends on our criteria. In speaking earlier about Arsenius I was careful to use the words “seems” and “appears.” When Arsenius flees from his fellow humans, it may indeed seem to the modern reader that he is doing nothing to help them. But, in the eyes of many of his contemporaries, he was in fact doing something extremely positive in the solitude of the desert: he was praying. Significantly, Arsenius, the Desert Father who represents *anachōrēsis* in its most uncompromising form, is depicted in the *Apophthegmata* as, above all, a person of unceasing, fiery prayer:

A certain brother went to the cell of Abba Arsenius in Scetis and looked through the window, and he beheld the old man as if completely on fire; for the brother was worthy to see this. . . . They also said about him, that late on Saturday evening he turned his back on the setting sun, and stretched out his arms towards heaven in prayer; and so he remained until the rising sun shone on his face. And then he sat down.²¹

Such, then, is the service which the solitary ascetic renders to society around him. He helps others not through active works of charity, not through writings and scholarly research, nor yet primarily through giving spiritual counsel, but simply through his continual prayer. His *anachōrēsis* is in itself a way of serving others, because the motive behind his withdrawal is to seek union with God; and this

prayerful u
he knows n
existence.

The poi
walls.” In h
CE during h
listlessness
afflict me, s
to me, “Tell
watch like s
of the chur-
the walls a
specific ans
weapon of
or city in E
and the pec

The pos
the meanir
twofold st
classic prot
at the sam
vividly em
he hears th
here in the
aim: to me
his purpos
achieve un
Equally he
advancing
whom he
is nothing
his fellow
on behalf
anachōrēs
movement
tian literat
but such p
studying t

Accor
others sin
through a

Civiliz
and the

prayerful union supports and strengthens his fellow humans, even though he knows nothing about them; and they, on their part, are unaware of his very existence.

The point is effectively summed up by Palladius in the phrase "guarding the walls." In his chapter on Abba Macarius of Alexandria, whom he met around 391 CE during his early years in Cellia, he recounts: "Once, when I was suffering from listlessness (*akēdia*), I went to him and said: 'Abba, what shall I do? For my thoughts afflict me, saying: You are making no progress; go away from here.' And he replied to me, 'Tell them: For Christ's sake I am guarding the walls.'"²² The monks keep watch like sentries on the walls of the spiritual city, thus enabling the other members of the church inside the walls to carry on their daily activities in safety. Guarding the walls against whom? The early Christian ascetics would have had a clear and specific answer: against the demons. Guarding the walls by what means? With the weapon of prayer. In the words of the *Historia monachorum*: "There is not a village or city in Egypt and the Thebaid that is not surrounded by hermitages as if by walls, and the people are supported by their prayers as though by God himself."²³

The positive value of flight into the desert is evident when we take into account the meaning that the desert possessed for these early Christian ascetics. It had a twofold significance. It was both the place where God is to be found—here the classic prototype was Moses, who met God face to face in the desert of Sinai—and at the same time it was the place where the demons dwell. The second meaning is vividly emphasized in the *Life of Antony*: as Antony withdraws into the deep desert, he hears the demons shouting, "Depart from our territory. What business have you here in the desert?"²⁴ So the solitary, in withdrawing into the desert, has a double aim: to meet God and to fight the demons. In both cases he is not being selfish, and his purpose is not to escape but to encounter. He goes out to discover God and to achieve union with him through prayer; and this is something that helps others. Equally he goes out to confront the demons, not running away from danger but advancing to meet it; and this also is a way of helping others. For the devil with whom he enters into combat is the common enemy of all humankind. Thus there is nothing self-centered in his act of *anachōrēsis*. Every prayer that he offers protects his fellow Christians, and every victory that he wins over the devil is a victory won on behalf of the human family as a whole. Such, therefore, is the positive value of *anachōrēsis*, even when it is not followed in any visible or explicit fashion by a movement of "return." Of course, many twentieth-century students of early Christian literature do not believe in the existence of demons or in the efficacy of prayer; but such persons need to recognize that the authors of the literature that they are studying believed keenly and intensely in both of these things.

According to the early Christian worldview, then, the solitaries were assisting others simply by offering prayer—not just through prayer of intercession, but through any kind of prayer:

Civilization, where lawlessness prevails, is sustained by their prayers, and the world, buried in sin, is preserved by their prayers.²⁵

In the words of an Orthodox writer in Finland, Tito Colliander:

Prayer is action; to pray is to be highly effective. . . . Prayer is the science of scientists and the art of artists. The artist works in clay or colours, in word or tones; according to his ability he gives them pregnancy and beauty. The working material of the praying person is living humanity. By his prayer he shapes it, gives it pregnancy and beauty: first himself and thereby many others.²⁶

★ The ascetic in the desert, that is to say, helps his fellow humans not so much by anything that he does, but rather by what he is. "First himself and thereby many others": he serves society by transforming himself through prayer, and by virtue of his own self-transfiguration he also transfigures the world around him. By weeping for his own sins, the recluse is in fact altering the spiritual situation of many others.

The rationale of ascetic *anachōrēsis* is concisely summed up by St. Seraphim of Sarov: "Acquire the spirit of peace, and then thousands around you will be saved."²⁷ Perhaps the more a monk thinks about converting himself, and the less he thinks about converting others, the more likely it is that others will in fact be converted. St. Isaac the Syrian (seventh century) goes so far as to maintain that it is better to become a solitary than to win over "a multitude of heathen" to the Christian faith: "Love the idleness of stillness above providing for the world's starving and the conversion of a multitude of heathen to the worship of God. . . . Better is he who builds his own soul than he who builds the world."²⁸ That is to put the point in a deliberately provocative way; but in fact he who "builds his own soul" is at the same time building the world, and until we have ourselves been in some measure "converted" it is improbable that we shall ever convert anyone else to anything at all. Actually, solitaries did on occasion prove quite effective as missionaries, as is shown, for example by the story of St. Euthymius (377-473) and the Bedouin tribe,²⁹ but this is exceptional.

In this way the solitaries, through their ascetic *anachōrēsis*, are indeed cooperating in the salvation of the world; but they do this not actively or intentionally but existentially—not through outward works but through inner perfection. In the words of Father Irénée Hausherr: "All progress in sanctity realized by one member benefits everyone; every ascent to God establishes a new bond between him and humanity as such; every oasis of spirituality renders the desert of this world less savage and less uninhabitable."³⁰

Repression or Transfiguration?

Anachōrēsis, then, can be world-affirming as well as world-denying. The flight of the solitary from the world may be followed by a "return," in which he or she acts as a spiritual guide, as a "soul friend"; and, even when there is no such return, the hermits are helping others by the very fact of their existence, through their hidden holiness and prayer. What then of *enkrateia*? Often in Eastern Christian sources this seems to imply an attitude toward material things, toward the human body, and toward members of the other sex, that is little short of dualist. But is this

invariably negative?

First consideration in precisely how often. Whence? Specifically it comes from distinguishing monic? (Other ear course is John of belly.³³ meal fee applies to of the po of this k ing.³⁶

"Mo more ex tween n:

The as th of fo encl ardu inflic time, tury.

Wh toward restricti delibera special upon it wherea form o on a be of a wo stand p is natu tables,

invariably the case? Cannot ascetic *enkrateia* be likewise affirmative rather than negative?

First of all, early Christian ascetic texts insist repeatedly on the need for moderation in all forms of abstinence and self-restraint. Doubtless this was necessary precisely because so many ascetics were immoderate; yet it is nonetheless significant how often the best and most respected authorities issue firm warnings against excess. What distinguishes true from demonic fasting, states Amma Syncletica, is specifically its moderate character: "There is also an excessive asceticism (*askēsis*) that comes from the enemy, and this is practised by his disciples. How then are we to distinguish the divine and royal asceticism from that which is tyrannical and demonic? Clearly, by its moderation."³¹ As regards food, the *Apophthegmata* and other early sources regularly discourage prolonged fasting, and state that the best course is to eat something every day.³² If we want to fast in the right way, affirms John of Lycopolis, the golden rule is never to eat to satiety, never to stuff one's belly.³³ According to St. Barsanuphius of Gaza, we should always rise from the meal feeling that we should have liked to eat a little more.³⁴ The same principle applies to the drinking of water: we should restrict our intake, stopping well short of the point where we feel that we cannot possibly drink any more.³⁵ Sober advice of this kind serves to counterbalance the stories of spectacular and inhuman fasting.³⁶

"Moderation," however, is a vague term. To render our evaluation of *enkrateia* more exact, let us take up a distinction that is made by Dom Cuthbert Butler between natural and unnatural asceticism:

The mortifications recorded of the Egyptian solitaries, extraordinary and appalling as they were, were all of a kind that may be called natural, consisting in privation of food, of drink, of sleep, of clothing; in exposure to heat and cold; in rigorous enclosure in cell or cave or tomb; in prolonged silence and vigils and prayer; in arduous labour, in wandering through the desert, in bodily fatigue; but of the self-inflicted scourgings, the spikes and chains, and other artificial penances of a later time, I do not recollect any instances among the Egyptian monks of the fourth century.³⁷

What basically distinguishes natural from unnatural asceticism is its attitude toward the body. Natural asceticism reduces material life to the utmost simplicity, restricting our physical needs to a minimum, but not maiming the body or otherwise deliberately causing it to suffer. Unnatural asceticism, on the other hand, seeks out special forms of mortification that torment the body and gratuitously inflict pain upon it. Thus it is a form of natural asceticism to wear cheap and plain clothing, whereas it is unnatural to wear fetters with iron spikes piercing the flesh. It is a form of natural asceticism to sleep on the ground, whereas it is unnatural to sleep on a bed of nails. It is a form of natural asceticism to live in a hut or a cave, instead of a well-appointed house, whereas it is unnatural to chain oneself to a rock or to stand permanently on top of a pillar. To refrain from marriage and sexual activity is natural asceticism; to castrate oneself is unnatural. To choose to eat only vegetables, not meat, and to drink only water, not wine, is natural asceticism; but it is

unnatural intentionally to make our food and drink repulsive, as was done by Isaac the Priest, who after the Eucharist emptied the ashes from the censer over his food, and by Joseph of Panepho, who added sea water to the river water that he drank.³⁸ Incidentally, such actions surely display a curious disrespect to God as creator; for we are not to disfigure the gifts that God confers on us.

Unnatural asceticism, in other words, evinces either explicitly or implicitly a distinct hatred for God's creation, and particularly for the body; natural asceticism may do this, but on the whole it does not. The official attitude of the church, especially from the fourth century onwards, has been entirely clear. Voluntary abstinence for ascetic reasons is entirely legitimate; but to abstain out of a loathing for the material creation is heretical. The point is firmly made in the *Apostolic Canons* (Syria, c.400 CE):

If any bishop, presbyter or deacon, or any other member of the clergy, abstains from marriage, or from meat and wine, not by way of asceticism (*askēsis*) but out of abhorrence for these things, forgetting that God made "all things altogether good and beautiful" (Gen. 1:31), and that he "created humankind male and female" (Gen. 1:27), and so blaspheming the work of creation, let him be corrected, or else be deposed and cast out of the Church. The same applies also to a lay person.³⁹

The Council of Gangra (Asia Minor, c.355 CE) likewise anathematizes those who censure marriage and meat eating as essentially sinful. The motive for asceticism must be positive, not negative: "If anyone practices virginity or self-control (*enkrateia*), withdrawing from marriage as if it were a loathsome thing and not because of the inherent beauty and sanctity of virginity, let such a one be anathema."⁴⁰ When we fast, so Diadochus of Photice (mid-fifth century) insists, "we must never feel loathing for any kind of food, for to do so is abominable and utterly demonic. It is emphatically not because any kind of food is bad in itself that we refrain from it." We fast, not out of hatred for God's creation, but so as to control the body; also fasting enables us to help the poor, for the food that we ourselves refrain from eating can be given to others who are in need.⁴¹

Natural asceticism, it can be argued, is warfare not against the body but for the body. When asked by some children, "What is asceticism?" the Russian priest Alexander Elchaninov (1881–1934) replied, "A system of exercises which submits the body to the spirit"; and when they inquired what was the first exercise of all, he told them, "Breathe through the nose."⁴² Our ascetic aim is not to impede our breathing through some forced technique, but simply to breathe correctly and so to let the body function in a natural way. "The important element in fasting," Father Alexander added, "is not the fact of *abstaining* from this or that, or of *depriving* oneself of something by way of punishment"; rather its purpose is the "refinement" of our physicality, so that we are more accessible to "the influence of higher forces" and thus approach closer to God.⁴³ Refinement, not destruction: that is the aim.

In contrast, then, to the unnatural variety, natural asceticism has a positive objective: it seeks not to undermine but to transform the body, rendering it a willing instrument of the spirit, a partner instead of an opponent. For this reason another

Russia:
"flesh"
self): "
it we a
12.1).
me, I k
affirm
is an e
quoted

Th
the

Th
rat

It
of all
toward
fort, F
dition
with
He w
state:
Antoi
and p
up to
"his c
teeth
great
enkre
"

Poer
servic
patho
disea
follo
being
patho
passi
empl
sider
"mo
F
him
This

Russian priest, Sergius Bulgakov (1871–1944), used to say (employing the word “flesh” in its Pauline sense, to signify not our physicality but our fallen and sinful self): “Kill the flesh, so as to acquire a body.”⁴⁴ As for the body, so far from killing it we are to hold it in honor and to offer it to God as a “living sacrifice” (Rom. 12.1). The Desert Father Dorotheus was surely wrong to say of his body, “It kills me, I kill it”;⁴⁵ and he was tacitly corrected by another Desert Father, Poemen, who affirmed: “We were taught, not to kill the body, but to kill the passions.”⁴⁶ There is an eloquent assertion of the intrinsic goodness of the body in the *mīmra* already quoted, *On Hermits and Desert Dwellers*:

Their bodies are temples of the Spirit, their minds are churches;
their prayer is pure incense, and their tears are fragrant smoke. . .

They greatly afflict their bodies, not because they do not love their bodies,
rather, they want to bring their bodies to Eden in glory.⁴⁷

It is reassuring in this connection to find that the earliest and most influential of all Greek monastic texts, the *Life of Antony*, adopts a markedly positive attitude towards the body. When Antony emerged after twenty years of enclosure within a fort, his friends “were amazed to see that his body had maintained its former condition, neither fat from lack of exercise, nor emaciated from fasting and combat with demons, but he was just as they had known him before his withdrawal. . . . He was altogether balanced, as one guided by reason and abiding in a natural state.”⁴⁸ There is no dualistic hatred of the body here; asceticism has not subverted Antony’s physicality but restored it to its “natural state,” that is to say, to its true and proper condition as intended by God. This natural state of the body continues up to the end of Antony’s long life. Although he lived to be more than a hundred, “his eyes were undimmed and quite sound, and he saw clearly; he lost none of his teeth—they had simply become worn down to the gums because of the old man’s great age. He remained strong in both feet and hands.”⁴⁹ So according to the texts, *enkrateia* enhanced rather than impaired Antony’s bodily health.

“We were taught, not to kill the body, but to kill the passions,” says Abba Poemen. But is he right? Cannot even the passions be redirected and used in God’s service? Our answer will depend in part on the meaning that we attach to the word *pathos* (passion). Are we to regard it in a Stoic sense, as something fundamentally diseased and disordered, a morbid and pathological condition, or should we rather follow the Aristotelian standpoint and treat it as something neutral, capable of being put either to evil or to good use?⁵⁰ The manner in which we understand *pathos* will also influence the sense that we give to the term *apatheia* (dispassion, passionlessness). But this is not simply a linguistic issue; for the way in which we employ words influences the way in which we think about things. It makes a considerable difference what we say to others and, indeed, to ourselves: do we enjoin “mortify” or “redirect,” “eradicate” or “educate,” “eliminate” or “transfigure”?

Philo adopts the Stoic view of *pathos*, and many Greek Christian fathers follow him in this, regarding the passions as “contrary to nature” and even directly sinful. This is the position of Clement of Alexandria, Nemesius of Emesa, Gregory of

Nyssa, Evagrius of Pontus, and John Climacus, to mention only a few. But there are significant exceptions, and both Theodoret of Cyrus and Abba Isaias of Scetis adopt a more positive attitude. Desire and anger, says Theodoret, are "necessary and useful to nature": without desire we would experience no longing for divine things, no appetite for food and drink, no impulse towards "lawful procreation," and so the human race would perish. Anger in its turn has a positive function, he says, for it prevents our desire from passing beyond due limits.⁵¹ Isaias likewise argues that the different passions can all be put to a positive use that is "in accordance with nature." Desire, employed aright, impels us to love God; jealousy (or *zēlos* [zeal]) spurs us on to make greater efforts in the spiritual life (cf. 1 Cor. 12.31); anger and hatred prove beneficial, if directed against sin and the demons; even pride can be used in a constructive way, when we employ it to counteract self-depreciation and despondency. The aim of the ascetic, then, is not to suppress these passions but to reorient them.⁵² St. Maximus the Confessor (c.580–662) follows the same approach when he describes love for God as a "holy passion."⁵³ In similar terms St. Gregory Palamas speaks of "divine and blessed passions"; our objective is not the *nekrōsis* (mortification) of the passions but their *metathesis* (transposition).⁵⁴

Even in those authors, such as Evagrius, who speak of *pathos* (passion) in pejorative terms, the notion of *apatheia* (dispassion) is by no means unduly negative. Evagrius himself links it closely with *agapē*.⁵⁵ It is not an attitude of passive indifference and insensibility, still less a condition in which sinning is impossible, but it is on the contrary a state of inner freedom and integration, in which we are no longer under the domination of sinful impulses, and so are capable of genuine love; "apathy" is thus a particularly misleading translation. Adapting Evagrius's teaching to a Western audience, St. John Cassian wisely rendered *apatheia* as *puritas cordis* (purity of heart) a phrase that has the double advantage of being both scriptural in content and positive in form.⁵⁶ To denote its dynamic character, Diadochus employs the expressive phrase "the fire of *apatheia*."⁵⁷ It is no mere mortification of the passions, but a state of soul in which a burning love for God and for our fellow humans leaves no room for sensual and selfish impulses.

From all this it is evident that *enkrateia*, although often understood in a negative manner—as hatred of the body, as the destruction of our instinctive urges—can also be interpreted in more affirmative terms, as the reintegration of the body and the transformation of the passions into their true and natural condition. Again and again, when the patristic texts are carefully analyzed, the Greek fathers turn out to be advocating not repression but transfiguration.

A Vocation for All

Our explanation of the terms *anachōrēsis* and *enkrateia* has made clear that *askēsis* signifies not simply a selfish quest for individual salvation but a service rendered to the total human family; not simply the cutting off or destroying of the lower but, much more profoundly, the refinement and illumination of the lower and its transfiguration into something higher. The same conclusion could be drawn from an examination of other key ascetic terms, such as *hēsychia* (stillness, tranquillity,

quietude).
than empti
speech, a p
and comm
worship G
'I sleep, bu
Interpr
askēsis is u
not a curio
true nature
of all for
needed by
Without a

NOTES

1. In Dor
pp. 86-
2. *The Tr*
3. *The Fi*
4. See Ni
Paul F
Skete l
Brothe
5. Jacob
L. Wii
in Ant
6. Leif A
7. Philo,
Asceti
8. *On H*
Asceti
9. Arsen
Collec
comp
10. Arsen
11. Arsen
12. *Deser*
13. See th
369. l
histor
tacts
14. For b
nasia
15. *Life c*
16. *The l*
17. *The l*
was r
in the
Stare

quietude). This too is affirmative rather than negative, a state of plenitude rather than emptiness, a sense of presence rather than absence. It is not just a cessation of speech, a pause between words, but an attitude of attentive listening, of openness and communion with the eternal: in the words of John Climacus, "*Hēsychia* is to worship God unceasingly and to wait on him. . . . The Hesychast is one who says, 'I sleep, but my heart is awake'" (Song 5.2).⁵⁸

Interpreted in this positive way, as transfiguration rather than mortification, *askēsis* is universal in its scope—not an élite enterprise but a vocation for all. It is not a curious aberration, distorting our personhood, but it reveals to us our own true nature. As Father Alexander Elchaninov observes, "Asceticism is necessary first of all for creative action of any kind, for prayer, for love: in other words, it is needed by each of us throughout our entire life. . . . *Every Christian is an ascetic.*"⁵⁹ Without asceticism none of us is authentically human.

NOTES

1. In Donald A. Lowrie, *Christian Existentialism: A Berdyaev Anthology* (London, 1965), pp. 86–87 (translation altered).
2. *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* (New York/London, 1973), p. 66.
3. *The First Circle*, trans. Michael Guybon (London: Fontana Books, 1970), pp. 106–107.
4. See Nicholas O. Lossky, *History of Russian Philosophy* (New York, 1951), p. 182; cf. Paul Florensky, *Salt of the Earth: Or a Narrative on the Life of the Elder of Gethsemane Skete Hieromonk Abba Isidore*, trans. Richard Betts, edited by the St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood (Platina, 1987), p. 11.
5. Jacob of Serug, *Homily on Simeon the Stylite*, trans. Susan Ashbrook Harvey, in Vincent L. Wimbush, ed., *Ascetic Behavior in Greco-Roman Antiquity: A Sourcebook*, Studies in Antiquity and Christianity (Minneapolis, 1990), pp. 21–22.
6. Leif A. Vaage, in Wimbush, *Ascetic Behavior*, p. 117.
7. Philo, *On the Contemplative Life* 8.66, trans. Gail Paterson Corrington, in Wimbush, *Ascetic Behavior*, p. 149.
8. *On Hermits and Desert Dwellers*, lines 329ff.; trans. Joseph P. Amar, in Wimbush, *Ascetic Behavior*, p. 75.
9. Arsenius 1, in *The Desert Christian: Sayings of the Desert Fathers, The Alphabetical Collection*, trans. B. Ward (New York, 1975); also in J. P. Migne, ed., *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Graeca*, 65 vols. (Paris, 1857–1866).
10. Arsenius 28.
11. Arsenius 13.
12. *Desert Christian . . . Alphabetical Collection*, Macarius 27: cf. Macarius 41.
13. See the *Vita* by Jerome, trans. Paul B. Harvey, in Wimbush, *Ascetic Behavior*, pp. 357–369. Paul himself may be legendary, but his story is typical; there must have been many historical figures who fled like him into the desert, permanently breaking off their contacts with other humans.
14. For bibliography on the authorship of the *Life of Antony*, see Alvyn Pettersen, *Athanasius and the Human Body* (Bristol, 1990), p. 33, note 69.
15. *Life of Antony* 87 (PG 26.965A).
16. *The Lausiac History of Palladius*, ed. Cuthbert Butler (Cambridge, 1898), 21:63–68.
17. *The Brothers Karamazov*, book 2., chapter 3, "Devout Peasant Women." Dostoevsky was not simply inventing an imaginary scene but reproducing what he had actually seen in the Optina hermitage; cf. John B. Dunlop, *Staretz Amvrosy: Model for Dostoevsky's Staretz Zossima* (Belmont, Mass., 1972).

18. *Desert Christian*, Antony 9. Similar statements can be found in the (perhaps authentic) Letters attributed to Antony (trans. Derwas J. Chitty, Fairacres Publication 50 [Oxford, 1975]); cf. Samuel Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony: Origenist Theology, Monastic Tradition and the Making of a Saint* (Lund, 1990).
 19. There can of course be "spiritual mothers" as well as "spiritual fathers": the Alphabetical Collection of *Apophthegmata* contains 3 *ammas* alongside 117 *abbas*, so women are certainly represented, although in a minority. Cf. Sister Benedicta Ward, "Apophthegmata Matrum," in *Studia Patristica* 16 (Berlin, 1985), pp. 63–66; reprinted in Ward, *Signs and Wonders: Saints, Miracles, and Prayers from the 4th Century to the 14th*, Variorum Collected Studies Series, CS 361 (Brookfield, 1992), section I.
 20. *Anmchara* (soul friend) is a term found in Celtic Christianity. Cf. Kenneth Leech, *Soul Friend: A Study of Spirituality* (London, 1977), p. 50.
 21. Arsenius 27 and 30.
 22. *The Lausiac History* 18:58.
 23. *Historia monachorum in Aegypto*, prologue 10; cf. Norman Russell, trans., *The Lives of the Desert Fathers* (London/Oxford, 1980), p. 50. ;
 24. *Life of Antony* 13 (PG 26.861C).
 25. *On Hermits and Desert Dwellers*, lines 509ff., trans. Amar, in Wimbush, *Ascetic Behavior*, p. 79.
 26. *The Way of the Ascetics*, new ed. (London/Oxford, 1983), pp. 57, 59.
 27. Ivan Kologrivof, *Essai sur la sainteté en Russie* (Bruges, 1953), p. 430.
 28. *Mystic Treatises by Isaac of Nineveh*, trans. A. J. Wensinck (Amsterdam, 1923), pp. 32, 298; *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, trans. Dana Miller (Boston: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1984), pp. 32, 306 (translation altered).
 29. Cyril of Scythopolis, *Life of Euthymius* 10 and 15, in R. M. Price, trans., *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Cistercian Studies 114 (Kalamazoo, 1991), pp. 14–17, 20–21.
 30. "L'hésychasme: Étude de spiritualité," in Hausherr, *Hésychasme et prière*, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 176 (Rome, 1966), p. 181.
- In the discussion above, *anachōrēsis* has been understood in its exterior sense, as a physical withdrawal into solitude. The term can also denote an inner, spiritual state, as when Abba Isaias of Scetis (died 489 CE) states: "The ancients who were our fathers said that *anachōrēsis* is flight from the body and meditation upon death," in *Logos* 26.3, ed. Monk Avgoustinos of the Jordan (Jerusalem, 1911), p. 184. Compare John Climacus: "Withdrawal (*anachōrēsis*) from the world is a willing hatred of all that is materially prized, a denial of nature for the sake of what is above nature," in *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Step 1, trans. Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell, *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York, 1982), p. 74.
31. Alphabetical Collection, *Syncletica* 15. Now see translation by Elizabeth Castelli, "The Life and Activity of the Blessed Teacher Syncletica," in Wimbush, ed., *Ascetic Behavior*, pp. 265–311. On the dangers of excessive asceticism and the need for relaxation, see *ibid.*, Antony 8 and 13.
 32. See, for example, *ibid.*, Ammonas 4 and Poemen 31.
 33. *Historia monachorum in Aegypto* 1.29, p. 56.
 34. *Questions and Answers*, ed. Sotirios N. Schoinas (Volos, 1960), §84; trans. Lucien Regnault and Philippe Lemaire (Solesmes, 1972), §158; cf. §511.
 35. See Evagrius, *Practicus* 18, eds. Antoine Guillaumont and Claire Guillaumont, *Sources chrétiennes* 171 (Paris, 1971), p. 542; cf. *Historia monachorum in Aegypto* 20.16, p. 107.
 36. See, for example, the story of Macarius of Alexandria at Tabennisi in *The Lausiac History* 18:52–53.

37. *The*
Egy
De:
cf.
Ler
But
cati
Wi:
38. *Ap*
39. *Ap*
1.2
R.
anc
tial
40. Ca
Ya
for
41. *Or*
anc
p.
42. *Th*
43. *Ibi*
44. *Cf*
All
Fel
45. *Th*
46. *Ap*
47. *Or*
Be
48. *Li*
Th
49. *Li*
50. *Se*
in
51. *Th*
tie
52. *Lo*
53. *O*
vc
54. *Th*
le:
55. *Pr*
56. *C*
57. *O*
58. *Li*
59. *T*

37. *The Lausiac History* 1:188. The wearing of chains is, however, occasionally found in Egypt, as with the body of Sarapion, discovered at Antinoe: see Derwas J. Chitty, *The Desert a City* (Oxford, 1966), p. 17, note 36. It is, however, far more common in Syria: cf. Theodoret of Cyrus, *Historia religiosa* 10.1, 15.2, 23.1, eds. Pierre Canivet and Alice Leroy-Molinghen, *Sources chrétiennes* 234, 257 (Paris, 1977-1979), 1:438; 2:18, 134. But initially ascetic practices in Syria were relatively moderate; severe feats of mortification only begin to appear in the late fourth and early fifth centuries (cf. Amar, in Wimbush, *Ascetic Behavior*, p. 67).
38. *Apophthegmata*, Isaac the Priest 6, Eulogius the Priest 1.
39. Apostolic Canon 51, in Périclès-Pierre Joannou, *Discipline générale antique (IV^e-IX^es.)*, 1.2, *Les canons des Synodes Particuliers* (Grottaferrata, 1962), pp. 35-36; trans. Henry R. Percival, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church: Their Canons and Dogmatic Decrees*, A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, 2d series, vol. 14 (Oxford/New York, 1900), p. 597.
40. Canon 9; cf. Canons 1-2, 4, 10, 14, in Joannou, op. cit., pp. 89-95; trans. O. Larry Yarbrough, in Wimbush, *Ascetic Behavior*, pp. 451-453. The Council of Gangra also forbids women to wear men's clothing (Canon 13).
41. *On Spiritual Knowledge and Discrimination* 43, trans. G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text*, vol. 1 (London/Boston, 1979), p. 266.
42. *The Diary of a Russian Priest* (London, 1967), p. 213.
43. Ibid., pp. 129, 187.
44. Cf. Metropolitan Anthony (Bloom), "Body and Matter in Spiritual Life," in A. M. Allchin, ed., *Sacrament and Image: Essays in the Christian Understanding of Man*, The Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius (London, 1967), p. 41.
45. *The Lausiac History* 2:17.
46. *Apophthegmata*, Poemen 184.
47. *On Hermits and Desert Dwellers*, lines 97ff., 189ff., trans. Amar, in Wimbush, *Ascetic Behavior*, pp. 70, 72.
48. *Life of Antony* 14 (PG 26. 864C-865A). On the significance of this passage, see Chitty, *The Desert a City*, p. 4.
49. *Life of Antony* 93 (PG 26. 973AB).
50. See Kallistos Ware, "The Meaning of 'Pathos' in Abba Isaias and Theodoret of Cyrus," in *Studia Patristica* 20 (Leuven, 1989), pp. 315-322.
51. Theodoret, *The Healing of Hellenic Maladies* 5.76-79, ed. Pierre Canivet, *Sources chrétiennes* 57 (Paris, 1958), pp. 251-252.
52. Logos 2.1-2, ed. Avgoustinos, p. 5.
53. *On Love* 3.67, trans. Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text*, vol. 2 (London/Boston, 1981), p. 93.
54. *Triads in Defence of the Holy Hesychasts* 2.2.22; 3.3.15, ed. Jean Meyendorff, *Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense* 30-31 (Louvain, 1959), pp. 367, 723.
55. *Practicus* 81, ed. Guillaumont, p. 670: "Love is the offspring of *apatheia*."
56. Cf. Owen Chadwick, *John Cassian*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 1968), p. 102.
57. *On Spiritual Knowledge and Discrimination* 17, trans. Palmer et al., vol. 2, p. 258.
58. *Ladder* 27, trans. Luibheid and Russell, pp. 263, 269-270.
59. *The Diary of a Russian Priest*, pp. 177, 188 (translation altered).

The Howl of Oedipus, the Cry of Héloïse: From Asceticism to Postmodern Ethics

Edith Wyschogrod

Asceticism is a complex of widely varying practices, beliefs and motives that have appeared in particular historical and cultural contexts. It is, to use the language of art criticism, site-specific. If the historical and phenomenological integrity of asceticism's many manifestations is to be preserved, it is beyond dispute that ascetic phenomena must be allowed to emerge in discrete material and psycho-social meaning constellations.¹

Yet, I want to argue, there is also for every psycho-social practice an episteme, a cluster of ideas often invisible, that is both the conceptual backdrop and the enabling mechanism for the emergence of ascetic life *in situ*. Thus, I shall allow myself to speak in more sweeping terms of Western asceticism and a Western episteme with the understanding that neither term implies theoretical or practical unity, but that both point to a loosely linked, open-ended chain of mythemes and philosophemes. These are the narrative and conceptual units that acquire meaning through their relation with one another and that, taken together, constitute a tradition. I sometimes refer to the linkage of these units as a chain of signifiers. Concrete practices do not lie outside a tradition but feed back into it in a loop that may overturn a formation or render it more supple. Within this episteme, there are discernible discursive formations—lesser patterns of signification. Thus, no essence of asceticism will be specified; I shall argue that the discursive formations within the episteme of asceticism are bound up with the self-imposition of corporeal and psychic pain or privation; but I shall also argue that not all pain and privation, even when self-generated, is ascetic.

In what follows four interrelated claims are considered: first, in order to understand the cluster of notions that enter into asceticism as an episteme, two prior and competing discourses, that of *erōs* (love) and of *dikē* (justice), especially as Plato interprets them, must be distinguished. The body concepts associated with each need to be sorted out, as well as the way in which these views of body are taken up or rejected in ascetic discourse. Second, Western asceticism demands the devaluing of the world, the turning of the world into vanity. In order to see this, the type of negation involved in world negation will be analyzed. Third, within the structure of asceticism, gaps or fissures appear in its understanding of love, pleasure, and

pain in
evident
emerge
ethics.
to inte:

In one
Oedipi
lative]

An
dou
roc

cor
wh
the
his

The h
tears c
to cor
Oedip
where
set in]
far fr
reflex
sive fo

A
Oedip
taboo
natur
with i
conte
argun
of its
natur
kind
allow
recor
their
I war
fore

pain in the form of an eroticism that asserts and denies itself. This is especially evident in the correspondence of Héloïse and Abelard. The view of the body that emerges presages a new postmodern understanding of asceticism and its relation to ethics. Finally, this new conception of body will allow asceticism, love and justice to intersect without integrating them heuristically or dialectically.

The Howl of Oedipus

In one of Greek tragedy's most powerful passages, a messenger recounts the cry of Oedipus upon discovering Jocasta hanged, a cry that gathers into itself the cumulative pain of incest and patricide.

And with a dread shriek, as though someone beckoned him on, he sprang at the double doors, and from their sockets forced the bending bolts and rushed into the room.

There beheld we the woman hanging by the neck in a twisted noose of swinging cords. But he, when he saw her, with a dread deep cry of misery, loosed the halter whereby she hung. . . . Then was the sequel dread to see. For he tore from her raiment the golden brooches wherewith she was decked and lifted them, and smote full on his own eye-balls.²

The howl of Oedipus is followed by a remarkable act of automutilation: Oedipus tears out his eyes. Why, it might be asked, is it so unthinkable, so counterintuitive to consider this self-infliction of pain and deprivation an ascetic practice? Perhaps Oedipus's cry of pain is simply the spontaneous response to powerful emotions, whereas asceticism involves a nexus of beliefs and practices that must be consciously set in place and should have a specific aim. I want to argue that the howl of Oedipus, far from being akin to the scream uttered in response to physical injury, a biological reflex as it were, is a distillate of a certain *telos* (purpose) and of a complex discursive formation, one that is different from asceticism.

A clue may be derived from Claude Lévi-Strauss's interpretation, not of the Oedipus story itself, upon which he has commented copiously, but of the incest taboo. The incest prohibition, he contends, occurs at the intersection of culture and nature and provides the link between them: "Before it, culture is still non-existent, with it nature's sovereignty over man is ended."³ Although its universality has been contested by anthropologists, what is crucial for Lévi-Strauss and germane to my argument is his contention that, "The fact of being a rule, completely independent of its modalities, is indeed the very essence of the incest prohibition."⁴ To be sure, nature alone already operates lawfully, in that living things reproduce their own kind and not some other. Nevertheless, it is culture and not nature that regulates allowable degrees of consanguinity in human societies. The aberrations of nature recorded in Sophocles' *Oedipus*, the inability of animals and humans to bring forth their young, are responses by nature to the violation of a social prohibition. What I want to focus on is the regulative character of the taboo in order to bring to the fore the episteme from which it arises. By regulative I mean the establishment of

that have
language of
ty of asce-
hat ascetic
social mean-

n episteme,
op and the
shall allow
Western ep-
or practical
themes and
ire meaning
stitute a tra-
nifiers. Con-
op that may
ne, there are
is, no essence
ations within
corporeal and
privation, even

order to under-
two prior and
pecially as Plato
ated with each
body are taken
ands the deval-
see this, the type
ain the structure
e, pleasure, and

culture's suzerainty over nature as reflecting a reapportionment of power, a reallocation that is essentially a juridical process belonging to a classical episteme, that of justice.

Missing in the explanation of Lévi-Strauss is a grasp of the juridical character of the discursive formation to which the Oedipus myth belongs. Early Greek philosophy's understanding of nature as cosmos and cosmos as a juridical *topos* (theme) belong to this conceptual formation. Beginning with the biologism of Aristotle, the cosmological genealogy of justice, in which the ideals of retributive and distributive justice and of punishment and equity can be traced, has been obscured. It is not at the level of genera and species, or even at the plane of the laws of motion as Aristotle formulates them, that nature is first understood, but rather as a moral field. Plato and Aristotle fabricate a new context for the interpretation of justice, subordinating its cosmic character to a psychological and political discourse. The terms of this discourse are those of the internal relations of the soul's constituent parts and of citizens' relations to one another and to their rulers. When the cosmological dimension of justice is reinstated in Stoicism, it is too late: the political subreption of the cosmic model is now a *fait accompli*.

Cosmic justice, the episteme in which the order of things is perceived in terms of apportionment or measure, is first brought to the fore in the pre-Socratic fragment of Anaximander:

The Unlimited is the first-principle of things that are. It is that from which the coming-to-be of things and qualities take place and it is that into which they return when they perish by moral necessity, giving satisfaction to one another and making reparation for their injustice, according to the order of time.⁵

The *apeiron* (boundless) is an "ontological storehouse,"⁶ the venue of physical change out of which things come to be and into which they pass away. I want, however, to resist Heidegger's rejection of the axiological or moral dimension of this text: his view that the fragment points to an overcoming of negativity in the coming-to-be or "presencing" of things. Instead the text describes a moral balance sheet: things make reparations for their injustice. The *apeiron* is always already configured as a moral *topos* against which wrongs are redressed by reimbursing it for the gift of being. Things and qualities "know" the order of time; they cannot not know when and how to make restitution.

Reparation is also an issue in establishing the boundary between nature and culture. The misreadings of consanguinity that characterize Oedipus's relation to his mother and father is a failure of knowledge about the social order, which requires the intervention of nature's power if equilibrium is to be restored. Divine punishment is meted out for Oedipus's inability to recognize not the precept—Oedipus knows the incest and patricide proscriptions well enough—but the placeholders to whom the proscriptions apply. Thus Oedipus cries out that he has "failed in knowledge of those whom [he] yearned to know [and that] henceforth [he] would be dark."⁷ Oedipus's transgression (whatever Freud may have made of it later) does not belong within the framework of a classical definition of erotics but within one of justice, transgression, and punishment. (Much the same case could be made for

King
consa
W
out, t
shall
cetic
powe
losop
Know
both
from
truth
of ju
W
divid
belor
mens
rule i
time'

In pr

Ir
o
a
T
d

This
havi
cour
Is
justic
body
answ
nega

T
fi
fi
u

The
of ai

King Lear, with madness substituting for blindness in the chain of signifiers, and consanguine daughterly obligation for primal sexual transgression.)

What is the function of Oedipus's physical pain within the terrain I have mapped out, the terrain of deficit and expenditure governed by the episteme of justice? (I shall defer for the moment the question of how this pain differs from that of asceticism.) In the realm of justice pain becomes both the instrument and the sign for power's redistribution. When justice becomes a political discourse in classical philosophy, pain is the agent of a punishment that is both pedagogic and retributive. Knowing how much pain is required, no more and no less, demands knowledge of both fact and value: knowledge of justice, the ideal, and of the angle of declination from that ideal reflected in particular cases. Methods for entering the storehouse of truths and applying them form the nub of the Platonic and Aristotelian discourses of justice.

Within the episteme of justice, Oedipus's failure to know his mother lies at the dividing line between nature and culture. The incest taboo is a crossover signifier, belonging to two intertwined chains of meaning: the cosmic and the political dimensions of justice. Violating the rule that is always already in place if any other rule is to follow, he "makes reparation for [this] injustice according to the order of time" through an act of ocular self-mutilation.

The Body of the Just

In praise of the past, first-century Stoic Seneca writes:

In that age which was called golden, Poseidonius maintains that rule was in the hands of the wise. They restrained aggression, protected the weaker from the stronger, advised and dissuaded and indicated what was advantageous and what was not. Their prudence saw to it that their people lacked for nothing, their courage averted dangers and their generosity enabled their subjects to . . . flourish.⁸

This Stoic distillate of the classical view of the philosopher depicts the just man as having knowledge, being prudent enough to apply this knowledge, and sufficiently courageous to act upon it.

In considering this account of the Stoic sage, the question is not simply how justice is reflected in the conception of the wise man or of the things done in the body, but what that body must be in order for there to be wisdom. Plato's radical answer is that the body is a disturbance. Thus, for example, in *Phaedo*, the most negative of the discourses on body, Socrates maintains:

The body is a source of endless trouble to us by reason of the mere requirement of food; and is liable also to diseases; . . . it fills us full of loves and lusts and fears and fancies of all kinds . . . even if we are at leisure and betake ourselves to some speculation, the body is always breaking in on us.⁹

The body as a whole, with its auxiliary organs of sensation, obstructs the knowledge of an absolute justice attainable by the rational soul.

For the Socratic just man no genuine decontamination of the body is possible short of the complete "separation of the soul from the body," a separation achieved in death. Only then is "the release of the soul from the chains of the body" fully consummated.¹⁰ But if the soul alone has access to the world of ideal forms, the body, severed from the soul, is cut off from that which is "in the likeness of the divine."¹¹ Whereas other material things imitate the forms, the disengaged body is not just another thing, but a thing bereft of soul. Denied access to forms, it can only imitate an absence. Thus the wise man's body is an imitation of the presence of an absence, of a formless form: death. This imitation cannot have suicide for its object, as for Socrates (if not for the Stoics) man is the property of the gods and as such cannot dispose of his own life. If Socratic discourse is to remain coherent, the wise man can only continue to exist in a deathlike suspension of pain and pleasure.

This view is consistent with the irrelevance attributed to gender in allocating guardianship in the ideal state: "The same education which makes a man a good guardian will make a woman a good guardian for their original nature is the same."¹² In theory at least the body of the just is genderless, unhindered by pain or pleasure, the distractions of sensation or the stirrings of desire. With the "biologism" of Aristotle, this view of body and soul would seem to collapse. For Aristotle, after all, soul is the principle of life in the animal body and as such inseparable from the body. Yet it is not in mere life that the relation of the human soul to its body is determined but, as with Plato, in rational life. Even when this claim is reconfigured by the Stoics, so that reason along with impression and impulse, becomes a faculty, there is no question as to pride of place. Thus Epictetus:

What then is a philosopher's matter? Not a ragged coat surely? No it is reason. What is his end? Surely it is not wearing a ragged coat? No it is keeping his reason right. What kind of theorems? Surely not ones with how to grow a large beard or long hair? No, but rather what Zeno says: to understand the elements of reason, what sort of thing each of them is, how they fit together and what their consequences are.¹³

The sage attends not only to the order of state and cosmos, but to the examination of reason itself. Although it belongs to the same moral *topos*, the same episteme of justice as the howl of Oedipus, classical philosophy transposes the death of the body into the body of death, indifferent to the pain of Oedipus because it is indifferent to death.

In sum, within the episteme of justice, reason alone can determine what counts as "reparation for injustice." Traces of the older notion of cosmic justice persist in later classical discourse so that justice does not assume the dryly computational form that the idea of reparation appears to imply. Pain remains an expression of compensatory power or, as in the case of Oedipus, the ideogram or sign of crime and its aftermath, while pleasure inheres in the ratiocinative process itself. By contrast, in the discursive formations of Western asceticism, pain will become a driving force, both instrument and end.

Three discursive strands will enter into the meaning constellation of Western asceticism: first, an erotics, a term defined by Foucault as "the purposeful art of love"¹⁴ which constitutes the focus of the *Symposium* and the first section of the

Phaedrus
tics, the
of Eccle

This
it al
mea

In this
water
Herack
with a
as a to
downg
the bri

Fir
becaus
orifica
Fouca
ground
of lov
posim
of bo
specl
orable
from
who
they
their
essen

T
is by
know
but t
fund
latio
of lo
Socr
soul
desu
into

Phaedrus and is linked to several fragments of Heraclitus; second, a cosmic heuristics, the subject of the *Timaeus*; and third an axiology implicit in the biblical text of *Ecclesiastes*.

The Fire of *Erōs*

This universe which is the same for all, has not been made by any god or man, but it always has been, is, and will be—an ever-living fire, kindling itself by regular measures and going out by regular measures.¹⁵

In this fragment of Heraclitus, fire is not to be envisaged as an element like the water or air of Miletian physics. It is not a material substratum of the world, for Heraclitus adds, "The phases of fire are craving and satiety."¹⁶ Cosmic fire burns with an erotic glow, that "throws apart and then brings together."¹⁷ The cosmos as a *topos* of desire will recur in Plato's cosmology, but Heraclitean fire will be downgraded to one among several elements even if it burns, as Plato claims, with the brightness and beauty of the divine form.

Fire as an explicit erotic motif is absent in the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, perhaps because of fire's frequent association in classical discourse not with lust but, honorifically, with light. For an understanding of this terrain, we need only examine Foucault's admirable treatment of these dialogues. He argues as follows: The groundwork for the Socratic discussion of *erōs* is laid in culturally accepted views of love that are retained in radically transformed fashion by Socrates. The *Symposium* sets forth the uses and abuses of pleasure, especially with regard to the love of boys, with an eye to explaining the relation of pleasure to truth.¹⁸ Its early speeches, like those of the *Phaedrus*, are psychological set pieces about the dishonorable games lovers play and are largely concerned with how to distinguish noble from base love. Aristophanes' speech posits the bisecting of primal human beings who will continue to seek their lost counterparts. As halves of a symmetrical whole they are equals, but this parity of the lovers does not change the basic character of their bond. No issue of proper relations within the erotic can be resolved until love's essential nature is uncovered.¹⁹

Through the discourse on love of the crone Diotima, Socrates shows that love is by nature an intermediate state born of deficiency and plenty, of ignorance and knowledge. The genuine lover lacks that which he desires, not the beloved's body but truth or beauty itself. For Socrates "it is not exclusion of the body that . . . is fundamental [but] rather that, beyond the appearances of the object, love is a relation to truth," Foucault writes.²⁰ The one who has access to truth is the master of love, indifferent to seduction and to the fires of lust. Unlike the other speakers, Socrates does not produce an etiquette of sexual reticence but an account of the soul's resistance to its appetites through the knowledge of its relation to its own desires and to their objects.

This resistance, Foucault alleges, is important for "the transformation of ethics into a morality of renunciation and for the constitution of a hermeneutics of De-

sire,"²¹ in short, into asceticism. I shall not enter here into the matter of Foucault's much disputed account of asceticism's relation to the Greco-Roman understanding of the self in his late work.²² In the present context I take Foucault to be partly right when he suggests Western asceticism is an outcome of indifference to the body's appetites. Yet this indifference cannot, as he claims, be a transformation of ethics, as Foucault understands this term, for it belongs within the episteme of justice in which body and soul are severed. By contrast, the body of classical erotics cannot be cordoned off. Love cannot escape the bodily because insofar as it is lack, it cannot be taken up into the rational soul. Even when love's objects are truth and beauty, love will continue to bear the imprint of a body it cannot jettison. When the transcendent becomes love's object, love will continue to be marked by an ineradicable corporeality that will necessitate a transfiguring *askēsis*. It is just this persistence of the body, I shall argue that allows for the transferring of ethics in the postmodern sense from the terrain of the classical *dikē* to that of *erōs*.

It is not surprising that the two-tiered ontology of ideal forms and physical objects that governs Plato's account of human love also dominates his cosmology. In the great cosmogonic drama of the *Timaeus*, "that which always is and never becomes" is distinguished from "that which is always becoming but never is."²³ It is also not surprising that, because the creator is benevolent and wants all things to be as like himself as possible, that the divine craftsman transforms a preexistent chaos in accordance with ideal goodness and beauty. What is striking is that the resulting artifact is a living thing, so that the body comes to function as a heuristic device for understanding the cosmos. Because the intelligent is superior to the non-intelligent and intelligence is impossible without soul, *Timaeus* argues, the creator "implanted reason in soul and soul in body . . . [so that] this world came to be, through God's providence, a living being with soul and intelligence."²⁴ Thus *cosmōs* and body mirror one another.

Plotinus, eager to protect the beauty of the cosmos against its gnostic depreciation,²⁵ refuses to link bodily *erōs*, the earthly Aphrodite, with *cosmos*. Thus, Plotinus inquires, when "love is represented as homeless, bedless, and bare-footed: would not that be a shabby description of the Cosmos and quite out of the truth?"²⁶ By contrast, the cosmos of the *Timaeus* might be read as longing for its eternal counterpart. Such a cosmos must be stilled just as bodily desire must be stilled if the soul is to turn towards beauty and truth. Thus, speaking of the Valentinian *gnōsis*, Peter Brown refers to the calming of human sexual agitation as "the outward visible sign of a mighty subsidence that takes place in the spiritual reaches of the universe."²⁷

Hebbel: The Nothingness of the All

I the Preacher have been king over Israel in Jerusalem . . . I have seen everything that is done under the sun; and behold all is vanity and a striving after wind.²⁸

The discursive formations of Western asceticism cannot fall into place until the world is reduced to vanity, to *hebbel*, a mere breath of air. The devaluing of all

that is in i
detachmer
can disting
"I applied
that this a
he who in
hebbel ref
worthless:

Hebbe
honorific
comes to
or vital b
work of
thing."³¹

It is h
of justice
the totali
vanity, Je
wards th
posits the
being an
large. Bu
appears :

I wou
worldly
classical
creation,
dinary a
the "wo
story or
patterns
is measu
Thus, to
story an
the fash
controll
"All thi
has been
serves, s

Van
Rather,
egation
negativi
It can b
corpore
the clas

that is in *Ecclesiastes* is a far more profound depreciation of the world than Stoic detachment. The Stoic sage is one who classifies things as good or indifferent, who can distinguish vice from virtue. By contrast, the narrator of *Ecclesiastes* declares, "I applied my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceive that this also is a striving after wind. For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow."²⁹ When all is vanity, the all that is *hebbhel* refers both to the totality of the world and to the maximum intensity of the worthlessness attributed to the world.

Hebbhel, mere wind, can be viewed as the obverse of *ruah*, wind or breath in the honorific sense of spirit. Thus it is said "you do not know how the spirit (*ruah*) comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child."³⁰ This infusion of *ruah* or vital breath into the child is compared in the same verse with the mysterious work of God: "so [too] you do not know the work of God who makes everything."³¹

It is here that the site of vanity must be distinguished from both the moral *topos* of justice and the lack that characterizes classical erotics as I have described them: the totality that is devalued by vanity is God's creation. In his brilliant account of vanity, Jean Luc Marion suggests that two possible standpoints can be taken towards this totality: first, the ontological standpoint, the view from inside which posits the world as the sum of beings. From this perspective, the difference between being and not being, suffering and enjoying, knowing and not knowing, looms large. But there is another standpoint from outside the world such that the world appears as "stricken with vanity."³²

I would, however, take issue with Marion's Heideggerian reading of the inner-worldly perspective as the domain of Being and the beings. Despite its veneer of classical philosophy, *Ecclesiastes* stands under the aegis of the biblical doctrine of creation, of the world as God's work. Missing from Marion's otherwise extraordinary account is a hermeneutic of work. The word for work in *Ecclesiastes*, as in the "work of God" mentioned earlier, is *maaseh*, the same root as the word for story or narrative. The account of creation in the *Timaeus* is governed by the eternal patterns so that when it is referred to as "merely probable" the truth of the account is measured by the forms. By contrast, God's creation or work is plotted, is narrated. Thus, to strike the world with vanity is to cease to be one of the characters in the story and to assume the standpoint of narrator. The demiurge of the *Timaeus* is the fashioner of a divine artifact; the God of *Ecclesiastes*, the artisan of history, the controller of event-filled time. Sheer temporal passing must end in worldweariness: "All things are full of weariness; a man cannot utter it."³³ When everything that has been repeats itself, when there is nothing new under the sun, as Marion observes, something like the French *ennui* permeates earthly existence.

Vanity is not simply another discursive formation alongside of classical erotics. Rather, it operates upon Plato's psychology and cosmology to denegate them. Denegation is a denial that denies itself.³⁴ By denying the world, vanity institutes a negativity; but at the same time it brings the world that is being denied to the fore. It can be argued that classical erotics already reflects an effort to negate at least the corporeality of the world. But vanity in denying the "all" also denies the denial of the classical world. The body that is negated in classical erotics, a body from which

of Foucault's understanding to be partly reference to the formation of an episteme of classical erotics as it is lack, are truth and attison. When marked by an It is just this of ethics in the s.

and physical is cosmology. s is and never never is."²³ It ants all things s a preexistent ing is that the as a heuristic or to the non- es, the creator d came to be, ⁴ Thus cosmos

nostic depreci- os. Thus, Plo- d bare-footed: of the truth?"²⁶ for its eternal ust be stilled if he Valentinian s "the outward reaches of the

everything that d.²⁸

place until the devaluing of all

nevertheless there is no dispensation, is transformed in asceticism into the body of temptation. In the new episteme of asceticism, vanity's denegation of classical erotics is reflected in one of asceticism's most powerful opening moves, Paul's declaration: "Creation was subjected to vanity (*mataiotēti*)."³⁵

Classical erotics and its denegation as vanity merge into a single *topos*, that of an asceticism that tries to manage the eruption of materiality into the chain of signifiers, a materiality that manifests itself in the body's unsurpassability. Ascetics across cultural and historical lines force pain and pleasure into new meaning constellations, so that through practices of self-mortification and deprivation the body is made transparent, a conduit for transcendence. At the same time, the transformed body also becomes an ideogram for this process. Thus when after twenty years of "pursuing the ascetic life" St. Antony emerged from his fortress, his friends "were amazed to see that his body maintained its former condition, neither fat from lack of exercise, nor emaciated from fasting and combat with demons, but was just as they had known him prior to his withdrawal."³⁶ The flesh is shown as polysemic: resplendent with higher meaning when disciplined, but always ready to erupt into temptation.

Héloïse's Cry

It is now time to revisit the meaning constellations considered earlier, classical erotics and justice, in order to determine how they emerge in postmodernity and to inquire into the prospects for a postmodern retrieval of asceticism. It would appear that the classical discourse of justice with its attendant notions of reason would provide the conceptual site for postmodern moral deliberation. By contrast, it could be assumed that classical erotics with its linking of sexual desire to truth would be superseded by the pansexuality of contemporary Western culture. Divested of its previous presuppositions, classical erotics would now be reshaped into new conceptual and corporeal practices.

With respect to the Platonic *erōs*, Foucault contends that, far from liberating a new sphere of pleasure, contemporary psychology has converted sex into discourse. The ruses that modernity has used to turn sex into a language of power, "to make us love sex, to make the knowledge of it desirable and everything said about it precious,"³⁷ are comparable to the strategies Christianity once employed to render the body suspect. If sex is discourse, what has become of the ineradicable corporeality of classical erotics? Where are the spoors or traces of a body whose putrescence has been refined away in Christian asceticism by a self-imposed regimen of pain so that it may become the pure receptacle of transcendence?

Let us pursue these questions by considering Ander Nygren's famous account of the distinction between *erōs* and *agapē*. Nygren argues that the Platonic *erōs* is "acquisitive desire and longing" and expresses the lover's drive to satisfy a need. Although it may be determined by the worth and beauty of its object, *erōs* remains egocentric. By contrast, Christian *agapē* is unselfish, a love originating in plenitude. Patterned on divine love, "*agapē* loves and creates value in its object."³⁸ What is

more, I
of Paul
persona

Des
here,³⁹

the pow

directe

quires t

for som

erōs ex

that asc

fasting;

negates

time br

hopes to

it. It is

postmo

to the t

Befc

the clas

Nygren

in ancie

has fail

possessi

it can b

present

The

endless

in the t

loïse to

these th

physica

The

they

whic

thou

The givi

distribu

"Certa

about w

able for

It co

exchang

the disc

more, Nygren attributes a Platonic-erotic thrust to many early Christian accounts of Pauline *agapē*, such that love of the other subserves a beatitude that remains personal.

Despite difficulties both scholarly and philosophical that I shall not rehearse here,³⁹ Nygren's account is useful from a postmodern perspective in that it captures the powerful sense of need and the penumbra of sensuality that clings to *erōs*. When directed towards an object to which value is attributed, need—what the body requires to remain alive—turns into desire, and desires spawn one another. "Desire for something different [becomes] a different desire,"⁴⁰ George Simmel affirms. An *erōs* expressing need and desire attests to human destitution, a bodily indigence that asceticism will cast into high relief by the corporeal mimicry of it: hunger by fasting; sexual desire by chastity; bodily ease by self-mortification. Asceticism denegates corporeality: pain and privation deny the visceral body, but at the same time bring it to the fore, in that only the nonidealized body that ascetic practice hopes to perfect can become the terrain of the physical suffering necessary to purify it. It is this version of corporeality, the tenacious residue of the classical *erōs*, that postmodernity will reconfigure in a new asceticism that will join the *erōs* of need to the terrain of ethics.

Before this new asceticism can become evident, we must show the relation of the classical *erōs* to generosity and compassion—to the *Other*. In a response to Nygren, A. Hilary Armstrong contends that although the primary meaning of *erōs* in ancient Greek society was sexual passion from its heights to animal lust, Nygren has failed to see that *erōs* is also a god. For Armstrong, love is not only a desire for possession but for a union of lover and beloved in order to create beauty.⁴¹ Thus, it can be argued, within the same *erōs*, the element of generosity is always already present in that a gift—beauty—is created in the interest of another.

The corporeal content of the classical *erōs* (the body reminding itself of itself endlessly) and the theme of generosity are nowhere more closely intertwined than in the twelfth-century reconfiguration of these philosophemes in the letters of Héloïse to Abelard, a text that, even if spurious, remains a *locus classicus* for bringing these themes to light.⁴² A penumbra of sensuality shadows her renunciation of its physical expression:

The pleasures of lovers which we shared have been too sweet. . . . Wherever I turn they are always before my eyes, bringing with them awakened longings and fantasies which will not even let me sleep. Even during the celebration of the Mass . . . my thoughts are on their wantonness instead of on prayers.⁴³

The giving of self at first concentrated in her love for Abelard becomes disseminated, distributed, as it were, to the nuns under her care for whose weaknesses she pleads: "Certainly those who laid down rules for monks were not only completely silent about women but also prescribed regulations which they know to be quite unsuitable for them."⁴⁴

It could be asserted that, both in Abelard's *Historia calamitatum* and in the exchange of letters between Abelard and Héloïse, romantic motifs have infiltrated the discourse of a more traditional asceticism.⁴⁵ Thus Abelard writes, "We were

body of
ical erot-
l's decla-

s, that of
chain of
. Ascetics
ning con-
the body
nsformed
/ years of
ids "were
from lack
as just as
olysemic:
rupt into

sical erot-
ty and to
ld appear
on would
st, it could
would be
sted of its
new con-

berating a
discourse.
"to make
d about it
l to render
ble corpo-
se putres-
egimen of

as account
onic *erōs* is
sify a need.
ōs remains
plenitude.

³⁸ What is

united first under one roof, then in heart. . . . [W]ith our books open before us, more words of love than of our reading passed between us, and more kissing than teaching."⁴⁶ In the present context we need only note that in Héloïse is concentrated not merely the motif of generosity but also that of a pain that fissures the discursive formations of asceticism with a cry of desire and longing that presages the post-modern body of ethics.

Héloïse's desire is articulated not only in terms of the recognized vices—greed, anger, pride and the like—but as a cry for help issuing from a sensual nature only half disowned. Héloïse's love is doomed not because Abelard "was deprived of those organs with which he practiced [his lechery],"⁴⁷ nor even because the life of a religious person had been foisted upon her, but because, within the discursive formation of asceticism, no rule of distributive justice could compensate her for a desire that sought not an object but another desire. This is not to say that issues of gender bound up with the reallocation of ecclesial power are lacking. Far from it. Yet, unlike the howl of Oedipus, the primordial cry of the juridical person whose pain is weighed on the scales of justice, the discourse of Héloïse "like nails that cannot touch wounds gently, but only pierce through them"⁴⁸ enters the chain of signifiers as insatiable need. Thus she entreats:

Do not suppose me healthy and so withdraw the grace of your healing. Do not believe I want for nothing and delay helping me in my hour of need. Do not think me strong, lest I fall before you can sustain me.⁴⁹

The Postmodern Body of Ethics

The pain expressed in Héloïse's lament opens the discursive space of a postmodern ethic in which corporeality emerges as a fundamental datum. Consider, first, the way in which postmodernism reconfigures corporeality as a focus of interpretation. On the one hand, the body is seen as a text; on the other, the pain and death to which bodies are subject remain an *hors texte*, an unsurpassable negation that slips both inside and outside the field of textuality. The body as text, as a chain of signifiers that convey multiple messages decodable by the astute reader, is a narrative body. Such a body tells its story, one of gender, social position, physical appearance, and the like. When actual or potential pain and death break into this sphere of narration, they introduce proscriptive and prescriptive meaning. No longer does the body serve the purpose of self-description; instead its vulnerability to pain calls the observer to responsibility. When seen in this way the body is not the body of an other but of the Other. Its vulnerability is not made explicit but is given prereflectively, instantaneously, as it were, in an act of immediate awareness. The lament of Héloïse gives verbal utterance to this prereflective aperçu.

What must bodies be if the Other can disturb one's world, come crashing into one's self-satisfaction? Or, put otherwise, how is the body's vulnerability expressed within the discursive sphere of ethics? Recognition of the body's vulnerability comes

from an
ego struc

A per
and in
it yie
intern
whicl
mode
T
itself

In a not
bodily s
thus be

The
of the b
vulnera
as diffe
are nev
is consc
to a cor
into the
of Em
same.

To
remark
as the
from h
bodily
second
the on
as a fic
sation,

Wh
poreal
that p
epister
nas's a
expos
penetr
the bc
to deli
the pc
sheer

from an unlikely quarter. In the *Ego and the Id*, Freud interrupts his account of ego structure with a crucial aside:

A person's own body, and above all its surface, is a place from which both external and internal perceptions may spring. It is seen like any other object, but to the touch it yields two different kinds of sensations, one of which may be equivalent to an internal perception. . . . Pain too seems to play a part in the process, and the way in which we gain new knowledge of our organs during painful illnesses is perhaps the model of the way by which, in general, we arrive at the idea of our body.

The ego is first and foremost a bodily ego; it is not merely a surface entity but is itself the projection of a surface.⁵⁰

In a note for the English edition, Freud adds: "The ego is ultimately derived from bodily sensations, chiefly from those springing from the surface of the body. It may thus be regarded as a mental projection of the surface of the body."⁵¹

The new and fruitful notions Freud introduces here are the receptive character of the body; the pedagogy of pain through which the body comes to know itself as vulnerability; and, finally, the dispersion that enables primordial meanings to arise as differences between the *quanta* and *qualia* of local sensation. These discoveries are nevertheless harnessed by Freud to the notion of a unitary subject. Such a subject is consciousness insofar as it reduces what is specifically Other about other persons to a content of consciousness. Viewed in terms of corporeality, the Other slips back into the chain of signifiers that constitute the narrative body. To use the language of Emmanuel Levinas's philosophy of the otherness, the Other is reduced to the same.

To avoid such reduction and to conform to the spirit of Maurice Blanchot's remark that one should learn to think with pain, Levinas goes on to envisage pain as the "non-ground" of thought. The intertwining of thinking and pain follows from his interpretation of sensation as dependent upon two distinct functions of bodily existence: first, vulnerability and susceptibility, sensation's passive side; and second, aesthetic (in the etymological sense) articulation, its active dimension. On the one hand, sensation leads into language and thought; on the other, it is lived as a field of receptivity. The body of ethics is identified with the passivity of sensation, with the body's defenselessness.⁵²

Why, it might be asked, is ethics linked to receptivity and the passivity of corporeality? Is ethics not regularly identified with moral action and the deliberation that precedes it? In terms of my earlier analysis, does ethics not fall within the episteme of justice, the plane of discourse reflected in the howl of Oedipus? Levinas's analysis must be taken a step further: "Corporeality is susceptible to pain . . . exposed to outrage and wounding, to sickness and aging,"⁵³ he maintains. Pain penetrates to the heart of the self that wills and thinks and calls it to order. Thus the body of ethics is a brake or restraint upon the active self prior to action, even to deliberation. Pain challenges self-righteousness. The sphere of moral deliberation, the possibility for the discourse of justice, supervenes upon the primordial level of sheer exposure to the Other, where neither reciprocity nor deliberation is possible.

Moral rules and juridical principles are necessary, following from the fact that there is a social order (internalized if not actually in evidence) requiring the allocation of material and nonmaterial goods. But before there can be justice there must be an Other.

It is now possible to discern the *topos* of postmodern asceticism. The fragility of the Other may lead not only to refraining from harmful action but to undertaking meliorative action on behalf of the Other, to placing the Other higher than the self. When such deeds occur repeatedly they begin to form a pattern of altruistic behavior. Such a pattern begins to take shape when the vulnerability of the Other shatters one's ego, turning it into vanity, thus giving vanity a new meaning. Preparation for this new social space requires a new *askēsis*, one that will respond to the cry of Héloïse.

NOTES

1. This point is stressed in Vincent L. Wimbush, "Rhetorics of Restraint: Discursive Strategies, Ascetic Piety and the Interpretation of Religious Literature," *Semeia* 57 (1992):1-9. In the two volumes *Semeia* 57 and 58, entitled *Discursive Formations, Ascetic Piety and the Interpretation of Early Christian Literature* (1992), devoted to social, cultural, historical, and literary manifestations of asceticism, this diversity is exemplified.
2. Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, trans. R. C. Jebb, in *The Complete Greek Drama*, eds. Whitney J. Oates and Eugene O'Neill, Jr. (New York: Random House, 1938), 1:410.
3. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, trans. James Harle Bell, John Richard von Sturmer, and Rodney Needham (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 25.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
5. Anaximander, frag. 1, in Philip Wheelwright, *The Pre-Socratics* (New York: Odyssey Press, 1966), p. 34.
6. The term is Wheelwright's. See *The Pre-Socratics*, p. 5.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 2 vols., eds. and trans. A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 434.
9. Plato, *Phaedo* 66 in *The Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Benjamin Jowett (New York: Random House, 1920), 1:450.
10. Plato, *Phaedo* 67 in *Dialogues of Plato*, 1:450.
11. *Phaedo* 80 in *Dialogues of Plato*, 1:465.
12. Plato, *Republic* V, 456, in *Dialogues of Plato*, 1:717.
13. *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 1:185-186.
14. Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, vol. 2, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), p. 229.
15. Heraclitus, frag. 29, in *The Pre-Socratics*, p. 71.
16. *Ibid.*, frag. 30.
17. *Ibid.*, frag. 31.
18. Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 229.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 232-233.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 240.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 230.
22. For an excellent account of this controversy see Marilyn Nagy, "Translocation of Parental Images in Fourth Century Ascetic Texts: Motifs and Techniques of Identity," in *Semeia* 58 (1992):3-23.

23. Plato, *Tim* 1977), p.
24. Plato, *Tim*
25. Plotinus, Pantheon
26. Plotinus,
27. Peter Bro Christian
28. *Ecclesiast* York: O
29. *Ecclesiast*
30. *Ecclesiast*
31. *Ibid.*
32. Jean Luc of Chica
33. *Ecclesiast*
34. The tern secret: tl "How to ology, e
35. This is J The Ox tility" (j
36. Athana: (New Y
37. Michel (New Y
38. Anders 210.
39. For a c a conte Altruis emy of
40. Simme
41. A. Hil: 82 (19 Reprir
42. The al Monk For th
43. The L p. 13
44. *Ibid.*,
45. Jean image wher nard Parac langu

23. Plato, *Timaeus* 27 in *Timaeus and Critias*, trans. Desmond Lee (London: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 40.
24. Plato, *Timaeus* 30, p. 43.
25. Plotinus, *Ennead* 2.9.1–18, in *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna (New York: Pantheon Books, n.d.), pp. 132–152.
26. Plotinus, *Ennead* 3.5.5, in *ibid.*, pp. 195–196.
27. Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 111.
28. *Ecclesiastes* 1.12–14 in *The Oxford Annotated Bible, Revised Standard Version* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 805–806.
29. *Ecclesiastes* 1.17–18, in *ibid.*, p. 806.
30. *Ecclesiastes* 11.5, in *ibid.*, p. 813.
31. *Ibid.*
32. Jean Luc Marion, *God without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 127.
33. *Ecclesiastes* 1.8, in *The Oxford Annotated Bible*, p. 805.
34. The term “denegation” is used by Jacques Derrida to describe the meaning of the term secret: that which “denies itself because it appears to itself in order to be itself.” See “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials,” trans. Ken Frieden, in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, eds. Harold Coward and Toby Foshay (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), p. 95.
35. This is Jean Luc Marion’s translation of *Romans* 8.20 in *God without Being*, p. 122. *The Oxford Annotated Bible* renders the verse: “For the creation was subjected to futility” (p. 1368).
36. Athanasius, *The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, trans. Robert C. Gregg (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), p. 42.
37. Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), p. 159.
38. Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip S. Watson (London: S.P.C.K., 1953), p. 210.
39. For a concise account of the debate initiated by Nygren’s account of *erōs* and *agapē* in a contemporary psychological context, see Paul Rigby and Paul O’Grady, “Agape and Altruism: Debates in Theology and Social Psychology,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 57.4 (Winter 1989):719–737.
40. Simmel is cited in Anders Nygren, *Eros and Agape*, p. 177.
41. A. Hilary Armstrong, “Platonic Eros and Christian Agape,” in *The Downside Review* 82 (1964):268. Reprinted in *his Plotinian and Christian Studies* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1979), 9:106–107.
42. The authenticity of the letters is contested by a number of scholars. See Jean Leclercq, *Monks and Love in Twelfth Century France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 119. For the purpose of my argument it is the textually constructed Héloïse that is significant.
43. *The Letters of Abelard and Héloïse*, trans. Betty Radice (London: Penguin Books, 1974), p. 133.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 162.
45. Jean Leclercq in *Monks and Love in Twelfth Century France* notes the strong sexual imagery of St. Bernard of Clairvaux in his commentary on the *Song of Songs* and elsewhere. Bernard’s adversarial relations with Abelard brought them into contact and Bernard is cited as having been in touch with Héloïse when he visited the monastery of the Paraclete. For Abelard and Héloïse “it is quite natural that in such an environment the language of chivalry and the court, and the love literature which flowed from them

should be familiar to all. It was part of the very air of the province" (p. 99). The literature on the personal relation of the lovers, of Abelard to Bernard, and ecclesiastical authorities of the day is vast. A recent relatively brief bibliography can be found in Enid McLeod, *Héloïse* (London, Chatto and Windus, 1971), pp. 305ff. As romance, the tale of Héloïse and Abelard has found its way into Western literature from Petrarch and Pope to the present.

46. Ibid., p. 67.

47. Ibid., p. 65.

48. Ibid., p. 135.

49. Ibid., p. 134.

50. Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, trans. Joan Rivière (New York: W. W. Norton and Co.), pp. 15-16.

51. Ibid., p. 16, note 1.

52. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), p. 53.

53. Ibid., p. 56.