Drive all Blames into One: Rhetorics of 'Self-Blame' and Refuge in Tibetan Buddhist Lojong, Nietzsche, and the Desert Fathers

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DRIVE ALL BLAMES INTO ONE:
RHETORICS OF ‘SELF-BLAME’ AND REFUGE IN TIBETAN BUDDHIST LOJONG,
NIETZSCHE, AND THE DESERT FATHERS

a dissertation

by

GLENN ROBERT WILLIS

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Abstract

Drive All Blames into One: Rhetorics of ‘Self-Blame’ and Refuge in Tibetan Buddhist Lojong, Nietzsche, and the Desert Fathers

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Professor John Makransky, Dissertation Director

The purpose of this work is to differentiate the autonomous ‘self-compassion’ of therapeutic modernist Buddhism from pre-therapeutic Mahāyāna Buddhist practices of refuge, so that refuge itself is not obscured as a fundamental Buddhist orientation that empowers the possibility of compassion for self and other in the first place.

The work begins by situating issues of shame and self-aversion sociologically, in order to understand how and why self-aversion became a significant topic of concern during the final quarter of the twentieth century. This discussion allows for a further investigation of shame as it has been addressed first by psychologists, for whom shame is often understood as a form of isolating self-aversion, and then by philosophers such as Bernard Williams and Emmanuel Levinas, for whom shame attunes the person to the moral expectations of a community, and therefore to ethical commands that arise from beyond the individual self. Both psychologists and philosophers are ultimately concerned with problems and possibilities of relationship. These discussions prepare the reader to understand the importance of Buddhist refuge as a form of relationship that structures an integrative rather than destructive self-evaluation.
The second chapter of the dissertation closely examines Friedrich Nietzsche’s work on shame. In a late note, Nietzsche wrote that “man has lost the faith in his own value when no infinitely valuable whole works through him”\(^1\); the second chapter argues that Nietzsche’s vision of a relatively autonomous will to power cannot fully incorporate this important Nietzschean insight, and helps to drive the kind of self-evaluation typical of modernist ‘personality culture,’ which is likely to become harsh.

The third chapter first discusses contemporary therapeutic Buddhist responses to self-aversion, particularly practices of ‘self-compassion’ that claim to be rooted in early Pali canonical and commentarial sources, before developing a commentary on the medieval Tibetan *lojong* teaching *Drive all blames into one*. *Drive all blames into one*, though often discussed in contemporary commentaries as a form of self-blame, should be understood more thoroughly as a simultaneous process of refuge and critique—a process that drives further access to compassion not only for self, but for others as well.

Chapter Four discusses mourning and self-reproach in the apophthegmata of the Desert Fathers, showing how ‘self-hatred’ in this context is in a form of irony: the self that is denigrated is not an ultimate reality, and the process of mourning depends upon both an access to love and a clear recognition of our many turns away from that love.

In conclusion, I draw attention to the irony of modernist rejections of religious self-critique as supposedly harmful forms of mere shaming, even as the modernist emphasis on autonomy is what enables self-critique to become harsh and damaging.

Acknowledgements

The Tibetan Buddhist lojong teaching that accompanies the injunction to Drive all blames into one instructs the lojong practitioner to contemplate the great kindness of others.

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Several of my most important teachers have passed away. This work would have
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saying that any blame for the imperfections of this work should be driven into one.
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INTRODUCTION

This is an extended essay about self-aversion, on the one hand, and about Buddhist and Christian rhetorics of ‘self-blame,’ on the other. These are very different ways of understanding oneself, and they imply different understandings of the world.

Self-aversion expresses isolation; Buddhist and Christian practices of self-blame have to do with integration into broader patterns of compassion and care. Contemporary psychological discussions of destructive shame have too readily assumed that religious ‘self-blame’ is a masochism, and that therapeutic ‘self-acceptance’ is the primary end of any justifiable religious commitment.

In the history of its usage, the English word shame has held a number of competing but related meanings: dishonor, exposure, modesty, moral self-consciousness. During the past half-century, however, shame has come to refer more singularly to a sense of unworthiness, as part of a spectrum that includes harsh forms of self-contempt, laceration, castigation, and denigration.

I find such internalized violence as occasionally melodramatic and tiresomely demanding as the reader may find it. I also wish to suggest, though, that such quiet hatreds are a genuine problem in what the social historian Walter Susman called a ‘personality culture’—the kind of self-amplifying, self-performative culture we live within, economically and otherwise.

As personality culture intensifies, the discourses of shame proliferate. For psychologists in particular, shame has recently displaced the earlier psychoanalytic concept of ‘guilt’ as a primary therapeutic focus. Most importantly, shame as self-
aversion or unworthiness has become increasingly understood as a pattern of thought
and feeling that is conditioned or imposed only from without: by early-life experience,
by families or cultures that deny care. This makes the psychology of shame at once a
diagnostic approach and a form of social criticism.

This psychological portrait of shame lends itself to what appears, at first, like
clear moral conclusions: shame is a violent imposition. James Gilligan has offered one of
the most beautiful and representative indictments of shame as a foundation for
destructive force in *Violence: Reflections on a National Epidemic* (1991), his study of
American prisoners with histories of extraordinary early-life abuse.

This narrative—that self-contempt is a tragic result of cultural and familial
violence—has become powerful and prominent. It is powerful in part because it names
the truth of human vulnerability and the very real damages of violence, but also because
it offers attractive possibilities of secular redemption. Through insight into the cultural
etiologies of one’s own shame it is possible to find and assert a more pristine identity.

This is a basic narrative strategy of both private psychotherapy and the
confessional of Oprah Winfrey. We are showered by narratives of therapeutic
redemption—narratives that emphasize an initial victimization and its subsequent
transcendence. The story of personal damage, displayed or performed for others, is
itself a fundamental component of the therapeutic process.

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2 See Eva Illouz, *Oprah Winfrey and the Glamour of Misery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003),
especially Chapter 2, “The Success of a Self-Failed Woman,” for Illouz’s analysis of public confession
narratives (‘therapeutic biography’) as a foundation for psychological liberation narratives.
This is primarily an essay about religious ways of understanding the self. I speak from a particular Mahāyāna Buddhist perspective, although, as the reader will see, I am intensely sympathetic to certain Christian understandings of mourning and self-critique. Of course Christianity in particular has been viewed during the past two centuries as a powerful source of unnecessary guilt and shaming. One incisive contemporary psychologist of shame, June Price Tangney, has written that the message taken from her own early experience of “Sunday sermons, stories of saints, and Monday afternoon religious classes was that: To be a good person, you have to feel really bad. If you’re not a saint, if you occasionally, inevitably sin, then your worthiness and closeness to God hinges on how bad you feel about those sins. Good people feel intense remorse and regret, and a painful, grinding self-scrutiny and denouncement of the self.”

The modern distortion of Christian repentance as a strange perfectionism to be performed is a significant theme in European literature. The priest with Camus’s Meursault, the Jesuits lecturing Stephen Daedalus, are ridiculous figures, serving only the power of the institutions they represent. Repentance is presented in those works as a form of bad faith; resisting such distorted self-judgment is definitive of heroic, autonomous self-affirmation. To be truly redeemed is to refuse repentance.

This essay will argue that an imposed self-contempt has nothing to do with more mature forms of religious self-evaluation. In Tibetan lojong, or awareness-training, the most central focus of this work, ‘self-blame’ is simultaneously a refuge in the basic ground (Tib.: shi) of compassionate awareness that enables an increasingly clear

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recognition of the ways in which we consistently turn away from integration into that compassion. Where no such integration seems believable, religious self-critique can only sound like a secret enjoyment of hatred.

The following pages are implicitly and sometimes explicitly about what Buddhists call refuge. But refuge is not separable from the simultaneous recognition of our most damaging and insidiously negative patterns of selfhood. Christian traditions, too, seek to turn our attention repeatedly toward a basic choice to either participate in, or refuse, the agapic love within which we are always held. And if that love is the primary reality, the most reasonable response to our continued refusal of that reality is a form of mourning.

My most basic claim is that Christian and Buddhist forms of ‘self-blame’ are, contrary to therapeutic expectation, important methods of deliverance from the sorts of self-contempt that we now talk about as ‘shame.’ Self-aversion, in fact, is a primary human mistake, for both Buddhists and Christians.

I address a primary modernist irony: we reject the very possibilities of connection offered by apparently destructive religious forms of self-evaluation, even though these practices effectively confront precisely the kinds of damaging self-judgment that a culture of intensive self-performance demands and induces. Devotion and trust, rather than expressing a sacrificial abjection, actually integrate our lives in important ways, and ‘self-blame’ has far more to do with trust than with aversion.

These claims resist the kind of autonomous self-affirmation that some psychologists of shame and religious thinkers have recently proposed as the
paradigmatic form of therapeutic redemption. However, to question the narrative of autonomous redemption is not to favor pain. I am concerned instead that the therapeutic-moralist critique of ‘shame’ during the past decades has rendered us less and less able to perceive older, more creative forms of self-evaluation and transcendent integration. For both the Buddhist practitioner of *lojong* and for the Christian, recognizing the patterns by which we assiduously avoid love in our lives is necessarily a practice of participation in love itself.

The distorted picture of forced repentance in Christian traditions has also influenced a very partial reception of Buddhism in the West. Is the Buddhist emphasis on self-compassion not part of a wider cultural rejection of the self-evident harms of exhausted theistic forms of self-critique?

In fact, for Buddhist and Christian traditions alike, practices of connection to compassion and love have been indispensable to the total process of unraveling false human autonomy and self-centeredness. This process is particularly definitive of the Mahāyāna figure of the *bodhisattva*, one who seeks awakening with and on behalf of all others. The path of the *bodhisattva* depends far less on ‘self-affirmation,’ however, than it does on a recognition of the harms we do to ourselves and to others when we remain unconnected to the heart of awakening itself: *bodhicitta*.

The Tibetan *lojong* or awareness-training instruction *Drive all blames into one* is the primary commentarial focus in the central section of this work. In order to show how Buddhist practices of ‘self-blame’ are in fact a participation in compassion, it will be helpful to show how theistic practices of integrative mourning have worked similarly, so
that the modernist therapeutic rejection of religious self-critique can be more thoroughly called into question.

I wish to make room for an understanding of ‘blame’ that is nothing like the sort of ‘self-blame’ that we usually practice in our interior, familial, and economic lives. Unlike the destructive self-denigrations of contemporary shame, Mahāyāna Buddhist self-evaluation takes place relentlessly within and toward a field of compassion.

In the first chapter, I begin by reviewing the different meanings that have been given to the word shame by philosophers and psychologists over the past half-century. Whereas Emmanuel Levinas, Bernard Williams, and other philosophical ethicists have emphasized shame as a human capacity necessary for moral learning and humane conduct in community, there has also been a concurrent consensus among psychologists that shame is in fact a morally destructive form of self-denigration, rooted in violent familial and social patterning.

It seems clear, however, that both philosophers of ethicizing shame, and psychologists of destructive shame, are concerned with problems and possibilities of relationship. Shame is a felt threat to, or absence of, connection. However, philosophers and psychologists tend to value autonomy very differently, and this has consequences for how they evaluate the moral implications of shame.

In the first chapter, I also discuss in detail several possible sociological reasons for the extraordinary proliferation of shame experience and literature in the late twentieth-century West. I draw in particular on the work of the late social historian
Walter Sussman and the sociologist Eva Illouz to show how economic changes have quietly demanded new standards of public performance and self-evaluation.

The second chapter reflects at length on Friedrich Nietzsche’s central preoccupation, increasingly evident beginning with *The Gay Science*, with shame. And although Nietzsche seeks to alleviate shame and ‘bad conscience’ through a critique of the socializing moralities of the slave and herd, this strategy of relief ultimately rests upon an untenable anthropological vision: Nietzschean autonomy cannot support the affirmation of life and fate that Nietzsche himself seeks to construct.

The third, most important chapter is a commentary on the Tibetan directive *Drive all blames into one*—an enigmatic but central teaching that will allow us to uncover some dynamics of self-critique and compassion in Tibetan Buddhist *lojong*.

This chapter also includes a critique of prominent contemporary teachings of Buddhist self-affirmation, which threaten to obscure central pre-therapeutic Buddhist strategies of transformation that necessarily include clear and critical self-recognition.

The fourth chapter examines some instances of the pre-modern Christian rhetoric of ‘self-blame’ and ‘mourning,’ or *penthos*, arguing that we have lost the ability to understand the implicit ironies, and the explicit turn toward love, embedded within those teachings. I focus in particular on the sayings of the Desert Fathers, for whom ‘self-reproach’ was not at all a total contempt for the whole self, but a stark recognition of the way in which we consistently refuse to love. If we have failed to hear both the directness and the humor in the Desert Fathers’ language, that of course says more about us than it does about them. One purpose of the fourth chapter is to sharply
differentiate Christian modes of self-evaluation from the sorts of sharp self-denigration practiced in a personality culture, where there is no true context of connection.

The final concluding section reflects on the importance of understanding Buddhist practices of self-critique as practices of compassionate connection and integration, and then asks briefly what Buddhists might learn from Christian understandings of evil.
1.1 CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

To imagine ourselves otherwise is definitively human. But this basic capacity for self-evaluation is also ambiguous, and can lead in directions both creative and destructive.

In this chapter, I review some ways that philosophical ethicists and contemporary psychologists have written differently about shame over recent decades. While philosophers such as Bernard Williams and Emmanuel Levinas have discussed shame as a foundational capacity of connection to values and ethical commitments that transcend any particular human being, psychologists have argued that shame, as a form of self-denigrating despair, is in fact a morally damaging form of isolation.

These appear at first as significant definitional divergences. However, the convergence of philosophical and psychological concern with issues of connection and isolation is ultimately more important than competing disciplinary definitions.

Over the past half-century, psychological thinkers have come to speak more and more frequently of shame, and far less often of guilt—which had been a central category of earlier psychoanalytic theory.4 Shame is now understood among psychologists as the most intensely damaging of the moral emotions—emotions that

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influence the attitudes and ethical postures with which we engage the world around us. In particular, the gravitational pull of shame’s self-involvement disrupts empathic responsiveness to others. But shame has also come to be seen as a foundation for some of the most intractable problems of human violence: the long-term conditioning of self-contempt slowly undermines any strong sense of dignified belonging in the world, leading to instinctive moments of violent self-protection against those who elicit the intolerable depth of that pain.

These patterns make us dangerous in a way that is different than other animals; we defend a far more expansive psychological territory than they do.

Simultaneously, however, several of our most gifted philosophers have responded to the increasingly influential therapeutic critique of shame by arguing that ‘shame’ is a necessary foundation for any robust ethical excellence. Without a basic openness to the force of extra-personal demands, without an affirmation of values and standards that are greater than any individual personality, both culture and the individual human come to lack moral depth and commitment.

From this perspective, the human transcendence of self-concern becomes less likely when we are unmoored from shame. Dismissing shame as a pillar of our life together risks a basic failure of our responsiveness to others—and this seems, at first, like an argument that must be opposed sharply to the insights of contemporary psychology.

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5 I focus here on philosophical ethicists who understand shame as a foundation for human moral learning in community, but other thinkers—Sartre, for instance, informed by a mid-century psychological culture—offer phenomenological accounts that are closer to psychological portraits of shame
Psychologists rightly suggest that self-denigration is not in fact a form of creative moral learning. Philosophers rightly argue that moral self-evaluation is a creative and communal necessity, even if it is sometimes painful. These insights are not exclusive.

But because, over the past half-century, shame’s negative definition as a form of isolating unworthiness has become the more widespread cultural understanding, it is necessary now to habilitate the philosophical insistence on the importance of moral self-evaluation in community.

It seems clear that if, when we speak of ‘shame,’ we sometimes mean self-contempt or a sense of unworthiness, and at other times we mean something like conscience or openness, disagreements may quickly and understandably multiply. It is unfortunate that both psychologists and philosophers have used the word ‘shame’ to designate their objects of inquiry, because these two disciplines employ the word to name such different—but, as I will argue, still closely related—meanings.

It must also be said that the emotion now referred to as shame is often difficult to distinguish from other ‘negative’ emotions. Among the tides of negative affect, wrote William James, “internal shadings merge endlessly into each other.”6 It comes to seem presumptuous to select something called ‘shame’ out of the myriad worlds of co-emergent emotion that compose an uncomfortable selfhood. Is compulsive shame simply an indicator of major depression? What is the difference between contemporary shame and the ‘despair’ outlined in Kierkegaard’s writing? To what extent can shame,

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an affect that often contains an implicit cognitive judgment against one’s self, be
separated from guilt, which supposedly evaluates action alone? (Emotions include both
affect and cognition, which is why empathy, for example, can go so badly awry when we
misperceive the emotions occurring for others.)

This important contemporary distinction between shame as self-directed, on the
one hand, and guilt as action-directed, on the other, is a useful one. However, intensely
regretted actions can only be performed by an irretrievably imperfect self. The
theoretical boundaries between shame and guilt are less vivid in lived experience. The
definitional distinctions drawn by psychologists and philosophers may not map neatly
onto any particular internal topography. And this leads us to a basic methodological
point: I will not propose a final or correct definition of the English word, shame, but
inquire instead into the important interrelated aspects of ‘shame’ as it is differently
understood by psychologists and philosophers.

This approach will, hopefully, allow us to begin naming those interrelated
conditions that allow shame to produce moral creativity under some circumstances, and
extraordinary violence in others. And in order to marshal the fullest possible range of
relevant conditions and circumstances, I also suggest several historical and sociological
reasons for the new intensity of shame literatures in the final decades of the twentieth
century, and in the first decades of this one. What is it about industrial and post-
industrial capitalist, technological, and secular developments that have made problems
of shame and self-evaluation so prominent a focus of attention across the humanities
and social sciences?
My purpose in these pages is to articulate the possibility of self-evaluation as a practice of connection and joy, rather than isolation and despair. That self-evaluation is much more like repentance than we currently imagine.

1.2 SOCIOLOGICAL SOURCES OF SELF-AVERSION

The varieties of self-aversion are among the most intransigent of all human self-limitations. Before Helen Block Lewis’s 1971 work *Shame and Guilt in Neurosis*, most of the first century of psychoanalytic theory had been dominated by an overwhelming focus on the problems of self-prosecutorial guilt, rather than on pathologies of shame.\(^7\) In 1963, Erik Erikson noted, in a revised edition of *Childhood and Society*, that shame “is an emotion insufficiently studied, because in our civilization it is so early and easily absorbed by guilt.”\(^8\)

It was Block Lewis who initiated a shift in disciplinary perspective. Most significantly, she suggested in a very clear way that guilt and shame could no longer be viewed as alternate shadings of the same basic human affect. For Block Lewis, shame and guilt diverge in the ultimate objects of their evaluation: “The experience of shame is directly about the self, which is the focus of evaluation. In guilt, the self is not the central object of negative evaluation, but rather the thing done or undone is the focus. In guilt, the self is negatively evaluated in connection with something but is not itself the

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7 See especially Helen Block Lewis, *Shame and Guilt in Neurosis* (Madison, CT: International Universities Press, 1971). In 1958, Helen Merrell Lynd had published *On Shame and the Search for Identity* (New York: Science Editions), but it was Block Lewis whose work initiated the enormous late-century outpouring of literature on shame, in both the clinical and popular works.

8 Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1963), 252. It is suggestive that Erikson did not mention shame at all in the 1950 edition of *Childhood and Society*. The latter half of the century saw significant cultural and psychological changes.
focus of the experience.”⁹ Following Block Lewis, therapeutic and clinical studies of
shame would be published with astonishing frequency through the final quarter of the
twentieth century.

Donald Capps noted, in 1993, that the late-century focus on shame had
coincided with an equally flourishing investigation of narcissism. For Capps, the relation
between shame and patterns of narcissism was an important because, “while narcissists
are popularly viewed as being in love with themselves, they are in fact engulfed in self-
hatred.”¹⁰ Self-aversion remains a fundamental expression of what other epochs
understood as a distorted curvature toward self.¹¹

What has been happening, this past half-century, such that psychoanalytic
theorists, philosophers, sociologists, and anthropologists¹² have come so consistently to
concern themselves with issues of narcissism and shame?

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⁹ Block Lewis, 30.
recent psychological studies have questioned the truism that narcissists don’t like themselves much. My
own sense is that it is entirely possible for a person to believe in their own superiority in comparison to
others, while simultaneously having an implicitly negative portrait of themselves. While a habitual focus
on oneself is not necessarily rooted in extreme self-aversion, self-aversion is certainly an extreme focus
narcissists dislike themselves ‘deep down inside’?. Psychological Science, 18, 227-229.
¹¹ Incurvatus in se: a significant metaphor for sin in Christian theological traditions. See Matt Jenson, The
¹² In 1946, Ruth Benedict, in The Chrysanthemum and the Sword, wrote explicitly of American culture as a
‘culture of guilt’ and of Japanese culture as a ‘culture of shame.’ Benedict’s attempt to understand
Japanese aggression in the Second World War led her to conclude, in part, that shame, defined as a
“reaction to other people’s criticism,” led to a greater risk of general ethical wrongdoing, because mere
social expectations may or may not be moral expectations. Guilt, on the other hand, relies on conscience,
an internal conviction that is largely immune (in Benedict’s view) to moral relativism. “A society that
inculcates absolute standards of morality and relies on men’s developing a conscience is a guilt culture by
definition…” (Ruth Benedict, The Chrysanthemum and The Sword [Mariner Books, 2005 (1946)], 222). It is
important, however, to see that even on Benedict’s understanding of ‘guilt culture,’ the internalized
conscience is related to ultimate concerns shared by a whole host of others—guilt cultures must be
cultures, even on her analysis.
For Christopher Lasch, the new prominence of bureaucratic institutions “put a premium on the manipulation of interpersonal relations, discourage the formation of deep personal attachments, and at the same time provide the narcissist with the approval he needs in order to validate his self-esteem.” And, crucially, the manipulation of interpersonal relations in a reliable way requires an increasing emphasis on self-management. The skillful projection of emotion comes to represent a necessary problem to be solved in economic life.

This mid-century bureaucrat was, however, only the forerunner of the hypercompetitive economic actor of the present, who increasingly represents himself or herself as an evolving commodity, as much as any product or service. The ability to compete economically depends on a much extended education, in which the human being contributes less to his or her own community, for longer. And the mobility of the hyper-competitive actor increases the variety of relationships, but almost certainly disrupts their long-term depth.

Cultures have always, of course, required their members to master practices of implicit and explicit self-representation. But recent shifts toward ferociously demanding forms of self-projection and self-control have legislated an endless self-development, usually framed as an ethics of personal growth. The worker’s own intensified practices of self-evaluation, self-comparison, self-judgment, and self-representation, are requisites of sustained economic belonging.

In 1979, the same year that saw the release of Lasch’s *The Culture of Narcissism*, the cultural historian Walter Susman published “‘Personality’ and the Making of Twentieth-Century Culture,” a study of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century cultural forms—self-help texts, films, and business advice literature—documenting a significant turn-of-the-century shift from a broad culture of ‘character’ to one that privileged a projection of ‘personality.’

Susman argued that a culture celebrating character had been defined, prior to the twentieth century, by adherence to moral codes—interdictory rules that offered “fulfillment through sacrifice in the name of a higher law, ideals of duty, honor, integrity.”14 The movement from a production-oriented economic culture to one of consumption required, importantly, a shift from rule-bound structures of character to expressive and energetic projections of personality:

From the beginning the adjectives most frequently associated with personality suggest a very different concept from that of character: *fascinating, stunning, attractive, magnetic, glowing, masterful, creative, dominant, forceful...* ‘Personality is the quality of being Somebody.’ This definition—repeated in various ways in almost all of the manuals I have analyzed—is also a major theme of this literature... ‘To create a personality is power,’ one manual writer insists. One does this by being ‘conscious of yourself and of others,’ by being discerning and sincere, by

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14 Walter Susman, “‘Personality’ and the Making of Twentieth-Century Culture,” in *Culture as History* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 280. Originally published in *New Trends in Intellectual History*, eds. John Higham and Paul K. Conklin (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979). Susman is not interested in nostalgia; he is interested in the loss of a ‘culture of character’ as a fact of early twentieth-century American history, and offers no moralistic evaluation of the contemporary emphasis on personality. He does persuasively document a shift. It might also be argued, however, that the culture of personality already finds representation in the popular culture of Britain, much earlier in the nineteenth century—in certain characters of Austen or Dickens, for instance. But those personalities are drawn as ultimately ridiculous, subjects for the reader’s implicit critique or amusement. The characters with the most ‘character’ succeed, in the end, over the morally shallow personality.
showing energy, by paying attention to others so that they will pay attention to you.\textsuperscript{15}

“The social role demanded of all in the new culture of personality was that of a performer.”\textsuperscript{16} The cultural shift outlined by Susman demands self-righteousness, understood not moralistically but literally: the attempt to establish and control one’s own status, both for oneself and for others. “The man of ambition is still with us, as in all times,” wrote Philip Rieff at mid-century, “but now he needs a more subtle initiative, a deeper capacity to manipulate the democracy of emotions, if he is to maintain his separate identity and significantly augment it with success...”\textsuperscript{17}

In \textit{Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism} (2007), Eva Illouz outlines what she calls “a new emotional style—the therapeutic emotional style—which has dominated the American cultural landscape throughout the twentieth century.”\textsuperscript{18} Like Lasch, Illouz believes that this style has emerged simultaneously with an increasing emphasis on emotion management within the workplace: “The economic sphere, far from being devoid of emotions, has been on the contrary saturated with affect, a kind of affect committed to and commanded by the imperative of cooperation and a mode of settling conflicts based on ‘recognition.’”\textsuperscript{19} This is an imperative to recognize one another’s emotional claims, “For the bearer of an emotion is recognized as the ultimate

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 277.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 280.

\textsuperscript{17} Philip Rieff, \textit{Freud: The Mind of the Moralist} (New York: Doubleday, 1961), 372. While Illouz speaks of a therapeutic emotional style, Philip Rieff referred to the rise of an ‘analytic attitude’: a safe self-involvement; an intelligent, reflective distance from oneself; and a belief that further self-analysis is always a foundation for personal ‘growth,’ vaguely defined.


\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, 23.
arbiter of their own feelings. ‘I feel that...’ implies not only that one has the right to feel that way, but also that such right entitles one to be accepted and recognized simply by virtue of feeling a certain way.”

One of Illouz’s most persuasive claims is that “the ethos of communication *blurs gender divisions* [ital. original] by inviting men and women to control their negative emotions, be friendly, view themselves through others’ eyes, and empathize with others.” Men, in Illouz’s work, take on qualities that had been considered feminine, while women, as they enter the workplace, increasingly value autonomy, self-reliance, and rights, so that “throughout the twentieth century, there has been an increased emotional androgynization of men and women.”

Shame is a felt threat of isolation. Such an implicit and serious threat is constantly at issue in an economic and social environment in which a person’s ongoing acceptability is managed through emotional performance. And such acceptability can never be final or complete—each exchange of emotion is as important for the ongoing production of authenticity, and acceptance, as the last. We must learn unceasingly to manage ourselves. Prominent late-century management consultant Peter F. Drucker writes:

> We live in an age of unprecedented opportunity: If you’ve got ambition, drive, and smarts, you can rise to the top of your chosen profession—regardless of where you started out. But with opportunity comes responsibility. Companies today aren’t managing their knowledge workers’ careers. Rather, we must each be our own chief executive officer. Simply put, it’s up to you to carve out your place in the work

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20 Ibid, 39.
21 Ibid, 37.
world and know when to change course. ...To do all of these things well, you’ll need to cultivate a deep understanding of yourself.  

Here is a Weberian rationalization of the inner life; this is the door to a self-surveillance and a pseudo-interiority in the service of economic self-realization. It is easy to see how management theory and therapeutic psychology became natural allies.

For Illouz, self-realization and the therapeutic narrative that claims to support such realization are inextricably intertwined, and the result is that the self is repeatedly redirected toward its own imperfection: “The very therapeutic narrative of self-realization can function only by identifying the complication in the story—what prevents me from being happy, intimate, successful—and make sense of it in reference to an event in one’s past. [Such a narrative] structurally makes one understand one’s life as a generalized dysfunction, in order precisely to overcome it. This narrative foregrounds negative emotions as shame, guilt, fear, inadequacy...”

Of course this contradicts the self-image of the therapeutic project itself, which understands its prominence as a form of moral progress, uncovering and alleviating objective layers of disorder in the person and in the culture. But self-aversion is one of the most acceptable affects in a therapeutic market culture: it resolves itself in consumption; it is carefully aligned with ambition. The ambition self is the problematized self (‘If you’ve got ambition, drive, and smarts...’). This has an iatrogenic force: “The therapeutic narrative posits normality and self-realization as the goal of the narrative of self, yet, because that goal is never given a clear positive content, it in fact

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23 Illouz, 52.
produces a wide variety of un-self-realized and therefore sick people... simultaneously
defined as potential patients and consumers. ...This is also why therapeutic culture
paradoxically privileges suffering and trauma.”  

Only autobiographies of authentic suffering can promise redemption through
recognition. The narrative of self-realization becomes a narrative of pain. And this
narrative is, for Michel Foucault, simultaneously a delightful exposure as well as a
pleasurable demonstration of special insight and power:

Perhaps this production of truth... multiplied, intensified, and even
created its own intrinsic pleasures. It is often said that we have been
incapable of imagining any new pleasures. We have at least invented a
different kind of pleasure: pleasure in the truth of pleasure, the pleasure
of knowing that truth, of discovering and exposing it, the fascination of
seeing it and telling it, of captivating and capturing others by it, of
confiding it in secret, of luring it out in the open... 

The therapeutic emotional style of modernity produces a pleasure of insight, which is
also a sense of expanding power. Nietzsche is amusingly ironic:

What urges you on and arouses your ardour, you wisest of men—do you
call it ‘will to truth’?

Will to the conceivability of all being: that is what I call your will! You first
want to make all being conceivable: for, with a healthy mistrust, you
doubt whether it is in fact conceivable. But it must bend and
accommodate itself to you! Thus will your will have it. ...That is your
entire will, you wisest men; it is a will to power... 

These interweavings of power and pleasure of insight itself are directly related to
the relief of diagnosis: to find out one’s problem, whether it be bipolar disorder or post-

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24 Illouz, 50, 52.
25 Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality: An Introduction (Vintage; New York, 1990 [1978]), 71. See_also Illouz, pp. 61-2, where Foucault is discussed in further detail.
traumatic stress, is in some sense to fulfill the first step in a longed-for redemption. The diagnosis makes sense of the unease that the therapeutic emotional style necessarily creates and demands. As Illouz notes, health, in therapeutic culture, is only vaguely defined, so that it can never be fully achieved. The pleasure of the diagnosis is potentially intense, so much so that diagnoses can easily multiply, offering new narratives of self, and then new potential recognition. Note here, too, the thematic prominence of exposure—a basic structure of shame.

Of course, what Susman, Rieff, and Lasch could not have fully foreseen, but which Illouz writes about in depth, is the way in which the internet and contemporary communicative technologies have greatly amplified the opportunities, and the demands, for emotional performativity. The therapeutic emotional style is enhanced by technological consumption.

Two further points are in order. First, in a therapeutic culture where recognition is earned through the communication of affect and insight, there is no love outside the love that we ourselves are able to earn. Love and acceptance are produced rather than relied upon. Religious repentance, in such a culture, will have to appear either as an alternative but deluded model of ‘earning’ acceptance, or else as a truly ridiculous trust in one’s own inalienable status within love itself—which destroys the motivational structure of the therapeutic emotional style, depending as it does on its own capacity to unceasingly create the foundations of its own acceptability.

Second, and importantly for the philosophical discussion below, the therapeutic production of recognition is not connected to any clear communal moral values beyond
the individual self. It is far more important to produce recognition in a ‘personality’ culture than to fulfill moral commitments that transcend the value of any particular individual: loyalty, kindness, sacrifice. It is not hard to see how the emptiness of living so functional a life leads toward the ongoing necessity of the therapeutic. Motivated by extraneous ends, related to no higher form of authority or other-oriented action, we create the conditions for the full spectrum of narcissisms.

Therapeutic ideology has had a far more serious social effect than is generally admitted. The twentieth-century psychoanalytic project of dissolving burdensome, unnecessary guilt—by relativizing cultural codes of behavioral expectation, weakening the internalization of those codes, and reducing the intensity of the psychic pressure these intergenerational codes understandably exert as the price of belonging—has meant the inexorable erosion of the very codes by which we might once have evaluated our own worthiness in a culture of character.

Where all interdictory ethical demands are criticized as coercive of our supposedly more fundamental autonomy, the permissive culture of the consumer is empowered. This leaves only the most tenuous, unstable possibilities of belonging, unmoored from particular moral expectations.

Certainly we need no further moralistic and ultimately impotent complaints about ‘consumerism,’ but it must also be said that the therapeutic emotional style is a style of desire that drives, and is also further amplified by, a consumer economy. Consumer culture must uncover ever new forms of suffering to sustain itself; it is a culture of the plaintiff, rather than the celebrant. And it is easy to see how an emphasis
on the place of the human within a field of affirmation disrupts the dialectic of need and fulfillment that characterize the therapeutic emotional and economic style.

For the therapeutic there is little beyond the self that can adequately measure the worth of a self. Self-evaluation becomes a relatively closed and increasingly dangerous feedback loop. And the therapeutic proposes to heal, at the level of the individual, the very problems of self-evaluation that it helps to induce at the level of culture.

1.3 SHAME IN CONTEMPORARY PSYCHOLOGY

Now a half-century later, shame is no longer analytically ‘absorbed by guilt,’ to return to Erikson’s note from 1963. The therapeutic disciplines have come to see a significant chasm between the two modes of affect. Guilt and shame lead toward different moral outcomes; guilt correlates positively to empathic concern for others, while the egocentrism of shame leads away from such concern; guilt and shame represent divergent character ‘dispositions’; shame, but not guilt, is related closely to anger, PTSD, anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation.27 Shame is not only not absorbed by guilt, but is now seen as contrary to guilt in the most significant ways.

For experimental psychologist June Price Tangney, guilt, which perceives and seeks to repair the damages we cause to others, enables a range of personal and moral creativity. Shame, on the other hand, is a sentence of moral and relational self-confinement: “[P]roneness to guilt (about specific behaviors) is a fairly adaptive

affective style or disposition, especially in the interpersonal realm. In contrast, proneness to shame appears to be a substantial liability, in terms of both individual and interpersonal adjustment.” 28 The dysphoric, self-focused feelings of shame “disrupt individuals’ ability to form empathic connections with others. ...Shame’s inherently egocentric focus on the ‘bad self’ (as opposed to the bad behavior) derails the empathic process. Individuals in the throes of shame turn tightly inward, and are thus less able to focus cognitive and emotional resources on the harmed other.” 29

James Gilligan, a psychiatrist and former director of mental health for Massachusetts prisons, has written eloquently about the long-term psychic damages of early-life brutality. For Gilligan, it is not so much that empathic disruptions result from shame; such disruptions within formative relationships in fact produce shame:

The violent criminals I have known have been objects of violence from early childhood. They have seen their closest relatives—their fathers and mothers and sisters and brothers—murdered in front of their eyes, often by other family members. As children, these men were shot, axed, scalded, beaten, strangled, tortured, drugged, starved, suffocated, set on fire, thrown out of windows, raped, or prostituted by mothers who were their ‘pimps’; their bones have been broken; they have been locked in closets or attics for extended periods, and one man I know was deliberately locked by his parents in an empty icebox until he suffered brain damage from oxygen deprivation before he was let out.... How can violence to the body kill the soul, even if it does not kill the body? Having heard hundreds of men describe the experience of being beaten nearly to death, I believe the answer to that question is that violence—whatever else it may mean—is the ultimate means of communicating the absence of love by the person inflicting the violence. 30

There is nothing new, of course, in the claim that repetitive exposure to violence profoundly influences a human being. But this fundamental connection between self-hatred and the loss of love, though simple enough, is important to articulate: “Children who fail to receive sufficient love from others fail to build those reserves of self-love, and the capacity for self-love, which enable them to survive the inevitable rejections and humiliations which even the most fortunate of people cannot avoid. Without feelings of love, the self feels numb, empty, and dead. The word I use,” writes Gilligan, “to refer to the absence or deficiency of self-love is shame.”

When the absence of love becomes too intense, for too long, a complete death of selfhood emerges as a fundamental possibility: “The death of the self—which is what we are talking about here—brings with it a sense of the intolerability of existence—one’s own and everyone else’s.” In a situation where such complete death appears as an imminent threat, violence can be an attempt to revive selfhood, an attempt “to bring one’s dead self back to life,” through the imposition of one’s own dignity in the mode of destructive dominance over another. Violence is an attempt at transcendence, seeking to solve, through force, a problem of dignity that has far more to do with one’s fundamental relation, or lack of relationship, to love.

Gilligan, focusing on situations of psychic extremity, emphasizes the near-absolute power of conditioning; Tangney, working with a relatively normal range of human experience, emphasizes a relatively unconditioned typology of affective

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31 Ibid., 47.
32 Ibid., 41.
orientation or ‘disposition.’ These differences between Gilligan and Tangney don’t present any serious conceptual problem—one may be faced with intense negative conditioning, and yet be graced with a disposition of hopeful resilience; one may be conditioned by a set of positive relations, and yet fail to overcome a disposition toward self-involvement.

But the language of ‘proneness’ and ‘disposition,’ while helping to name potentially inelastic habits of affect, enforce a questionably rigid emotional distinctions, and then a division between kinds of persons. What of the guilt that stumbles into the repetitive self-reprisals of shame? What of the shame that is easily translated into other-engaging guilt through a challenging conversation? There is little sense here of possible alteration, of potential dynamism in the person so thoroughly conceived as prone: “Shame-prone people are not empathic people.”\(^{33}\) The shame-disposed person is damned to a permanent sameness.

The distinction between shame and guilt that had been initially introduced by Helen Block Lewis, was offered as a practical therapeutic heuristic to distinguish emotions. But this interpretive distinction may be distorted by a more abstract experimental method that begins from a much sharper distinction between affects than is likely to actually exist for most persons. Shame and guilt, writes Stanford psychiatrist

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\(^{33}\text{Ibid., 133.}\)
Herant Katchadourian, “are neither good nor bad in themselves, but just part of our nature. They become a blessing or a curse depending on how they are used.”

Tangney notes that relatively little attention “has been directed toward how people cope with aversive feelings of shame and guilt.” But she expresses little confidence that coping can be effective at all: “[P]ainful feelings of shame are difficult to resolve. Shame—and, shame-fused guilt—offers little opportunity for redemption. It is a daunting challenge to transform a self that is defective at its core.”

There is a latent perfectionism in the therapeutic style, and Tangney arrives at a perfectionist distinction between moral persons: good and bad, morally functional and non-functional. But what self is not defective in some way? The differences between shame and guilt should be upheld, not as static forms or types, but as affective modes capable of transformation from one end of a spectrum of self-evaluation to the other: from self-involvement to a focus on actions that involve and affect valued others.

Human connectedness is, of course, always exposed to damage: we can’t fully prevent loss, misunderstandings, harm intensified by intention, pain inflicted without awareness. But a vision of ontological interconnection, deepened by a repeated

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36 This phrase, ‘shame-infused guilt,’ is not fully explained in Tangney’s work. It functions simply as shame.
37 Ibid., 353. James Gilligan, too, expresses a certain hopelessness about the negative determinism of shame as it relates to interpersonal aggression. In the final pages of his extended reflection on pathogenic shame and the epidemiology of violence, Gilligan writes that “It is presumptuous to think that anyone can ‘save’ another person... [W]here violence is concerned, attempting to repair the damage, whether by means of punishment or of therapy, after irrevocable violence has already occurred, is too little too late...” (Gilligan, 266-67) The problem, of course, is that violence has always already occurred; there is no return to a prelapsarian time for any of us. The question, then, is whether we can recover practices that allow us to move from isolation toward more interconnected and empathic patterns.
commitment to that vision, places these damages in a context of care that makes reparation (and forgiveness, from another perspective) not just possible, but desirable. It is not that guilt leads to empathic connection; instead, the connected imagination produces reparative guilt when precarious but valued human relations are harmed. The connected imagination produces guilt, while the isolated imagination produces shame.

To recognize harm is to have already perceived fundamental connections between ourselves and others. Differences in the moral responses of shame and guilt have much to do with this prior, habitual understanding of the self as it is constituted, or not, by relationship. Self-evaluative guilt, but not self-aversive shame, is grounded in a moral identity that is intrinsically embedded within a field of valued others. The moral identity is first of all a related identity.

Here again is Helen Block Lewis’s initial distinction between guilt and shame: “In guilt, the self is negatively evaluated in connection with something but is not itself the focus of the experience.” So much—perhaps everything—depends on this ‘connection with something.’

‘Self-blame,’ as we will see, is precisely a practice of reconnection with a love that cannot be earned. And if shame is in large part an expression of moral isolation, such isolation can be re-imagined. Human beings can make choices and commitments toward repeated connection. And even if it is the case in some sense that “shame-

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38 Tangney writes that feelings of shame “disrupt individuals’ ability to form empathic connections” (Tangney, et al. [2007], 350). I am arguing that disrupted connections are, instead, one aspect of the prior framework for self-aversive shame.

39 Block Lewis, Shame and Guilt in Neurosis, 30.
prone people are not empathic people,” the formula should have been given in the opposite order: without empathic connection, people tend toward self-isolating shame.

If our first instinct, when faced with deep imperfection in ourselves or others, is to sense our own remoteness from the lives around us, we are not therefore condemned as an affective type to an eternal remoteness. It is not so clear that, given a certain early conditioning (Gilligan), or a certain disposition of ‘proneness’ (Tangney), we can thereby express any final certainty about the future of a moral character. In much of the psychology of self-evaluation, we are entirely confined within the conditioned—there is little if any clear trust in an unconditioned love or compassion.

The difference between shame and guilt is not a divergence between kinds of persons, but rather a variation in how, and whether, we choose relatedness. Guilt, convinced of connection, can choose to affirm relationship in response to a particular situation of harm.

Katchadourian has already noted that shame and guilt “become a blessing or a curse depending on how they are used.” The emotions, even the deepest affective negativities, offer choices about whether to use them (or not) to imagine our own connection with the full range of others who experience those same negativities—a fundamental strategy of Tibetan lojong.

The therapeutic assumption that self-hatred is fundamentally a response to the conditioning of early-life no doubt contains certain important truths. But many of us are in fact more responsible for our self-aversions than the therapeutic suggests. Self-denigration, as Buddhists from a variety of traditions will argue, is actually an aggressive
self-construction. It is an ongoing form of intentionality, of more or less conscious choice. Self-hatred, self-contempt, and the more vicious varieties of critical self-judgment are forms of controlling power. This has not been argued insistently enough in the burgeoning contemporary literature of shame. Self-contempt is not an innocence.

The self-concern of the therapeutic emotional style does not fully disengage us from the *incurvatus in se* at the heart of shame itself. Instead, that disentangling occurs more consistently through the cultivation of a practical imagination that connects us to others through commitment and act. The long cultivation of such a practical imagination is a religious life.\(^{40}\)

This is a very different process from projects of autonomous self-alteration rooted in an initial sense of deficiency. The religious process of alteration has far more to do with increasing receptivity to qualities of care that transcend the autonomous self, than it has to do with an imposition of individual will. From the sort of Buddhist perspective that will be outlined in more detail in Chapter 3, attention itself already contains basic capacities of compassion and love. We do not change from one kind of human being to another kind of human being. We discover, instead, more and more of what we are most fundamentally. This will be true for many Christians as well.

Just as there is a therapeutic emotional style, there is also a therapeutic intellectual style, oriented toward analytic certitude about oneself and one’s own prior

\(^{40}\) The imaginary of isolation is primarily a secular imagination. The etymology of ‘religion’ is likely rooted in the Latin word *religare*, to bind fast, to connect, as reflected in the English word ‘ligament.’ Thomas Aquinas writes: “But whether religion be so called from frequent reading [*relegere*, to re-read], or from fresh election of Him Whom we have negligently lost [*re-eligere*, choosing again], or from re-binding, it properly implies a certain relation to God.” See *Summa Theologica*, Second Part of the Second Part, Question 81, “Of the Virtue of Religion.”
conditioning—the new form of therapeutic pleasure-in-truth highlighted by Michel Foucault. But the penitential discovery of what we are is not a development of certainty. The human person is constantly formed by relations that he or she cannot ever finally comprehend. Self-aversion, on the other hand, is an insistence on certitude.

If love and compassion actually lie at the heart of the way things are, then cultivating a set of psychological narratives about oneself becomes less important than trusting repeatedly in relations of love to form us more thoroughly over time. We become a mystery to ourselves, rather than a problem to solve or a process to control.41

It is virtually impossible to cultivate hatreds of any kind, toward self or other, when one senses that one’s own life and all other lives unfold within such a field of compassionate affirmation. To entrust ourselves to a compassion that is not entirely our own is that same compassion’s way of transforming human negativities, over a lifetime, into ongoing opportunities for empathic connection with other imperfect and suffering persons.

41 See Augustine, Confessions, 4.4.9; 10.3.3. On December 22, 1817, in a letter to his brothers George and Thomas, John Keats reflected briefly but famously on the foundations of human creativity. While Keats’s primary interest was in literary creativity, he was explicit in addressing himself to other spheres of activity as well: “I mean Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable searching after fact and reason” (John Keats, Selected Letters, ed. Robert Gittings [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002], 41).

This capability is, of course, not a dark, aversive negativity; and the ‘doubt’ embedded in the definition is no simple skepticism. Doubt is, at times, a suspicion that normal patterns of imagination have become inadequate, combined with an intuition that another way of being or seeing may yet emerge. Doubt can sometimes align itself closely with the deepest sense of possibility (Descartes used doubt not to negate, but to discover).

Jackson Bate, a prominent scholar of Keats, has suggested that negative capability is “the ability to negate or lose one’s identity in something larger than oneself—a sympathetic openness to the concrete reality without, an imaginative identification, a relishing and understanding of it” (Walter Jackson Bate, Negative Capability: On the Intuitive Approach in Keats [Contra Mundum Press, 2012 (1939)]). What Keats calls negative capability can only be sustained within a broader trust: inquiry can only forego ‘irritable searching’ because it is engaged in an openness to sources of insight beyond the self—to something like revelation.
Such religious forms of self-evaluation must always be embedded within an ongoing liturgy, some sustained repetition, wherever they retain vitality. We are enabled, by a participation in such repetition, to relate to others through something other than our own power. The capacity to affirm comes from our consistent exposure to the field of affirmation itself, through sacrament, liturgy, and devotion. And such repeated liturgical, contemplative, and imaginative commitments to an ontology of love is also a way for that field of compassionate affirmation to connect to itself.

One influential cultural narrative holds that religious practices of confession and penance are the real historical sources of contemporary self-aversion, from which we are now finally extricating ourselves. But such practices in fact contextualize the self within relationships that secular epistemologies tend not to recognize in the first place. Confessional practices are only possible because of a prior trust in one’s own connectedness to compassion or mercy; without such trust, the normal human habit of self-evaluation risks turning sharply in on itself.

The failure to sense that, prior to any pragmatic outcome or production, we are well-made to participate in love, is a fundamental human loss wherever it occurs. Mistakes of self-evaluation, then, are among the most serious kinds of mistakes that human beings commit. So, while I admire therapeutic scholars’ deep concern with self-

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42 To maintain that this exposure is ‘merely imaginative,’ misses the point entirely.
43 Thomas Aquinas’s understanding of evil, not as a separate creation, but rather as that aspect of creation that turns away by choice from an agapic God, has much in common with Gilligan’s understanding of the dynamics of shame and violence, where violence, like Aquinas’s ‘evil,’ is the expression of a separation from love.
aversive shame, I work at a distance from the therapeutic, and wish to gesture toward
a paradox: the most fundamental human healing of the *incurvatus in se* occurs where a
movement toward mere human health is renounced, in favor of a desire to offer oneself
more and more to a reality whose basic character is love or compassion.

The soteriological and the therapeutic, of course, each seek human healing. But
soteriologies rest upon relational commitment, rather than therapies of self-analysis.

In the next section, we will look briefly at several recent philosophers of shame in order
to see how they, too, highlight themes of connection and commitment.

1.4 SHAME AMONG THE PHILOSOPHERS I:

BERNARD WILLIAMS AND JOHN BRAITHWAITE

For several prominent contemporary philosophers, it is not only possible that
some version of shame should contribute to social ethics, it is necessary that shame
should do so. To live together, we need an affect capable of evaluating the self in light
of standards of excellence that connect us to others. Shame is not primarily self-
aversion, but rather an awareness of some temporary, resolvable distance between
ourselves and an ideal. Shame is quintessentially and constructively human.

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44 I write about ‘the’ therapeutic, following Philip Rieff, in part to draw attention to the current hegemony
of psychologized ways of perceiving and interpreting the world. I do not deny the internal diversity of
therapeutic and psychological disciplines, but like Rieff, I seek to challenge therapeutics to more fully
articulate their own common assumptions.


46 The Polish poet Wisława Szymborska writes:

...Though hearts of killer whales may weigh a ton,
in every other way they’re light.

On this third planet of the sun
among the signs of bestiality
It is possible to perceive two distinct but related modern philosophical approaches to shame. The first represents shame as a kind of sentimental education—a social training in preferred values and virtues. This approach is prominent among thinkers who attempt to articulate the affective mechanisms of social cohesion (this is philosophy as a project of social restoration). The second approach seeks to articulate a more intricately phenomenological and existential structure of shame as an affect.

A variety of understandings of ‘shame’ in multiple languages has led philosophical thinkers to consider shame very differently than psychologists have done. In English, to be called ‘shameless’ is to be exiled beyond a particular community of moral expectation. The shameless is for himself alone, and shame itself is a commitment to value what is valued by others. Shame is the affect of moral solidarity.

The words translated into English from other languages as ‘shame’ contain a similar range of potentially positive meanings. The German scham, though it can at times connote something of the serious self-negativity of shame’s late-century English meaning, has at times suggested something much closer to ‘modesty.’ Max Scheler, writing a century ago, argued that scham, as a dignified modesty that guards a deep sense of personal value, should be understood most fundamentally as a “protective


47 The rhetorical phrase ‘Have you no shame?’ appears to have made its way into contemporary English usage as a revision to Army Counsel Joseph N. Welch’s response to Senator Joe McCarthy on June 9, 1954: “Have you no sense of decency, sir?” Shame as a ‘sense of decency’ is no doubt culturally demarcated, but some form of defined decency is universally necessary for any significant cultural cohesion. This concern for cohesion is a primary philosophical motivation for the analysis of shame.

feeling of the individual.” “In general,” he argued, “genuine shame is always built upon a feeling of a positive value of the self” [ital. original].49

In this kind of discussion, we are suddenly quite distant from any sense of shame as a significant self-aversion. Instead, shame is here aligned with a heightened capacity for very real reverence.

Scheler was in fact explicit in complaining that shame as a modest, self-respecting form of nobility had been degraded by class and racial developments in his own time.50 Scheler’s formulation of the philosophy of shame in the early years of the twentieth century is very much opposed to the self-destructive vision of shame advanced by James Gilligan and others at the close of the century.51

In the classical Greek aidōs, ‘shame’ gestures toward an internalized sense of honor to be defended against nemesis—a word often paired with aidōs in Greek literature.52 For Bernard Williams, it is particularly revealing that, in Homer, aidōs serves as a battle cry. Here again we are quite far from shame as a form of self-

49 Ibid., 17, 37.
50 Scheler, 69: “The decline of the feeling of shame in modern times is undoubtedly a sign of racial degeneration. It is not, as is sometimes superficially held, a consequence of higher and increased cultural development. The low valuation of shame is one sign among many expressions of the rising domination of those values which the common man produced by his endlessly quantifying production and by the gradual abolition of higher social strata which became subject to such values. He who understands the Germans well will find that it is the tall, blond, blue-eyed and long-faced people of lower Saxony that have the most refined feeling of a shame easily aroused. And if one ignores prudishness and cant among the English, one will find that it is the English, Irish, Scottish, and Welsh peoples that have a most refined feeling of shame and traces of a master-type.”
51 We should also expect that German cultural understandings of scham have themselves been altered, well beyond Scheler’s own complaints about already changed meanings, given the extraordinary history of Germany in the decades following Scheler’s writing.
52 Bernard Williams, Shame and Necessity (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 80.
contempt. If anything, ‘shame’ is here a *positive* self-evaluation, albeit in need of assertion or defense.

“People have at once a sense of their own honour,” writes Williams, “and a respect for other people’s honour; they can feel indignation or other forms of anger when honour is violated, in their own case or someone else’s. These are shared sentiments with similar objects, and they serve to bind people together in a community of feeling.”\(^{53}\) Shame performs and expresses this binding.

In recent legal philosophy, social shaming has been influentially theorized by John Braithwaite as a moral and restorative education. Such shaming—including encounters between offenders and victims, fines, public admissions of wrongdoing, and other sanctions—is presented by Braithwaite as “a means of making citizens actively responsible, of informing them of how justifiably resentful their fellow citizens are toward criminal behavior which harms them. In practice, shaming surely limits autonomy, more surely than repression, but it does so by communicating moral claims over which other citizens can reasonably be expected to express disgust should we choose to ignore them. In other words, shaming is a route to coerced compliance.”\(^{54}\) This coercion is the necessary foundation for any coherent culture of shared values, and so, although shame may be painful, its enforcement is crucial.

Such restorative strategies of justice promise to prevent the permanent severance of perpetrators (and victims) from a given moral community. The broadly

\(^{53}\) Ibid.

positive philosophical view of shame as an affective foundation for cultural cohesion and moral creativity rests upon a view of the shamed person as ultimately connected to a vital, consistent community of common value. However, if serious violence is in part the basic expression of separation from loving connectedness to self and other, it may be very naïve to expect that any educative ‘communication of moral claims’—through expressions of disgust or ‘justifiable resentment’—can actually heal the basic prior lack of relation that violence expresses.55

It simply isn’t clear that communities of common value currently exist in the way that Braithwaite, for instance, needs for them to exist, in order for his vision of reintegrative shaming to work.56 There is no possibility of reintegration where moral integration has itself been so incomplete or tenuous. Braithwaite projects a cohesive communal sensibility that does not describe our actual sociological situation. And when Bernard Williams speaks of communities of feeling,57 he uses as his social model the ancient Greek polis—a pre-secular community in which a genuine cohesion of moral

55 For a sociologically sensitive alternative to Braithwaite’s criminological views, and particularly for examples of ‘shaming legislation’ that all too easily turn toward strategies of mere humiliation, see Martha Nussbaum, Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006).
56 Reintegration is likely to occur only within what Rowan Williams has called ‘supplementary jurisdictions,’ or situational legal alternatives, such as forums for restorative justice, or the limited application of religious jurisprudence. These might be considered very momentary but functional ‘communities of feeling.’ Such episodic moral ‘communities’ may even help to create the possibility of more sustained sensibilities of integrative justice within diverse modern democracies like Britain, America and India. But within our own diversity of ethical sensibility and judgment, it is difficult to expect that restorative justice can be anything but an occasional punctuating alternative to more dominant, and far less trusting, legal frameworks. Williams himself has famously advocated for the very selective use of sharia law among British Muslims. See Rowan Williams, “Civil and Religious Law in England: A religious perspective,” a lecture to the Temple Foundation at the Royal Courts of Justice, Feb. 7, 2008. Text accessed Jan. 9, 2013: http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2008/feb/07/religion.world2.
57 The broadly conservative desire for communal cohesion is understandable: where there is no community of feeling, the individual is less directed toward others for whom he might sacrifice, or to whom he might give, and a form of human greatness is genuinely attenuated.
expectation among one section of the relatively small population rested in part on the enslavement of another. If shame functions creatively only within a certain kind of community, we must ask whether ours is of the proper kind.

We have already seen the historian Warren Susman write about the early-twentieth-century shift from an American ‘culture of character’ to one of ‘personality.’ Philip Rieff argued that a culture of character is primarily one in which interdictory moral codes retain their authority. In such cultures, character is not a psychological category, and not about what one feels or even what one experiences; character has to do with behaviors of commitment.

The arguments of Bernard Williams, John Braithwaite, and others implicitly challenge the emphasis on autonomy in much modernist moral thought (including the moralist psychologies of shame). Philosophical historian J.B. Schneewind notes that for Kant, “morality centers on a law that human beings impose on themselves, necessarily

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58 Some may wish to suggest that Susman’s representation of the culture of personality as one of ‘performance’ should be equally applied to the culture of character, which is no less performative. This critique is superficial in my view. The performance of the personality is one intended to attract; it ultimately directs the desire of others toward ourselves; the performance of character is intended primarily to act on behalf of a broader communal moral sensibility, and is always qualified by a robust account of sin, an insistence that no will toward the good is completely self-created.

59 Michael Himes notes that, in the only judgment narrative given by the New Testament, that of Matthew 25, the criterion of judgment is not faith, but actions: feeding the hungry, visiting prisoners, welcoming strangers. The ones welcomed into the ‘kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’ are those who construct it through active practical commitments. However, as Himes himself argues in Doing the Truth in Love (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1995), such practical commitments are enabled by faith and by participation in an agapic love that is not fully our own. Neither the ‘conservative’ nor the ‘liberal’ Christian can fully claim these passages in Matthew.

60 We have already seen that, for Braithwaite, social shame, in communicating its moral claims, “surely limits autonomy.” This would be a strange and peripheral statement, if autonomy were not already presumed to hold some serious moral significance.
providing themselves, in doing so, with a motive to obey. Kant speaks of agents who are morally self-governed in this way as autonomous.”61

It is important to note, however, that the Kantian practice of autonomy is a method of self-governance that is intended to align us with the identical intentions of others (whether it actually functions this way is another matter; the imperative seems to be easily coopted as a form of self-confirmation). The categorical imperative actively disrupts the merely personal desires that cannot be reasonably imagined to be good for others, and rests upon a deep faith in the self’s power over its own affects and commitments. The categorical imperative is always a practice of imagined participation in a broader community of moral purpose: “Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law. ...[E]very rational being must so act as if he were through his maxim always a legislating member in the universal kingdom of ends.”62

Autonomous reason is a shared, potentially universal foundation of morality, enabing a common, repeatable method for arriving at common ethical commitments. Autonomy is therefore the surest foundation for the ethics of the democratic age.

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61 Jerome B. Schneewind, The Invention of Autonomy: A History of Modern Moral Philosophy (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 483. “The idea that we are rational beings who spontaneously impose lawfulness on the world in which we live and thereby create its basic order is, of course, central to the whole of Kant’s philosophy. In its practical aspects it has engaged attention and attracted adherents since its first publication” (484).

62 Immanuel Kant, Grounding for a Metaphysics of Morals, trans. James W. Ellington (Hackett Publishing Company, 1993 [1785]), 30, 43. This famous practice of universal imagination has been criticized on perspectival, feminist, and anti-totalitarian grounds. It is, ironically, an implicit ancestor of all of these positions. We will briefly revisit the categorical imperative in Chapter 4, when it is compared to the universal imagination of lojong.
Nietzsche, as we will see in the next chapter, was, like Kant, intensely concerned to restore a true autonomy to the human person—or to one sort of person. (Nietzsche’s peculiarly invitational rhetoric invites the reader to recognize themselves as this sort of higher person. One also senses that Nietzsche is addressing himself in some way.) Nietzsche writes: “We... want to become those we are—human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves” (GS 335).63 This is the autonomy that is at stake in the pages below.

One irony is that such autonomous self-creation can easily become, or has always been, a form of performance of the self for others, a way of gaining attracting the perceptions, interest, and confirmations of others. Nietzsche writes of Kant as a fox who, through the categorical imperative, came close to releasing its own self-interested reason—the kind of reason that wishes to command others. But by subsuming the categorical imperative under a social purpose, the fox “goes astray back into his cage” (GS 335). Nietzsche, himself the fox that seeks a higher ethical independence from socializing slave moralities, relentlessly encourages his readers to ‘create themselves,’ precisely at the moment when self-performativity is a necessary foundation for capitalist economies. If Nietzsche had not existed, personality culture would have found it necessary, of course, to invent him.64

What has this to do with shame of any kind?

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64 One irony is that, for both Kant and Nietzsche, autonomy is intended to transcend social conditioning, but ends up failing to do so.
For Kant, and in a way for Nietzsche as well, all moral judgments that do not come to us by self-legislation—all socialization and educability—must be suspect. Shame imposes precisely such heteronomous, socializing, culturally dependent, and therefore ethically suspect judgments. Shame, on this view, must be mere “adjustment to the prejudices of the community,” and therefore a form of moral relativism that is alienated from the imperatives of autonomous conscience.

In his defense of shame as an indispensable aspect of a deep education in virtue, therefore, Bernard Williams suggests that he argues primarily with Kant, though it is probably Nietzsche he has most in mind. For Williams, the judgment of the internalized other shows me the possibility of my own full humanity in relation to others: “He can provide the focus of real social expectations, of how I shall live if I act in one way rather than another, of how my actions and reactions will alter my relations to the world about me.”

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65 Williams, 81. As we will see, it is not Williams’s own position that shame is actually the mere accession to conventional opinion. That position is, however, reflected in the work of Ruth Benedict. See footnote 11.
66 Kant’s anthropological expertise was relatively advanced, and the categorical imperative seems designed in part to short-circuit socially determined moral relativism. The imperative, ingeniously, also manages to appeal to Christian ethics while undermining the importance of confessional differences. It seems doubtful that the categorical imperative has ever been practiced formally in any sustained way, but it functions far more importantly as a narrative about the shared human capacity to agree, in principle, on real moral ends. A better ethical formulation could hardly have been created to meet the needs of the early democratic period. Politically, Kantians and anti-Kantians generally seek different political communities: those who wish to found our common political life on practices of reason and logic most often seek an ideal, imagined consensus; those who wish to engage democracy as a community of necessary dispute between irreconcilably diverse positions commit themselves, instead, to institutional practices of argumentation.
67 The philosophical anthropology of the therapeutic forcefully advances autonomy, aiming to restore the functional integrity of the psyche. The therapeutic repairs autonomies.
68 Williams, 75-77.
69 Ibid., 84.
Shame reveals to us the standards of excellence to which we might aspire—one reason why ‘shame’ cultures are often simultaneously ‘honor’ or public achievement cultures. For Williams, it is shame, and not guilt, that “embodies conceptions of what one is and of how one is related to others” (emphasis mine). If guilt seems to many people morally self-sufficient, it is probably because they have a distinctive and false picture of the moral life, according to which the truly moral self is characterless.” In other words, we can only recognize specific actions as damaging to others—we can only experience ‘guilt’—when our character has already been educated toward a commitment to shared virtues such as courage and justice. Shame, as Williams says, involves a set of ‘conceptions of what one is and of how one is related to others’—a formulation neatly opposed to that of James Gilligan, for whom shame is a conception of one’s ultimate isolation. The moral-life-in-relation, for Williams and for Braithwaite, depends upon the work of shame.\(^\text{72}\)

\(^\text{70}\) Williams, 94.
\(^\text{71}\) John Rawls fundamentally disagrees that the categorical imperative is incommensurate with the cultivation of moral character: “Our humanity [for Kant] is our pure practical reason together with our moral sensibility (our capacity for moral feeling). These two powers constitute moral personality, and include the power to set ends; they make a good will and moral character possible. We have a duty to cultivate our natural capacities in order to make ourselves worthy of our humanity.” See John Rawls, “Themes in Kant’s Moral Philosophy,” in *Kant’s Transcendental Deductions: The Three Critiques and the Opus postumum*, ed. Eckart Forster (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1989), 89. Rawls has also written, I think correctly, that “[B]eing excellences of our person which we bring to the affairs of social life, all of the virtues may be sought and their absence may render us liable to shame. But some virtues are joined to shame in a special way, since they are peculiarly indicative of the failure to achieve self-command and its attendant excellences of strength, courage, and self-control. Wrongs manifesting the absence of these qualities are especially likely to subject us to painful feelings of shame.” See *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), 391.

\(^\text{72}\) The ‘necessity’ of Bernard Williams’s *Shame and Necessity* is both moving and disturbing, insofar as it refers to an overwhelming sense that, in the face of certain failures of virtue, the only honorable option is suicide (or total exile). Writing about Sophocles’s Ajax, Williams says: “He has no way of living that anyone he respects would respect—which means that he cannot live with any self-respect” (Williams, 85). This is the text’s only hint that shame is as capable of self-destruction as it is of moral creativity and
The tacit premise of such a position is that, without shame’s intrinsic desire to belong more fully to a desired field of relations, no moral education is possible. However, this is the point at which we will begin to speak in a more theological key. We can desire to belong to some definitive human family or community, but we can also desire to belong to a more ultimate or transcendent set of relations. Socializing shame educates us into the moral expectations and commitments of a given community; repentance, however, places the person within compassion itself, so that he or she can not only uphold compassionate commitments within community, but can also challenge communities when they fail to uphold those commitments themselves. In the next section of this chapter, we begin to examine the changing nature of self-evaluation when the field of relations shifts from the social to the transcendent.

1.5 SHAME AMONG THE PHILOSOPHERS II: EMMANUEL LEVINAS AND JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

I turn here to a brief discussion of shame in the work of Emmanuel Levinas in order to more clearly see the relation between shame and transcendence. These pages include a number of technical and specialized terms, and although I will spend time exploring those terms, I do so with the sole purpose of drawing out the significance of shame in Levinas’s work.

As background to any discussion of Levinas, I want to first mention the detailed reflections on shame in Jean-Paul Sartre’s Being and Nothingness: An Essay in relation—though one might say that suicide, in such a case, is as much an affirmation of the true authority of communal value, as it is a judgment of self.
Phenomenological Ontology (1943). Levinas himself spoke not so much of Sartre, but of Martin Heidegger and the broader Western tradition of philosophical ontology, as his primary targets of philosophical critique. But it seems clear that many of Levinas’s most influential philosophical formulations—the face, infinity, the limitation of freedom—find several direct, inverted counterparts at the center of Sartre’s work. Levinas transforms the phenomenological categories used by Sartre in Being and Nothingness, so that they become, in Levinas’s own thought, a critique of ‘phenomenological ontology.’

Shame, in Being and Nothingness, is a recognition of one’s own status as an object before another’s gaze—shame is our experience before what Sartre called ‘the look’ of the other. This experience of ourselves as an object invokes shame because, in being addressed by ‘the look,’ we become aware of the diminution of our own freedom.

Our naïve sense of that freedom, our sense of the world as ours, is suddenly threatened by the awareness that we have become perceived as an object, in a way that we are not mere objects for ourselves. Shame is an awareness of the disruption or limitation of our freedom. In Being and Nothingness, the discussion of shame helps Sartre begin to say what it is that prevents the human person from consistently affirming his own freedom: others.

73 Levinas’s resistance to visual metaphors is rooted, one suspects, in his original resistance to Sartre’s phenomenological formulations.
For Sartre, the other is “the presence of a strange freedom,” one before whom “I experience a subtle alienation of all my possibilities.” Sartre’s ‘freedom’ is zero-sum; it escapes to the other when we do not retain it. In shame, writes Sartre, “To use an every-day expression which better expresses our thought, I am no longer master of the situation [ital. original].”

Existential ontology is, first and foremost, an affirmation of freedom, one intended to allow individuals embedded in mass culture to reclaim their own autonomous self-mastery. The faint existentialist posture of rebellion is in part a defiance against the perception of others—others who hold a quiet but immense power over us. Existentialism was an effort to teach us to desire our own freedom, the most basic human quality.

Perhaps the most famous existentialist words ever written are Camus’s: “There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy.”

The question of *The Myth of Sisyphus* is whether Sisyphus can be happy. Can Sisyphus, emblem of repetitious and alienated labor, figure of punishment, affirm his own life? In

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75 Ibid., 350, 355. In a particularly suggestive passage, Sartre says that “It would perhaps not be impossible to conceive a For-itself which would be wholly free from all For-others and which would exist without even suspecting the possibility of being an object. But this For-itself simply would not be ‘man’” (376). It is an odd speculation. This vision of total isolation, of a being ‘for-itself’ who is unseen by others, or who is inescapably sociopathic, is faintly disturbing, but also expresses a significant undertone of Sartre’s actual celebration of autonomy. “[W]hile I seek to enslave the Other, the Other seeks to enslave me. …Conflict is the original meaning of being-for-others. If we start with the first revelation of the Other as a look, we must recognize that we experience our inapprehensible being-for-others in the form of a possession” (475). If freedom is, in fact, zero-sum, it becomes easier to say something as patently immature as “hell is other people.”

Camus’s modernized mythos, there is no one else around. The answer to the suddenly fundamental question of self-affirmation is up to Sisyphus himself.

For Sartre, the human situation at the middle of the century required an articulation of the ‘ontological’ foundations of resistance—resistance to violence, to the state, to mass culture, to man’s fate as a consumer of his own manipulation. Sartre responds to mass conditioning by articulating a self-conditioning, self-affirming freedom: his existentialism is a humanism of defiance; he, not Kant, is the true philosopher of autonomy.

Sartre’s ontology of existential freedom, as well as Levinas’s own ethics, are both attempts to articulate an elemental human dignity in the middle of a century of sometimes amplified inhumanity. The problem of human dignity may be found at the heart of Bernard Williams’s *Shame and Necessity* as well. The text unfolds from the situation of Sophocles’s Ajax: “He has no way of living that anyone he respects would respect—which means that he cannot live with any self-respect” (Williams, 85).

For Levinas, however, human dignity is recognized, or activated, in an ethical demand—a demand that is encountered most directly in the face, or vulnerability, of

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77 Sartre responds to shame largely by rejecting the social ‘level’ of connection—not in an attempt to turn to a transcendent Other, but rather by radically reinforcing the self-relation, at the individual ‘level’ of self-connection.

78 Kant and Levinas have more in common than either thinker does with Sartre. The infinity of ethical demand to be found in the face of the other functions, in several ways, very much as the categorical imperative functions. Both the infinity of demand and the categorical imperative are universal in their affirmation of others as ultimate ends in themselves; and both infinity and the imperative admit, but undermine, our own accidental preferences and desires, in favor of a greater ethical desire and duty. My own sense is that both infinity and the imperative function as important moral narratives, rather than real moral practices. As narratives, they induce new habits of ethical experience, rather than accurately describing such habits. Sartre, on the other hand, is in a sense categorically anti-imperative: he focuses not on others as ends, but on freedom as its own end.
the other. This is a fateful difference between Levinas’s thought and that of Sartre. Dignity cannot be accomplished through a self-affirmative freedom; no dignity can ever be our own. Instead, dignity is what occurs when the nakedness, the basic vulnerability of the face is disclosed through an infinite communication of the demand that we should not kill. (Infinite, because we can never fully grasp or comprehend the demand; it exceeds understanding, goes beyond ‘what thought itself can think’ in such a way that we can never get behind the demand, to any system of which it is only a part. Infinity addresses us as a command that cannot be undermined by our habit of mere comprehension. The point is not comprehension but response.) We are now clearly within the interdictory confines of the Tanakh, overhearing the early human worlds of Genesis, in which human vulnerability is a sentence of expulsion for our grasping after mere understanding, and Cain is unwilling to be put to question: where is your brother?

‘The look’ that had objectified us, for Sartre, now becomes, in the work of Levinas, the ‘face’ that reveals the human, not as an object, but as an ethical demand to which we can only respond or fail to respond.

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79 Among contemporary thinkers, Levinas is the most profound critic of the literal self-righteousness discussed earlier in this chapter. This is, I think, one reason why his work has been so influential in recent decades, precisely as self-righteousness is increasingly required by our economic context.

80 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay in Exteriority*, trans. Alphoso Lingis (Pittsburg, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 1969 [1961]), 74-75, 199. The language of naked vulnerability invokes the most devastating images of the Shoah. (Mary Oliver’s ‘soft animal of the body’ depends on a context of a benevolent nature; Levinas does not assume the same.)

81 Similarities between Levinas and Kant have already been noted, but here is a serious difference: Kant adheres to the power of a calculative reason, and Levinas critiques an ethics of calculation and comprehension in favor of a fundamental human receptivity to interpersonal ethical demand, or what Charles Hallisey has called ‘the moral self degree zero,’ prior to calculation (personal communication). Moral calculation is particularly suspect in the Japanese Buddhist traditions of Jodo Shinshu and Zen.
Levinas’s creative inversion of ‘the look’ extends also into a counter-existential account of freedom. For Sartre, freedom was something that we lose, something that flees from us, when we are objectified in ‘the look.’ Freedom, for Levinas, is instead something that is rightly ‘called into question’ in our encounter with the infinity of ethical demand. *In responding to the demand in the face of the other, we do not reclaim our freedom but renounce it.*

One suspects that Levinas has Sartre in mind when he says, with a hint of sarcasm, that in the Western philosophical tradition, the limitation of freedom “alone is held to be tragic and to constitute a scandal.”

The freedom that can be ashamed of itself founds truth.... The Other is not initially a *fact*, is not an *obstacle*, does not threaten me with death [a refutation of Sartre]; he is desired in my shame. To discover the unjustified facticity of power and freedom one must not consider it as an object, nor consider the Other as an object; one must measure oneself against infinity, that is, desire him. It is necessary to have the idea of infinity, the idea of the perfect, as Descartes would say, in order to know one’s own imperfection. The idea of the perfect is not an idea but desire; it is the welcoming of the Other, the commencement of moral consciousness, which calls in question my freedom. Thus this way of measuring oneself against the perfection of infinity is not a theoretical consideration; it is accomplished as shame, where freedom discovers itself murderous in its very exercise.\(^8^2\)

This is a typically intricate Levinasian passage. The language here will strike some readers as hyperbolic. But it is a finely ordered conceptual poetry. Levinas suggests that a relationship to the other—a relation made possible by a recognition of infinity as the transcendent Other—is not only possible, but is in fact always the true

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\(^8^2\) *Totality and Infinity*, 83-84.
direction of human consciousness. We are human, for Levinas, as far as we recognize ourselves as subjected to an infinity of ethical demand.

It may be that the work of Levinas would be unnecessary, if this encounter with infinitude of ethical demand were in fact fundamental to human consciousness. Levinas does not develop a full account of the human propensity to escape or avoid this fundamental precariousness of the other.

Levinas persuasively suggests that the Western tradition of moral philosophy has been tempted to, and co-opted by, mere comprehension.\(^8^3\) The failure of moral life is a failure of the Western intellectual tradition, more than it is a failure inherent in human consciousness itself. Western thought is a refusal to be called into question, and this is its basic fault.\(^8^4\) Elsewhere, Levinas suggests that our consistent failure to allow ourselves to be addressed by an infinite moral demand is fundamentally a natural human ‘forgetfulness’ of primary responsibility.\(^8^5\) “The aggressiveness of the offender is

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\(^8^3\) In “The Temptation of Temptation,” a Talmudic reading of part of the Sabbath Tractate given in late 1964, Levinas reflects quite beautifully on the rabbinic teaching that when the Torah was presented to the Israelites, they “committed to doing before hearing” (Nine Talmudic Readings, trans. Annette Aronowicz [Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990], 30). The ‘temptation to temptation’ is the temptation of comprehension as an end in itself, and “temptation defines the philosophical reason of the West” (38). The commitment to accept (to do) the law, before understanding the law, is, in Levinas’s reading, the foundation of Israelite Temimut, uprightness (a term that appears in Levinas’s philosophical work as well). Elsewhere, Levinas writes that “The idea of totality and the idea of infinity differ precisely in that the first is purely theoretical, while the second is moral” (Totality and Infinity, 83).

\(^8^4\) As far as Levinas places the tradition itself in question, however, he is a participant in the process of critique that defines tradition itself, and so his thought may be simply incorporated by the very habits of comprehension that he criticizes.

\(^8^5\) “The Temptation of Temptation,” Nine Readings, 50.
perhaps his very unconsciousness. Aggression is the lack of attention *par excellence*.”86

Shame is the human capacity of return from this forgetfulness of attention.

The arguments that violence is the result of a failed intellectual tradition, and that this failure of tradition now continues to condition our natural human forgetfulness of the primary demand, do not fully explain how we ever return to the vulnerability of the face, once it is forgotten. If Levinas had developed a more adequate account of our actual shamelessness when encountering the vulnerability of the other, he might also have had to commit himself to some liturgy to educate our attention. Instead, for Levinas, the consciousness of infinity is simply a given, toward which we can always turn. It is shame that implicitly allows for that turn.

In the extended passage selected above, shame is the revelation of infinity; it is the ‘commencement of moral consciousness.’ Shame allows two simultaneous events of consciousness to occur: it reveals our self-affirmative ‘freedom’ as a mode of harmful ignorance87; and it measures that ignorance against the perfection of the infinite ethical demand. Shame reverses the latent violence of innocence.88

In Levinas, shame as a movement of desire receives its most insistent and skillful articulation. Infinity is not conceptualized, but desired; only desire makes possible our

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86 “Toward the Other,” *Nine Readings*, 25. This might have been just as easily said by a student of the Mahayana.
87 “Morality begins when freedom, instead of being justified by itself, feels itself to be arbitrary and violent” (*Totality and Infinity*, 84). The language of justification, as well as the basic attitude expressed in Levinas’s position, is remarkably consonant with Luther. Strange bedfellows indeed.
88 Levinas does not completely explain the tension between the fundamental directions of consciousness in his work: the direction of enjoyment, or naïve freedom; and the exterior encounter with the infinity of demand. If consciousness is, most fundamentally, the latter, the real power of violently self-affirmative freedom is left largely unexplained. Shame would be unnecessary if our consciousness were as oriented toward the ethical demand as Levinas’s phenomenological claims suggest it is. In my view, shame becomes central to Levinas *because* of the immense power of naïve freedom in his work.
basic receptivity to ethical demand. We are always addressed by infinity, but shame opens up in us the very human desire to hear that address.\textsuperscript{89}

Self-contempt is not at all the same thing as the ‘shame’ that occurs when our naïve freedom is called into question through the encounter with the other. The compulsivity of self-hatred is felt as a sensation of assertive power, while Levinasian ‘shame’ involves a basic openness.\textsuperscript{90} And unlike the strange certitude of self-contempt, Levinasian shame is a way of unknowing; infinity is the relation we cannot fully fathom, even as it renders us more responsive to vulnerability.

In \textit{Otherwise than Being} (1974), Levinas develops further this account of the structure of the commandment not to kill. Here, instead of representing infinity as an interdict against violence to which we either do or do not respond, Levinas speaks of our responsiveness as a primary, even passive, substitution of our own self-interest for others. Such substitutionary responsiveness is the status, writes Levinas, of one who is a ‘hostage,’ ‘persecuted’ by the ethical demand of the other in an ‘expiation’ of the contamination of being’s self-interested inertia.\textsuperscript{91} We do not choose this; the substitution of self-interestedness is already what is performed in us, but also what our freedom may ultimately refuse. Freedom, contra Sartre, is not in any sense the highest human good. Shame, the moment in which we come to perceive the infinitude of

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\textsuperscript{89} This teaching of desire, like Augustine’s teaching on prevenient grace (the desire for grace is a already a grace), directs us to search for what is already closest to, but hidden from, our own awareness.
\textsuperscript{90} “Or else this knowledge invites the knower to an interminable psychoanalysis, the desperate search for a true origin at least in oneself…” (\textit{Totality and Infinity}, 65).
\textsuperscript{91} Emmanuel Levinas, \textit{Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence}, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 1981 [1974]). See Chapter IV, esp. 113-27. Substitution may actually presume a greater primacy of self-interestedness than Levinas allows. Without a primary egoism, there would be little to substitute.
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ethical demand in *Totality and Infinity*,\(^92\) becomes a turn toward an always prior substitution in *Otherwise than Being*.

Paul Ricoeur objects that this account actually risks “the substitution of self-hatred for self-esteem.”\(^93\) Substitution may appear, from one perspective, as insane ethical perfectionism, or as an acceptance of a domineering and even wrathful judgment. Levinas does anticipate the objection offered by Ricoeur: “I exist through the other and for the other, but without this being alienation: I am inspired.”\(^94\) Levinas does not claim that substitution is a procedure of secular reason; his thought is a refutation of autonomy.

“The responsibility for another,” writes Levinas, “an unlimited responsibility which the strict book-keeping of the free and non-free does not measure, requires subjectivity as an irreplaceable hostage.”\(^95\) We cannot be our own, without violence. Levinas renounces calculative reciprocities, which seek to define who deserves and does not deserve responsive compassion (as if compassion were a limited, measurable

\(^{92}\) See also “Transcendence and Height,” a talk presented in early 1962, in which Levinas notes that “[S]hame is a movement in a direction opposed to that of consciousness, which returns triumphantly to itself and rests upon itself. To feel shame is to expel oneself from this rest and not simply to be conscious of this already glorious exile. The just person who knows himself to be just is no longer just. The first condition of the first as of the last of the just is that their justice remains clandestine to them.” Shame, here, has close resonances with the fear of the Lord. (Emmanuel Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings* [Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1996], 17.)


\(^{94}\) *Otherwise than Being*, 114. See also 124.

\(^{95}\) *Otherwise than Being*, 124. See also Levinas’s 1986 “Interview with François Poirié,” in *Is it Righteous to Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. Jill Robbins (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001). “For [Martin] Buber the relation between the I and the Thou is straightaway experienced as reciprocity. My point of departure is Dostoevsky: ‘Each of us is guilty before everyone and for everything, and I more than the others.’ …[W]hat is central is the theme of asymmetry [in Levinas’s own work], which determines our different manners of speaking. Consequently, I have read Buber with much respect and attention, but I am not always in agreement with him” (72-73).
resource), or, who deserves and does not deserve retribution and vengeance. When we
are grasped by substitution, there is nothing we need to receive from others ‘in return’;
substitution is the basic self-offering in the face of the other—a self-offering that is at
the heart of the human person.

Self-contempt is in large part the refusal of that offering; it wills certitude and
separation.
CHAPTER 2

THE PROBLEM OF SHAME IN NIETZSCHE

Oh my friends! Thus speaks the enlightened man:
‘Shame, shame, shame—that is the history of humankind!’
—Thus Spoke Zarathustra, ‘Of the Compassionate’

2.1 AUTONOMY AND SHAME

The problem of shame is among the most intense concerns of Friedrich
Nietzsche’s writing in The Gay Science and after. Self-affirmative autonomy is
Nietzsche’s primary response to that shame.

Nietzsche, however, is a flawed visionary of affirmation. The Eternal Return and
the will to power are peculiar, magnetic expressions of an aspiration to self-
affirmation.96 But Nietzsche’s central constructive projects have long failed to invite any
true commitment; they remain artifacts of philosophy. These pages ask why that is the
case. I will suggest that the capacity for strong affirmation and the defense of strong
autonomy cannot finally coincide.

Nietzsche’s interwoven projects of genealogical moral critique and constructive
philosophical vision—his attempt to envision the positive shameless man—project a
forceful sense of possible freedom. But Nietzsche also refuses an anthropology that
depends upon connection; human sociality is the opening for precisely those herd
instincts and slave moralities that induce in us a ‘bad conscience’ about ourselves.

96 “You still want to create the world before which you can kneel: that is your ultimate hope and
intoxication” (Z, ‘On Self-Overcoming’).
For Michel Foucault, Nietzsche’s genealogical critique of Christian shame initiates the true task of the discipline of historical inquiry: “Its task is to become a curative science.”

Nietzschean history, writes Foucault, “opposes itself to the search for ‘origins’; “The true historical sense confirms our existence among countless lost events, without a landmark or a point of reference.”

But Nietzsche does not in fact disclaim origins—he celebrates the origin that is unexpected or repressed. He locates the origin of moral judgment, for instance, in our fear of those ‘dangerous’ ones who have injured us; the origin of notions about responsibility is the need to justify punishment. And it is the origin of shame, the shameful origin, which draws Nietzsche’s most acute interest:

O pudenda origo!

‘The origin,’ writes Foucault, ‘always precedes the Fall,’ and in fact Nietzsche is very much interested in shame itself as the lapse that stands in need of healing. Both

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98 Ibid, 77.
99 Ibid., 89. Foucault rejects teleologies. But the Eternal Return is characteristically teleological, insofar as it imagines time in a way that induces our assent to suffering, which would otherwise produce too much memory, and too much fear of the future.
100 Ibid. See Friedrich Nietzsche, Dawn, § 102. See also On the Genealogy of Morals, II.4: “But how did that other ‘somber thing,’ the consciousness of guilt, the ‘bad conscience,’ come into the world?” Note: In this essay I have included abbreviated initials for Nietzsche’s primary works, and the number of the aphorism quoted, when citing Nietzsche himself. Except where noted, I have used Walter Kaufmann’s translations of The Birth of Tragedy (BT), The Gay Science (GS), Beyond Good and Evil (BGE), On the Genealogy of Morals (GM), and Ecce Homo (EH). See The Gay Science (New York: Random House, 1974) and The Basic Writings of Nietzsche (New York, Random House, 1966). When discussing Thus Spoke Zarathustra, I found R.J. Hollingdale’s 1961 translation more useful (London: Penguin Books, 1961).
101 Ibid., 79.
102 Bruce Ellis Benson argues that Nietzsche cannot be considered a soteriological thinker, because “redemption for Nietzsche means not thinking there is something wrong in the first place.” Nietzsche is engaged in “a soteriology from soteriology, a soteriology that insists on abandoning soteriology” (Benson,
Nietzsche and *Genesis*, writes Thomas Altizer, agree that “morality is a consequence of an original and catastrophic fall.”103 Nietzsche seeks to cure the catastrophes of shame. Nietzsche’s focus on origins is characteristically religious and soteriological.104

Nietzsche, more than any other modern figure, is author of the suspicion that Christian commitments are, among other things, disciplines of damaging shame. If we are to argue, later, that Buddhist or Christian practices of ‘self-blame’ are in fact movements of an encompassing affirmation, we will first have to answer a pervasive wariness—one that Nietzsche helps to initiate.105

James Joyce, June Price Tangney, and thousands of others now repeat a basic Nietzschean refrain: Christian teachings are inhumane in their impositions of destructive self-despising. The Nietzschean view that religious lives are anti-human has been thoroughly normalized. “Always,” writes Nietzsche, “love your neighbor as yourselves—but first be such as *love themselves*—”106 Nietzsche does not trust modern Christians to trust in their own lovedness: this is a basic meaning, and opportunity, implied in God’s death. Merely to admit that God is dead, for those who have heard the madman’s...

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105 Nietzsche: “The two great nihilistic movements: (a) Buddhism, (b) Christianity” (*Will to Power* [WP] 220). Nietzsche recognizes immediately that the European inculturation of Buddhism would depend profoundly upon European understandings of Christianity—a basic assumption of this essay as well, in a North American context.
106 *Zarathustra*, “Of the Virtue that Makes Small.”
announcement, is inadequate—they ignore the true opportunity disclosed by that death, which is the possibility of a new self-love.

Sociality has required a basic distortion of the true nature of the human: the will to power. The will to power is not only the most fundamental psychological principle for interpreting human behavior, it is also, as Walter Kaufmann has noted, “the basic force of the entire universe.” In Nietzsche’s early work *The Birth of Tragedy*, he describes Dionysian joy in the ontologically expansive terms with which he will later articulate power itself:

> We are really... primordial being itself, feeling its raging desire for existence and joy in existence; the struggle, the pain, the destruction of phenomena, now appear necessary to us.... We are pierced by the maddening sting of these pains just when we have become, as it were, one with the infinite primordial joy in existence, and when we anticipate, in Dionysian ecstasy, the indestructibility and eternity of this joy. In spite of fear and pity, we are the happy living beings, not as individuals, but as the one living being, with whose creative joy we are united. (BT 17)

At the end of his working life, in one of the aphorisms collected by his sister in *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche would write that, “At bottom, man has lost the faith in his own value when no infinitely valuable whole works through him; i.e., he conceived such a whole in order to be able to believe in his own value” (WP 12).

The infinite whole that Nietzsche conceives is the will to power. It is, however, a power that requires, for its affirmation, the *separation* of the human person from the social and religious spheres of value that seek to inhibit self-affirming power itself.

Here there is a crucial and unresolved ambiguity in Nietzsche’s oeuvre.

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On the one hand, Nietzsche conceives of an ontology of creative and affirmative joy, in which all persons may potentially participate and share. On the other hand, Nietzsche suggests repeatedly that only a select set of persons are in fact capable of such participation, and that these persons must be capable of separation, so that they are not drawn unnecessarily toward constrictive and shame-inducing moralities.

The Übermensch is one whose vital autonomy allows him to withstand the threat of communal disconnection—the threat upon which shared moral discourse depends is the threat of shame, and it is best to move beyond both. For Nietzsche, it is not connection, but power, which is the true path to self-affirmative joy.

Nietzsche’s profound anthropological division into the powerful and the weak moves him to privilege an inviolable autonomy for the vital few—an autonomy that ensures they will not be exposed to the constraining shame of social moralities. We have already seen, in the previous chapter, Nietzsche’s invitational tone to the readers of *The Gay Science*: “We… want to become those we are—human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves” (GS 335). In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche writes of “the sovereign individual, like only to

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108 Already in 1904, Arthur Drews wrote that Nietzsche was chiefly opposed to “heteronymous morality, which imposes its commandments from without and results in the diminishment and subjugation of the individual self. He would like to confront this old, life-denying morality with a new, autonomous morality, which stems directly from the individual will...” Arthur Drews, *Nietzsches Philosophie* (Heidelberg, 1904), quoted in Gianni Vattimo, *Nietzsche: An Introduction*, trans. Nicholas Martin (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 170-71.

109 Remember that philosophers like John Braithwaite and Bernard Williams seek to uphold ‘shame’ as the affect that supports shared moral learning and social integration. From Nietzsche’s perspective, such relationships only impinge upon the self-overcoming Übermensch.
himself, liberated again from morality of custom, autonomous and supramoral (for
‘autonomous’ and ‘moral’ are mutually exclusive)” (GM, II.2).

Nietzsche proposes an extraordinary amplification of individual autonomy as the
necessary preparation for the will to power itself:

Thus what is really praised when virtues are praised is, first, their
instrumental nature [for the community] and, secondly, the [altruistic]
instinct in every virtue that refuses to be held in check by the over-all
advantage for the individual himself—in sum, the unreason in virtue that
leads the individual to allow himself to be transformed into a mere
function of the whole. The praise of virtue is the praise of something that
is privately harmful—the praise of instincts that deprive a human being of
his noblest selfishness and the strength for the highest autonomy. [GS
21]

For Kant, shame violated precisely the human capacity for autonomy that underwrites
the practical and moral application of our reason.110 Here, even though Nietzsche,
unlike Kant, ultimately divides autonomy from morality, he remains in many ways a
Kantian heir—shame is the most profound threat to autonomy: “Even the strongest
person fears a cold look or a sneer on the face of those among whom he has been
brought up. What is he really afraid of? Growing solitary! ...Thus, the herd instinct
speaks up in us” (GS 50). “What Nietzsche’s position does share with Kant’s moral
philosophy,” writes David Owen, “is a view of autonomy as the ground of self-
respect.”111

Shame is the fear of isolation—a fear that must be overcome:

110 Williams, 77: “In the scheme of Kantian oppositions, shame is on the bad side of all the lines.” For
Kant, the purpose of autonomy was political cohesion. Autonomy in Kant is the guarantor that we will
arrive at a common valuation of the good through reason. To impose shared values through culturally
variable shame, therefore, is to create a weak foundation for personal and political decision.
...During the longest period of the human past nothing was more terrible than to feel that one stood by oneself. To be alone, to experience things by oneself, neither to obey nor to rule, to be an individual—that was not a pleasure but a punishment; one was sentenced ‘to individuality.’ Freedom of thought was considered discomfort itself. While we experience law and submission as compulsion and loss, it was egoism that was formerly experienced as something painful and as real misery. To be a self and to esteem oneself according to one’s own weight and measure—that offended taste in those days. An inclination to do this would have been considered madness; for being alone was associated with every misery and fear. ...Whatever harmed the herd, whether the individual had wanted it or not wanted it, prompted the sting of conscience in the individual—and in his neighbor, too, and even in the whole herd.—There is no point on which we have learned to think and feel more differently. [GS 117]

The range of human instinct is seldom congruent with communal demands, and so, for the person who would intensify their own instinct for freedom, power, and joy, communal demand must be rejected. A moral community requires, and enforces, damaging shame; the fear of shameful exposure is the basic price of belonging.112

Moralities make a threatening appeal to the ‘herd instinct’ precisely in those who are the strongest and most potentially independent persons—moralities are implicit threats of fatal expulsion. Nobility, then, is really the adoption of a proud contempt toward one’s own desire for the affirmation of others: “The noble type of man experiences itself as determining values; it does not need approval...” (BGE 260). The necessary self-contempt of the noble person will lie in his confrontation with any such need, if should arise.

112 Again, on origins, Nietzsche writes: “I regard the bad conscience [cruelty toward the self] as the serious illness that man was bound to contract under the stress of the most fundamental change he ever experienced—that change which occurred when he found himself finally enclosed within the walls of society and of peace” (GM, Second Essay, 16). This seems very dubious; the escape from cruelties of wilderness may have created some discontents of ‘civilization,’ but certainly there was at least as much relief as there was new pain.
We are of course much freer to develop diversities of moral commitment than pre-modern persons. We depend far less directly and completely upon our neighbors and hierarchs for protection and shared sustenance. Nietzsche seeks a radical fortification of these freedoms, arguing that moral communities actually damage our capacities for independent self-affirmation: “Morality trains the individual to be a function of the herd and to ascribe value to himself only as a function. …Morality is herd instinct in the individual” (GS 116).

In *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), Nietzsche introduces the closely related category of ‘slave morality.’ “According to slave morality, those who are ‘evil’ [instinctual] thus inspire fear… [and] the good human being has to be *undangerous* in the slaves’ way of thinking: he is good-natured, easy to deceive, a little stupid perhaps…” (BGE 260). Like the ‘herd instinct’ of *The Gay Science*, “Slave morality is essentially a morality of utility,” emphasizing qualities “which serve to ease existence for those who suffer: here pity [*Mitleid*; compassion], the complaisant and obliging hand, the warm heart, patience, industry, humility, and friendliness are honored—for here these are the most useful qualities and almost the only means for enduring the pressure of existence” (BGE 260).113

What is most striking, in all such passages, is that Nietzsche presumes that there can be persons, either now or in the future, for whom self-affirmation apart from relationship can be lasting or complete. This is where Nietzsche’s failures of affirmation begin: the assumption that strong self-affirmation can ever be a lasting expression of

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113 There are strong resonances here, of course, with Eva Illouz’s work on emotional capitalism.
autonomy, or that the human need for connection can be transcended. Neither assumption seems anthropologically workable.

So, even though Nietzsche conceives a broadly ontological will to power, in which we may or may not come to participate, that ontology does not function to connect the human to others—a basic requirement of any creative ontology.

In his discussion of Nietzsche’s will to power as an extra-personal phenomenon, Walter Kaufmann has this to say:

The most obvious objection at this point is, no doubt, that it seems empirically untrue that our minds are so constituted that, when we consider phenomena and think as carefully and cogently as we can, we are driven to assume that the will to power is the basic principle of the universe. This criticism seems not only relevant but, in the end, unanswerable.114

The criticism itself, I think, is correct. Other thinkers, including Levinas, will suggest that responsiveness to the vulnerability of the other is an even more basic principle of the human encounter, and that this true responsiveness is obscured by ontologies of power that posit ‘basic principles of the universe’ whose function is really the justification of self-interest. Levinas, like Bernard Williams, privileges shame as a primary foundation for any recognition of our deeply human responsiveness. This is the anthropology that Nietzsche attempts to leave behind.

We cannot altogether escape shame, except through total isolation, or death.

114 Ibid.
2.2 SHAME AND THE GAY SCIENCE

Nietzsche offers suggestions for how to read his work, anticipating that certain formulations will strike us at first as deeply strange:

*One must learn to love.*—This is what happens to us in music: First one has to *learn to hear* a figure and melody at all, to detect and distinguish it, to isolate it and delimit it as a separate life. Then it requires some exertion and good will to *tolerate* it in spite of its strangeness, to be patient with its appearance and expression, and kindhearted about its oddity. Finally there comes a moment when we are *used* to it, when we wait for it, when we sense that we should miss it if it were missing; and now it continues to compel and enchant us relentlessly until we have become its humble and enraptured lovers who desire nothing better from the world than it and only it. But that is what happens to us not only in music. That is how we have *learned to love* all things that we now love. In the end we are always rewarded for our good will, our patience, fair-mindedness, and gentleness with what is strange; gradually, it sheds its veil and turns out to be a new and indescribable beauty. That is its *thanks* for our hospitality. Even those who love themselves will have learned it in this way; for there is no other way. *Love, too, has to be learned.* [GS 334]

Like the medieval Provençal poet-singers who helped to inspire *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft*, Nietzsche seeks (perhaps more earnestly than they might have done) to ‘compel and enchant’ his listeners, so that we might follow in the current of his imagination. But he recognized that readers could only approach his most central constructive visions through attitudes of receptivity, patience, kindheartedness. How would readers come to consent to new visions of affirmation? How would they assent to themselves? *Even those who love themselves will have learned it this way.*

It is significant that Nietzsche proposes, for his ideal reader, capacities involved in encounters with both music and revelation. And he is preparing us in particular to encounter the vision of the Eternal Return and the Dionysian prophet Zarathustra—both
of which are presented just a few aphorisms later, at the conclusion of the original 1882 version of *The Gay Science*.

In *The Gay Science* Nietzsche composes symphonically: arguments achieve a cumulative force through repetitions of emphasis and tone; leitmotifs recur; works develop across a series of movements that are interwoven with provocative symmetries. Seeing the centrality of shame in Nietzsche’s mature thought depends in part on understanding the compositional structure of Nietzsche’s writing in *The Gay Science*.

The work covers wide topographies, but Nietzsche’s most prominent internal transitions and patterns suggest quite clear thematic emphases. Book One closes with a discussion of different kinds of suffering, and at the end of Book Two, Nietzsche writes that, “as long as you are in any way ashamed before yourselves, you do not yet belong with us” (GS 107). These words directly prefigure the final words of Book Three:

*What is the seal of liberation?—No longer being ashamed in front of oneself.* [GS 275]¹¹⁵

This concise formulation marks a centerpiece of *The Gay Science*—the announcement of a soteriology against shame, which will be resolved in Nietzsche’s presentation of the Eternal Return at the end of Book Four (the work’s original conclusion). The closing passages of the four original Books are mutually referential,

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¹¹⁵ I have found no discussion of this emphatic aphorism in any scholarly literature. The question, *What is the seal of liberation?—*is one of a series of questions in Nietzsche’s dialogue with himself at the end of Book Three of *The Gay Science*. These are, one senses, some of Nietzsche’s most personal lines.
and Nietzsche’s increasingly insistent explorations of shame\textsuperscript{116} in the closing aphorisms of the first three books are answered structurally by the cosmological vision of the Eternal Return that concludes the original version of the work. The \textit{amor fati}, love of fate, induced by the Eternal Return offers a direct answer to the problem of shame:

If this thought [the Eternal Return] gained power over you it would, as you are now, transform and perhaps crush you; the question in all and everything: ‘do you want this again and again, times without number?’ would lie as the heaviest burden upon all your actions. Or how well disposed towards yourself and towards life would you have to become to have \textit{no greater desire} than for this ultimate eternal sanction and seal? [GS 341]\textsuperscript{117}

Self-affirmation is chiefly a consent to the entirety of that process which has produced one’s own self, including all of the necessary suffering that such a process entails.

The structural symmetries of Nietzsche’s writing makes their own claim; the ‘ultimate confirmation and seal’ invoked at the close of Book Three of \textit{The Gay Science}, in the context of a discussion about shame, is now directly answered by the ‘eternal sanction and seal’ of the Eternal Return—a vision that attempts to ground the work of affirmation: can one consent to the given moment as it is, repeated infinitely, as part of the gathering of ever greater strength?\textsuperscript{118}

\textsuperscript{116} Nietzsche uses \textit{Scham, or selber schämen} [GS 275], most consistently to invoke a damaging failure of self-affirmation, particularly driven by enforced shaming within the ancient ‘herd’ and within ascetic cultures. But Nietzsche comes in his later work to theorize new purposes of sharper, more powerful forms of self-despising, self-cruelty, and self-hatred. There are some marginal exceptions to his normal usage of \textit{scham}—see \textit{Beyond Good and Evil} aphorism 40, for example, in which the dramaturgic mask is discussed as ‘the proper disguise for the \textit{Scham} [modesty] of a god’ [an allusion to Dionysus]. More often, however, shame is presented as the most damaging of all affects. It is an obsession in Nietzsche’s writing.

\textsuperscript{117} In this instance, I have used R.J. Hollingdale’s translation of this passage, offered in the introduction to his translation of \textit{Thus Spoke Zarathustra} (London: Penguin Books, 1961).

\textsuperscript{118} Without belaboring the point: the first aphorism of Book Four—that is, the aphorism immediately following the formula of the liberation from shame—raises the question of the love of fate: “\textit{Amor fati: let that be my love henceforth!”} (GS 376). In Nietzsche’s writing, \textit{amor fati} answers shame.
To become ‘well-disposed toward oneself’ is the primary antidote to modern ‘weightlessness’\(^{119}\)—a weightlessness that is primarily a contemporary failure of commitment. The most important commitment, for Nietzsche, is self-affirmation, and the Eternal Return is an aide to precisely that affirmation.

In the very last aphorism of the original version of *The Gay Science*, we find, for the first time, the figure of Zarathustra—advocate of power and joy, strident critic of shame.\(^{120}\) Nietzsche’s voice is now no longer merely diagnostic, but full-prophetic—perhaps even somewhat too loud to be entirely believable.

The early interpretive concern with the question of Nietzsche’s ‘immoralism’\(^{121}\) was understandably drawn to the most basic of his announcements: ‘God is dead.’ The first iteration of the statement itself opens Book Three of *The Gay Science*:

After Buddha was dead, his shadow was still shown for centuries in a cave—a tremendous, gruesome shadow. God is dead; but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown. —And we—we still have to vanquish his shadow, too. \([108]\)\(^{122}\)

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\(^{119}\) Aphorism 341, in which the Eternal Return is introduced, is titled *Das grösste Schwergewicht: The Greatest Weight*. Jackson Lears comments: “During the late nineteenth century, for educated Americans, secularization meant primarily a particular dis-ease: a sense that American Christianity had begun to lose moral intensity and that as a result, the entire culture had begun to enter what Nietzsche had called a ‘weightless’ period. Nietzsche had seen the secularizing process as part of a larger tendency in modern culture—a general blurring of moral and cultural boundaries and loosening of emotional ties, a weakening of the conviction that certain principles, certain standards of conduct, must remain inviolable, and a loss of the gravity imparted to human experience by a supernatural framework of meaning. With the decline of Christianity, he had predicted, ‘it will seem for a time as though all things had become weightless.’” See Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), p. 41.

\(^{120}\) “I will teach men the meaning of their existence—the overman, the lightning out of the dark cloud of man” (Z 7). Note that, for Nietzsche, the human being is not its own justification.

\(^{121}\) GS 346: “If we simply called ourselves, using an old expression, godless, or unbelievers, or perhaps immoralists, we do not believe that this would even come close to designating us...”

\(^{122}\) It is instructive that Nietzsche considered the Buddha capable of producing an equally ‘tremendous, gruesome shadow,’ particularly in light of his statement in *Beyond Good and Evil* that “Europe seems threatened by a new Buddhism” [BGE 202]. Nietzsche has some strange bedfellows in this recognition of
God, then, is already dead. What, then, is truly ‘vanquished’ when the shadow of God is overcome?

The announcement of God’s death continues directly from the final words of aphorism 107, already mentioned above: “And as long as you are in any way ashamed before yourselves, you do not yet belong with us” (GS 107). The ongoing, as yet unconquered shadow of God is human shame.

The madman’s parody of Diogenes, bringing news of God’s death in The Gay Science, continues with a series of questions: “Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?” (GS 125). The future of human worthiness is the true question of God’s death.

It is not only that confidence in the Christian God was a symptom of alienated human self-confidence and affirmation (Feuerbach’s argument), but also that the Christian God produced a peculiar and painful self-consciousness: “But he—had to die: he looked with eyes that saw everything—he saw the depths and abysses of man, all man’s hidden disgrace and ugliness. His [compassion] knew no shame: he crept into my dirtiest corners. This most curious, most over-importunate, over-compassionate god had to die. He always saw me: I desired to take revenge on such a witness—or cease to live myself” (Z, ‘The Ugliest Man’).

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Buddhism’s potential cultural power in the modern West. Then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger commented, in a March, 1997 interview with L’Express, that “Someone had rightly predicted in the 1950s that the challenge to the Church in the twentieth century would not be Marxism, but Buddhism.” For a reflection on Ratzinger’s interview, see Leo Lefebure, “Cardinal Ratzinger’s Comments on Buddhism,” in Buddhist-Christian Studies, Vol. 18 (1998), p. 221.
The moment has come in which the human capacity for affirmation of self and world will have to be structured by something other than theism. This is in part why Nietzsche must quietly criticize Buddhism throughout *The Gay Science*. At the moment when God’s death is announced, Buddhism threatens to emerge as a pleasantly non-theistic Christianity, further undermining human confidence in the real source of joy—the will to power.

“From the start,” writes Nietzsche, “the Christian faith is a sacrifice: a sacrifice of all freedom, all pride, all self-confidence of the spirit; at the same time, enslavement and self-mockery, self-mutilation” (BGE 46). On the face of it, Nietzsche’s strident critique of slave morality\(^{123}\) seems to make an empirical historical point: *doulos*, slave, is an extraordinarily prominent term in the Greek New Testament. Among the metaphors for ‘Christian’ (which itself only appears three times), the *doulos* of God is the most frequent, with 124 separate occurrences.\(^{124}\)

Nietzsche was in fact mistaken about the slave origins of the Christian movement. We find, instead, rich benefactors in archaeological inscriptions; women of status in the New Testament itself; the presence of some ‘wise’ and ‘mighty’ among the congregation at Corinth; Ignatius pleading with his readers in the Roman churches that

\(^{123}\) “Christianity,” writes Nietzsche, “destroyed the faith in his [particular, personal] ‘virtues’ in every single individual; it led to the disappearance from the face of the earth of all those paragons of virtue of whom there was no dearth in antiquity—those popular personalities who, imbued with faith in their own perfection, went about with the dignity of a great matador” (GS 122). The full force of Nietzsche’s wrath is reserved primarily for Christianity, but he also writes of Jews as forerunners of self-disdain: “The Jews... had a more profound contempt for the human being in themselves than any other people” (GS 136). Nietzsche is elsewhere deeply critical of modern anti-Semitism.

they should not interfere in his martyrdom, and thereby presuming their power to so intervene; and epistolary language designed to be heard by the educated.  

Nietzsche’s argument was rooted less in an accurate sociological reading of ancient literatures, and more in a need to present an origin for unnecessary shame.

But if early Christian communities were not, in fact, composed primarily of slaves or lower classes, why did Paul and other New Testament writers so consistently use the term *doulos* to invoke the basic meaning of Christian identity? Does this simply reveal a *spirit* of masochistic abjection? “The entire morality of the Sermon on the Mount should be seen in this context: man takes positive pleasure in violating himself with excessive demands…” (HH 137).

The New Testament metaphor of the *doulos* actually suggests very different meanings, not unrelated to Nietzsche’s own central concerns: the Christian as *doulos* certainly invokes an implicit turn toward the *Kyrios*, the Lord or Master, but this is

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125 Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 29-32. Rodney Stark has noted that “For most of the twentieth century historians and sociologists agreed that, in its formative days, Christianity was a movement of the dispossessed—a haven for Rome’s slaves and impoverished masses. …These views seem to have first gained ascendency among scholars in Germany. Thus New Testament scholars trace this view to Deissmann [1908], while sociologists look to Troeltsch [1911].” But those years were, of course, the first and perhaps most intensive years of Nietzsche’s cultural influence: the early-century German origin of the thesis on the lower-class origins of early Christianity suggests a direct or indirect Nietzschean influence. During the nineteenth century, historians had emphasized the under-representation of lower classes in the early church. One senses that Nietzsche’s ideas became, for a brief historical moment, so broadly influential as to make invisible his interpretive innovation. Most interestingly, in my view, is the fact that such historical views helped to justify the later rise of liberation theology.

126 Lou Salomé, following her psychoanalytic training among Freud’s circle in Vienna, recalled that “The first person with whom I talked about the matter of [bisexuality] was Nietzsche, himself a sadomasochist. And I remember that afterwards we did not dare to look each other in the eye” (Quoted in Safranski, 337). The comment is interesting, less for its Freudian sexualization of psychology, and more for its frank appraisal of Nietzsche’s interest in self-inflicted pain.
simultaneously a turn away from the dominant, violent social moralities of the Roman
imperium.

Paul and Nietzsche both seek a disruption of de-humanizing social moralities. The New Testament *doulos* is in fact an ironic expression of independence from one kind of social-political relation, but also a profound metaphor of belonging within another set of relations. For Paul, unlike Nietzsche, the turn away from one social morality is a turn *toward* another kind of community. Belonging in Christ offers a deliverance from the norms of violence, freeing the Christian to act differently: “You were bought with a price; *do not* become slaves of men” (1 Cor. 7:23; emphasis added).

Paul, unlike Nietzsche, will not assume that the person can do without any belonging at all. It is pointless, for Paul, to imagine a total moral independence: this is an oxymoron. There can be no communion of Übermenschen. The *doulos*, though, is not a category of abjection or of blind obedience. Its true meaning is human dignity.

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127 Julian Young argues, in *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of Religion* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), that Nietzsche is in fact a far more communal thinker than most readers, including Kaufmann, have perceived. Young foregrounds, instead, Nietzsche’s “proximity to the Volkish tradition,” in which the health of a people is privileged over the health of any given individual. For Young, “it is not the case that the social totality is valued for the sake of the higher types. Rather, the higher types are valued for the sake of the social totality” (3). Nietzsche does suggest at times that persons of noble stature belong together, and also writes, in *Will to Power* 287, that “My philosophy aims at an ordering of rank: not at an individualistic morality. The ideas of the herd should rule in the herd—but not reach out beyond it: the leaders of the herd require a fundamentally different valuation for their own actions, as do the independent, or the ‘beasts of prey,’ etc.”

However, Nietzsche’s *master morality* contains none of the enforcing or socializing mechanisms that constitute a ‘morality’ elsewhere in Nietzsche’s writing. There is a quiet incoherence here. Neither Nietzsche nor Young explain how a morality shared by noble persons can have any binding force. Zarathustra is, after all, the prophet who *fails* when he addresses himself to the people as a whole, and whose followers are barren of any noble trace. (Compare Zarathustra’s encounters with his first listeners, following his emergence from the mountain, with the Buddha’s initial meeting on the road with an entirely indifferent skeptic.)
Early Christian writings are able to assert distance from one sort of political community because they simultaneously recognize the broader constitution of their lovedness in another kingdom. Nietzsche’s kingdom of affirmation, however, is entirely contained in the individual—and this is not, in history or in fact, a viable anthropology. Affirmation and connection to others go together.

Nietzschean autonomy attempts to advance the necessary social distance, sometimes named as nobility or ‘greatness,’ which will supposedly free us from the demands of shame and ‘bad conscience.’ A Nietzschean ideology of isolation, an ‘argument of growing solitude’ (GS 50), is the basic condition of that greatness. Nietzsche made it seem plausible that moral independence, 128 which is actually a quotidian feature of the modernist self-image, is in fact a mark of the highest heroism.

However, what is most surprising is the fact that, at the moment of the noble person’s imagined and frankly romantic self-separation from others, the monstrous conscience does not actually disappear:

Independence is for the very few; it is a privilege of the strong. And whoever attempts it even with the best right but without inner constraint proves that he is probably not only strong, but also daring to the point of recklessness. He enters into a labyrinth, he multiplies a thousandfold the dangers which life brings with it in any case, not the least of which is that no one can see how and where he loses his way, becomes lonely, and is torn piecemeal by some minotaur of conscience. (BGE 29)

128 These resonances are central to the power and allure of Nietzsche’s writing. He is a master of the inclusively conspiratorial tone. Nietzsche writes: “And the philosopher will betray something of his own ideal when he posits: ‘He shall be greatest who can be loneliest, the most concealed, the most deviant, the human being beyond good and evil, the master of his virtues, he that is overrich in will. Precisely this shall be called greatness: being capable of being as manifold as whole, as ample as full’ (BGE 212). It remains unclear how one may be deviant in isolation.
In *The Gay Science* and *Beyond Good and Evil*, shame is presented as the demand made by communal moralities; the ancient herd and slave morality each produce self-accusation as a condition of belonging. Nobility lies precisely in the avoidance of such entrapments. There are hints in these works, however, that the singular conscience risks a savagery of its own. “Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster” (BGE 146).

Nietzsche emphasizes that the Übermensch must be one given to his own self-overcoming—and the primary focus of such overcoming is a victory over the herd instinct that makes us vulnerable to shame. Self-overcoming is the will to power purifying itself of bad-conscience—all need for connection.

The all-too-human “reactive forces” of the bad conscience, *ressentiment*, the ascetic ideal, and shame function to divide the will to power: “*they decompose, they separate active force,*” writes Deleuze, “*from what it can do.*”¹²⁹ In the will to power, however, Nietzsche seeks to marshal the destructive aspect on behalf of its own destruction. Deleuze writes:

> Active negation or active destruction is the state of the strong-minded who destroy the reactive element within themselves ...; “it is the condition of strong spirits and wills, and these do not find it possible to stop with the negative of ‘judgment’; their nature demands *active negation*” (WP 24).¹³⁰

Self-overcoming is the integration of the divided will.

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¹³⁰ Ibid, 102.
In the *Genealogy of Morals* (1887), Nietzsche articulates more thoroughly the crucial importance of a noble self-contempt. While shame had been, in Nietzsche’s earlier work, an affect which undermines all self-affirming nobility, and was therefore a focus of abrasive critique, Nietzsche now upholds a certain kind of self-contempt as self-overcoming *par excellence*.

No longer a pure abolitionist of shame, as he had been in his earlier work, Nietzsche speaks increasingly of the noble human being as “one who has power over himself, who knows how to speak and be silent, who delights in being severe and hard with himself and respects all severity and hardness” (BGE 260). Shame is the affect produced by the original communal threat of isolation, but self-severity is the work of self-fashioning greatness. Nobility requires an ineradicable capacity for creative self-contempt.

In the figure of the ascetic, Nietzsche had detected “an abundant, over-abundant enjoyment at one’s own suffering, at making oneself suffer—and wherever man allows himself to be persuaded to self-denial in the *religious* sense, or to self-mutilation... he is secretly lured and pushed forward by his cruelty, by those dangerous thrills of cruelty turned *against oneself*” (BGE 229). The noble person, unlike others, is able to marshal their instinctual self-dominance, adopting an ascetic intensity for more vital purposes:

For fundamentally [this instinct] is the same active force that is at work on a grander scale in those [noble] artists of violence and organizers who build states... only here [among the ascetics] the material upon which the form-giving and ravishing nature of this force vents itself is man himself, his whole ancient animal self—and *not*, as in that greater and more obvious phenomenon, some *other* man, *other* men. This secret self-ravishment, this artists’ cruelty, this delight in imposing a form upon
oneself as a hard, recalcitrant, suffering material and in burning a will, a critique, a contradiction, a contempt, a No into it, this uncanny, dreadfully joyous labor of a soul voluntarily at odds with itself that makes itself suffer out of joy in making suffer—eventually this entire active ‘bad conscience’—you will have guessed it—as the womb of all ideal and imaginative phenomena, also brought to light an abundance of strange new beauty and affirmation, and perhaps beauty itself. (GM 2.18)

Nietzschean self-production depends upon askesis, and his former distinction between self-purifying ascetic and noble now becomes far less definitive.

In the tonal centerpiece of Thus Spoke Zarathustra—the chapter entitled ‘Of Self-Overcoming’—self-overcoming itself is deeply intrinsic to the nature of the one who commands, for “he who cannot obey himself will be commanded.” The noble mastery of an external world demands, first, an internal mastery of self. The will to power that is turned toward others must be first turned toward oneself.

Zarathustra announces: “Alas! The time of the most contemptible man is coming, the man who can no longer despise himself” (Z, Prologue, 5). He reflects, “I have yet found no one who has despised himself more deeply: even that [would be] height.” Noble self-despising, ‘despectio sui’ (GM 3.18)—these are forms of the most profound self-creation.

Gilles Deleuze argues that this active, integrative negation is not at all the same thing as the turning against oneself that can be found in ‘bad conscience’ and shame. I agree. In fact, the creative destruction of the will to power, directed against reactive forms of negativity, is what separates Nietzschean self-affirmation from the more simplistic self-compassion of contemporary therapeutic Buddhist practice. The structure of the will to power, in which negation is turned creatively against itself, is
aligned much more closely with the pre-modern Mahāyāna lojong instruction: *drive all blames into one*.

However, although Deleuze is right that Nietzschean negation is not the same thing as shame, neither does it actually heal self-aversion. Nietzsche believes that once the will has been unified as affirmation, “The small, petty, reactive man will not recur.”¹³¹ But this unification depends upon, and then strengthens further, a fierce Nietzschean autonomy—an inviolable distance from the other. The will to power does not connect the person to anything beyond himself, and there is no human being capable of such isolation, unified or not. Unification of the affirmative will in isolation must necessarily be a failure; lack of connection is anthropologically untenable.

If we are to understand the failure of Nietzsche’s projects of affirmation, the importance of his ‘argument of growing solitude,’ his ideology of noble isolation, is difficult to overstate. Nietzsche’s attempts to draw on an extra-personal source of affirmative joy did not work, because they seek separation, which is actually a defensive goal, more than a human one.

‘Greatness’ and nobility are dislocated from relation—even though greatness itself is a category of implicit comparison with others. The incoherence of the position is simultaneously unresolved and attractive, because it allows the naïve reader to sense that ‘greatness’ is accessible merely through a pose of anti-heroic social alienation. Nietzsche’s rhetoric of self-separating greatness makes it appear that nobility itself is accessible *through* separation. This is appealing anthropological nonsense.

¹³¹ Ibid.
In *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering*, Eleanore Stump, following Thomas Aquinas, argues that ‘willed loneliness,’ a basic expression of human lostness, is only a problem because what we more fundamentally desire is to be creatures defined by connection.\(^{132}\)

Nietzsche seeks to empower the person, or one sort of higher person, to value autonomy instead as his or her most proper teleological purpose. Moralistic self-division can be ended, if one is great enough to renounce connection to all socializing, and therefore self-divisive, demands. The noble person thus connects not to others, but supposedly to vitality itself.

However, if, as Kaufmann suggests, Nietzsche is wrong that human beings are *primarily* expressions of the will to power, then his proposal of noble separation is unlikely to find acolytes—except perhaps for those who hope to project an adolescent pose of individuation. Nietzsche is ultimately mistaken in his insistence that joy and connection exclude one another; they are in tension, but must be stay in relationship, for either to exist.

Nietzsche is perhaps the clearest exemplar of and spokesperson for the turn-of-the-century shift from Walter Susman’s ‘culture of character,’ defined by ‘ideals of duty, honor, integrity,’ toward a new ‘culture of personality,’ marked by singularly Nietzschean adjectives: “fascinating, stunning, attractive, magnetic, glowing, masterful,

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creative, dominant, forceful.” The voices of the early-century self-help manuals explored by Susman are positively Nietzschean: “To create a personality is power.”

Nietzsche might be helpfully read in light of such manuals of self-creation. Susman nowhere mentions Nietzsche, but one senses that Nietzsche’s explosively popular writing may be one aspect of the fin de siècle rise of new commitments to self-criticism and self-projection, which are always mutually implicated. The creation of the magnetic personality demands new keenness of self-evaluation.

It should be clear that there can actually be no such thing as a culture of personality; personality alone does not impose relational forms strong enough to constitute any but the most momentary culture. Charisma, in its Weberian sense, is oriented toward social formation; personality, on the other hand, seeks recognition; it produces nothing longitudinal or communal.

Nietzsche himself intuited this: “To say it briefly (for a long time people will still keep silent about it): What will not be built any more henceforth, and cannot be built any more, is—a society in the old sense of that word; to build that, everything is lacking, above all the material. All of us are no longer material for a society; this is a truth for which the time has come” (GS 356).

“I never speak to masses,” Nietzsche protests (EH, ‘Why I am a Destiny’), but the empirical evidence, and Nietzsche’s own rhetorical strategy of appealing to a stark desire for distinction, say otherwise. Dostoevsky’s Raskolnikov, in order to test an

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133 Susman, 280. One senses here, just as in the previous discussion of the twentieth century historical hypothesis of lower-class Christian origins, that Nietzsche is again invisibly, but profoundly, influential.
intuition regarding his own greatness, marshals an arbitrary force to prove his separation from the moral order. The experiment of ‘greatness’ results, of course, in Raskolnikov’s imprisonment for the murder of a pitifully defenseless person. Such greatness is predicated on an absurd and violent separation from others.

The creation of the ‘magnetic, dominant, forceful, powerful’ self (Susman) requires not connection with others, but rather a sense of what others will consistently desire, fear, or respect. Personality creation is a form of product development. Nietzsche’s self-overcoming is quickly reduced to the therapeutic slogans of middle management: to manage others we must manage ourselves (Drucker). Gilles Deleuze writes: “Nietzsche—the creator of the philosophy of values—would have seen, if he had lived longer, his [philosophy]...serve and turn into the basest and most insipid ideological conformism.”

The ‘personality market’ is now entirely saturated. It is closely aligned with a widespread banality of self-hatred. We moderns, Nietzsche writes, have acquired “a refined taste” for self-torture; it is our “distinctive art” (GM 2.24).

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134 Deleuze, 92.
135 C. Wright Mills wrote, in 1951, that the rise of white collar work required the simultaneous development of a ‘personality market’: “For in the great shift from manual skills to the art of ‘handling,’ selling, and servicing people, personal or even intimate traits of the employee are drawn into the sphere of exchange and become of commercial relevance, become commodities in the labor market. Whenever there is a transfer of control over one individual’s personal traits to another for a price, a sale of those traits which affect one’s impressions upon others, a personality market arises” (C. Wright Mills, White Collar [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951], p. 182).
2.3 AUTONOMY OVER ASSENT

The Eternal Return occurs to Nietzsche with revelatory, heteronomous force. It comes as something received. But Nietzsche later ruminates: “I do not want life again. How did I endure it?”

Epiphanies, even those that arrive with joy, are of little use, where there are no practices of repetitive receptivity. The assumption that insights alone are enough to produce transformation is one of the strangest conceits of therapeutic culture. Any insight that remains merely propositional can always become an object of cognitive deliberation about its ‘reality.’ A more transformative trust is always dependent upon its own repetition.

Religious imagination often or always depends upon specific ritual repetition to help us become more and more capable of the affirmation it calls forth in us. Repetition is theoretically important for the Return as well. “[T]ransfigured existence,” writes Paul Valadier, in a discussion of the Return, “is an ever renewed act....” Only in the light of repetition can the Eternal Return be understood “as radical and fundamental in scope as religion traditionally has been.”

“It would perhaps not force Nietzsche’s thought too much,” notes Henri Birault, “if we said that, for him, the principal source of all that we call action today is hatred or

136 Noted by Walter Kaufmann in *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 370. It may be that Zarathustra is not so much a representative of Nietzsche’s views, but the attempt to create a figure capable of convincing Nietzsche of his own visions.

137 Valadier, 255.

discontent with what is, while every veritable creation proceeds from love and love
only, from an immense gratitude for what is, a gratitude that seeks to impress the seal
of eternity on what is...”139

Why, then, does no one submit themselves to the dictates of the Return, including Nietzsche himself?

Birault articulates Nietzsche as he perhaps wished to be, but could not become. Our lives are too full of deadened affect and general somnambulism for any mere momentary sincerity or insight to make us capable of an eternal affirmation of imperfection in all its details. Fatally, Nietzsche advocates no ritual, no practice of the body’s own repetition of receptivity to affirmation.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith, tracing the changing meanings of ‘belief’ in early modernity, notes that whereas belief had previously been interchangeable with belove—and whereas it had been a verb meaning “to love, to hold dear, to cherish; conceptually, to recognize; actively, to entrust oneself to, to give one’s heart, to make a commitment”140—the meanings of belief and faith became, in early modernity, not only conflated, but reduced to a propositional assent without any essential involvement of the person herself. The religious life becomes assertion rather than reception—an assertiveness which finds its way to the heart of the Eternal Return as well. Affirmation

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becomes not a characteristic of reality itself, to be received or not, but rather a formulation of the autonomous and assertive self.\footnote{The genealogy of this confusion is complex and debatable, traceable to a range of ecclesial and theological developments, including the advent of medieval nominalism (see Hans Boersma, *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2011]). The modernist understanding of faith as projective assertion seems to originate also in the teachings of Luther. Luther’s salvation by *sola fide*, while part of a bold attempt to reclaim faith as an experience of grace, may have produced the opposite of its intended effect—making faith instead, eventually, a work of the human mind and will. Takes, for instance, Luther’s insistence that “It is not enough to know what the sacrament is and signifies,” but that one must “firmly believe that you have received it,” (Timothy Lull, ed. *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings* [Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1989], p. 253). If the sacrament is actually a source of faith, however, our reception of the sacrament obviates any need to make any attempt to *firmly believe*. This is like forcing God’s hand when it is already open.}

‘Belief’ became in significant part the category of thought by which skeptics, reducing others’ faith [that of other Christian communities, and of other non-European religious traditions] to manageability, translated that faith into mundane terms. ...Therein was wrought a transforming of what had been a noble and open relation into a dubious and closed one. What had been a relation between the human and something external and higher... was transformed by the new thinking into a self-subsistent, mundane operation of the mind.\footnote{Smith, p. 144.}

Nietzsche relies far too heavily on precisely such autonomous, self-subsistent assertion, rather than a repeated receptivity in faith. When Zarathustra encounters a young shepherd with a serpent stuck fast in his throat—‘writing, choking, convulsed, his face distorted’—he orders the shepherd to bite the serpent’s head. The serpent, circular symbol of eternity, is consumed. Immediately, an astonishing change occurs: “No longer a shepherd, no longer a man—a transformed being, surrounded with light, laughing! Never yet on earth had any man laughed as he laughed! O my brothers, I heard a laughter that was no human laughter—and now a thirst consumes me, a longing that is never stilled.”\footnote{See *Zarathustra*, “Of the Vision and the Riddle,” Part 2.}
The notion that the Eternal Return, so sacramentally received through the figure of the snake, need be received but once, is a basic Nietzschean and modern naïvete. The quiet longing for commitment, in Nietzsche and in others, displaces the necessary repetition of commitment itself. The symbols of eternity must be consumed again and again. Autonomy militates against such repetitions.

Nietzsche speaks of Christian faith as ‘self-mutilation’—a “sacrificio dell’intelletto a la Pascal” (BGE 229). He seeks, therefore, “A new way of life, not a new faith” (Antichrist 33). But his new way of life contains none of the formative repetition that would allow it to actually be renewed. A new way of life, it turns out, depends upon a far greater trust, and a more thorough relinquishing of autonomy, than Nietzsche can actually produce or allow. Faith is reduced to “some fundamental certainty that a noble soul has about itself” (BGE 287).

It is incoherent to hope for Dionysian joy without relinquishing autonomy. So autonomously imprisoned, Nietzsche’s assertions about loving fate ultimately lose their force. His constructions of affirmation hold no persuasive power. Autonomous assertion turns out to be less creative than the receptivity of faith, which connects us to both ourselves and to others.

To show how dangerous human connection is, for the will to power, it is helpful finally to turn to Nietzsche’s critique of altruistic ‘compassion.’ Compassion connects us, and thereby fosters the very relationships that make shame probable for ourselves and others. Compassion erodes the autonomy that allows the noble person to withstand communal demands. It is also an expression of one’s own distorted will to power over
the weak—any power that seeks such an easy domination has no real superabundance.

In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche had asked, “Is it good for you yourselves to be above all full of compassion? And is it good for those who suffer?” The answer, on both counts, is no. “When people try to benefit someone in distress, the intellectual frivolity with which those moved by compassion assume the role of fate is for the most part outrageous; one simply knows nothing of the whole inner sequence and intricacies that are distress for me or for you” (GS 338). Compassion ruins the whole process of self-overcoming and separation that is itself the path to vital growth.

Nietzsche rightly protests the self-righteousness of those who assert solicitous simulations of intimacy, “I’m concerned for you,” when they are so often ignorant about what is painful for another, and about what kinds of suffering may in fact be necessary: “The whole economy of my soul... the way new springs and needs break open, the way in which old wounds are healing, the way whole periods of the past are shed—all such things that may be involved in distress are of no concern to our dear compassionate friends....”

Nietzsche himself ironically accuses these ‘compassionate ones’ of having no shame in order to highlight his polemic subtext: the insistence that the compassionate ones produce shame.

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144 Among the lojong directives there is this: “Don’t seek others’ pain as the limbs of your own happiness.”

145 Levinas, too, objects to any mere feeling, ‘compassionate’ or not, as the marker of the ethical; thus, his emphasis on receptivity to the infinite demand of non-violence, encountered in the concrete ‘face’ of the other. For Levinas, no particular affective status is accentuated. He emphasizes the ‘height’ of the vulnerable other in part to counteract the kinds of condescension that also troubled Nietzsche.
This is, for Nietzsche, unconscionable: “ Truly, I do not like them, the compassionate who are happy in their compassion: they are too lacking in shame. If I must be compassionate I still do not want to be called compassionate; and if I am compassionate then it is preferably from a distance” (Z, ‘Of the Compassionate’\textsuperscript{146}). To keep another from their necessary suffering is a violence against them, an intervention that stunts their capacity for vitality and therefore for joy.

Compassion also expresses an avoidance of one’s own nobility: “All such arousing of [compassion]... is secretly seductive, for our ‘own way’ is too hard and demanding and too remote from the love and gratitude of others, and we do not really mind escaping from it—and from our very own conscience—to flee into the conscience of the others and into the lovely temple of the ‘religion of [compassion]’” (GS 338).

In his remarks on \textit{Mitleid}, compassion, Nietzsche explicitly attacks ‘the morality that is very prestigious nowadays’ (GS 21).\textsuperscript{147} Nietzsche makes the celebration of any self-important compassion ridiculous, and he should be given immense credit for this critique of self-centered moral seriousness\textsuperscript{148}: “I want to teach them what is understood

\textsuperscript{146} See, also, ‘The Ugliest Man,’ in which Zarathustra is warned against his own propensity for \textit{Mitleid}, and in which God himself is accused: “His [compassion] knew no shame...”

\textsuperscript{147} “They are at one, the lot of them, in the cry and the impatience of [compassion], in their deadly hatred of suffering generally, in their... faith in the morality of \textit{shared} [compassion], as if that were morality in itself, being the height, the \textit{attained} height of man...” (BGE 202).

\textsuperscript{148} “One might even say that wherever on earth solemnity, seriousness, mystery, and gloomy coloring still distinguish the life of man and a people, something of the \textit{terror} that formerly attended all promises, pledges, and vows on earth is still \textit{effective}: the past, the longest, deepest and sternest past, breathes upon us and rises up in us whenever we become ‘serious’” (GM 2.3).
by so few today, least of all by these preachers of [compassion]: *to share not suffering but joy*” (GS 338).  

The question is how to foster any shared joy.

Nietzsche is right that it is often far more effective and helpful to express one’s own hopeful *confidence* (GS 272) for a suffering human being, than it is to indicate that one believes one simply *understands* her suffering. (Empathy, as Jesse Prinz and others have argued, contains a cognitive component, which distinguishes empathy from mere affective contagion, but which also means that empathy can be woefully inaccurate.)

The expression of empathy may become damagingly iatrogenic, inducing the suffering that it claims to perceive, because a suffering person so often seeks connection, and will accede even to a false diagnosis, when any diagnosis at all seems to promise a form of ongoing connection with the therapeutic observer. The pattern is potentially insidious.

It may seem, then, that Nietzsche is simply to be congratulated for showing that human compassion, on its own, is so deeply imperfect. (This would have been unsurprising, to say the least, to Nietzsche’s grandfathers and father, all Lutheran

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149 “Truly,” says Zarathustra, “I did this and that for the afflicted; but it always seemed to me I did better things when I learned to enjoy myself better. ...and if we learn better to enjoy ourselves, we best unlearn how to do harm to others and to contrive harm” (Z, ‘Of the Compassionate’).

150 The Mahayana generally presents an interesting response to this problem: the gradual, epochs-long development of a Buddha involves the slow perfection of enlightened capacities of affective and cognitive perception, so that compassion becomes less and less prone to error, and increasingly generous, effective, and liberating in response to individual beings’ particular forms of suffering. Compassion is the nature of Mahayana ontology, but compassion is not, therefore, generic in relation to beings.
pastors. Luther is the original ‘master of suspicion’ about the hidden motivations of human love.\textsuperscript{151)}

Nietzsche’s basic denial of the vital value of connection was, however, a source of profound personal ambivalence for him. He was consistently uncertain about the sort of absolute autonomy that he celebrates at times in his philosophical work.

In \textit{The Gay Science}, Nietzsche had been explicit that his way of thinking “requires a warlike soul, a desire to hurt, a delight in saying No, a hard skin,” and, without these attributes, one who attempts such thinking “would slowly die of open and internal wounds” (GS 32). In \textit{Beyond Good and Evil}, he writes: “Finally consider that even the seeker after knowledge forces his spirit to recognize things against the inclination of the spirit, and often enough also against the wishes of his heart—by way of saying No where he would like to say Yes, love, and adore—and thus acts as an artist and transfigurer of cruelty” (BGE 229).\textsuperscript{152}

The foremost requirement of creative cruelty is the denial of the heart’s sensitivity toward oneself and others. Nietzsche, rather than living with ambiguity, seeks to overcome the values of humane connection, as a snare. But it was almost certainly Nietzsche’s own extraordinary sensitivity that generated, and then threatened, his vision of the hard, heroic,\textsuperscript{153} and self-transcending figure of nobility.

\textsuperscript{151} Luther often anticipates certain aspects of Nietzsche, though from a different direction of inquiry entirely: “Hence the loftiest virtues of the best of men are... not submissive to the law of God and not capable of submitting to it...” (Lull, 202). See \textit{The Bondage of the Will} in particular, for a Lutheran prologue to \textit{The Gay Science}.

\textsuperscript{152} Here, again: modernist belief as assertive and intellectual force.

\textsuperscript{153} Nietzsche hopes to be read by “the kind of people who alone matter: I mean those who are heroic” (GS 292).
In August of 1880, a year before the revelation of the *Eternal Return*, Nietzsche wrote to his friend Peter Gast, “Even now my entire philosophy wavers after just an hour of friendly conversation with complete strangers. It strikes me as so foolish to insist on being right at the expense of love.”\(^{154}\) In July, 1883, Nietzsche wrote to his friend Malwida von Meysenburg:

Schopenhauer’s [compassion] has always been the major source of problems in my life... This is not only a soft spot that would have made any magnanimous Greek burst into laughter but also a serious practical hazard. We should persevere in realizing our idea of man; we ought to be adamant about enforcing it on others as well as on ourselves, and thus exert a creative impact! However, this also entails holding one’s own [compassion] in check and treating everything that goes against our ideal... as enemies. You notice how I am ‘reading a moral lesson’ to myself, but attaining this ‘wisdom’ has almost cost me my life.\(^{155}\)

In 1888, less than a year before the Basel theologian Franz Overbeck travelled urgently to Turin to find his friend manically incapacitated, Overbeck had received a letter from Nietzsche that spoke of a ‘black despair,’ expressing sadness about a “perpetual lack of truly refreshing and healing human love, the absurd isolation [actual human contact] involves and the fact that any remaining connection to people only causes afflictions.”\(^{156}\)

The desire for human connection is a quiet presence throughout Nietzsche’s philosophical writing, albeit primarily as a focus of sharp, perhaps somewhat overwrought critique. The ‘last temptation’ of Zarathustra is *Mitleid*. Nietzsche himself clearly wishes to be free of his own compassionate sensitivity to suffering. Zarathustra

\(^{154}\) Safranski, 166, 204.
\(^{155}\) Safranski, 167.
\(^{156}\) Safranski, 312.
exclaims, “May my destiny ever lead across my path only those who... do not sorrow or suffer, and those with whom I can have hope and repast and honey in common!” (Z, ‘Of the Compassionate’).

Zarathustra’s wish is of course utterly ridiculous. In its objection to suffering, connection, and weakness, Zarathustra rejects precisely the full range of Dionysian acceptance and affirmation that Zarathustra claims to pursue. Zarathustra laughs, but it turns out that he does so through clenched teeth; I find the laughter unconvincing.

Nietzsche’s promotion of creative self-contempt, ‘artists’ cruelty,’ is necessarily directed against the human desire for connection: loneliness, the hope of acceptance, the need for care, and the desire to express care. But autonomous self-cruelty steps into a hall of mirrors. The Nietzschean self is finally incoherent: self-cruelty will not coexist with an extra-personal joy.

Personality culture and Nietzsche both demand a relentless self-fashioning autonomy. There is nothing to which we can give ourselves, and nothing to receive. In fact, “There is not enough love and goodness in the world for us to be permitted to give any of it away to imaginary things” (HH 129).

Autonomy cannot allow itself to perceive the superabundance of love and goodness that it secretly desires. To be constituted, instead, by relations of love that extend to all persons is to renounce all such self-manufacturing. To be so constituted requires repeated refuge.

We turn now to lojong.
CHAPTER 3

AUTONOMY AS IGNORANCE:
A COMMENTARY ON THE LOJONG SLOGAN—DRIVE ALL BLAMES INTO ONE

3.1 CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins with a critical overview of contemporary literatures of therapeutic Buddhist self-compassion. This critique, however, serves a larger purpose in the pages below, which is to uncover a richer range of meanings in the Tibetan lojong (awareness-cultivation) teaching, *Drive all blames into one*, than those outlined in recent lojong commentarial literatures.

This instruction, nominally about a particular kind of ‘self-blame,’ may at first seem to some readers to have little to do with compassion of any kind. *Drive all blames into one*, which does ask us to interrupt our aversion toward others by perceiving, instead, the roots of suffering in our own self-centered and self-constructing patterns of vision and affect, is in some sense a confrontational teaching. But it is also a teaching that is deeply embedded in compassionate vision and intention. And in order to recognize *Drive all blames into one* as a teaching of compassion, it will be necessary to briefly outline the Mahāyāna doctrinal developments that most directly inform the commentary below.

Both modern therapeutic self-compassion and Tibetan lojong are concerned with a re-habituation of the human person. However, I will suggest that therapeutic self-compassion remains closely tethered to modernist assumptions about autonomy, and that such assumptions may ultimately impede access to the very sources of
compassion that lojong itself seeks to cultivate, in ways sometimes quite different from the strategies of modernist therapeutic Buddhism.

In the first section of the chapter, I offer an overview of contemporary self-compassion literatures, as well as an account of the relationship between therapeutic Buddhism and the Pali canonical and commentarial sources from which it claims to draw.

In the second section, I offer an account of important qualities of self-critique, *hiri* and *ottappa*, or *shame* and *karmic imagination*, in those early Buddhist sources, and attempt to say why these ‘bright guardians’ are so necessary for the path of creative *sati* (*‘mindfulness,’* or skillful recollection). This is in part a way to show how much more central creative self-critique has been for pre-modern Buddhist understanding, than has any autonomous self-compassion.

In the third section, I develop early Mahāyāna themes of emptiness, compassion, and the figure of the *bodhisattva*, as foundations for understanding the way that *lojong*, as an expression of the Mahāyāna, confronts false assumptions of autonomy while simultaneously accessing transcendent sources of wisdom and compassion from beyond samsaric and conditioned modes of perception.

In the fourth section, I have presented particular Tibetan Nyingma- Kagyü perspectives on emptiness, the altruistic intention of awakened compassion (Skt.: *bodhicitta*), and Buddha Nature (Skt.: *tathāgatagarbha*) that most directly inform my commentarial work on the *lojong* slogan *Drive all blames into one*. I have drawn in particular from understandings of mind developed in the *Uttaratantra*, and on medieval
Tibetan understandings of *shentong*, other-emptiness, as these views found expression in the work of the fourteenth-century Jonang figure Dölpopa, and later influenced the nineteenth-century *lojong* commentator and teacher Jamgön Kongtrul. All of these doctrinal sources, both in their critical encounter with autonomous self-conditioning, and in their articulations of deep reliance on the unconditioned, help to disrupt assumptions about a self that is separate from others, and ultimately seek to turn us toward a compassion beyond all autonomy, self-compassionate or otherwise.

Finally, in the fifth section of this chapter, I develop an extended account of *Drive all blames into one* as a teaching, not of autonomous self-aversion or self-compassion, but of refuge in an always-present potentiality of pervasive compassion.

### 3.2 SELF-COMPASSION IN CONTEMPORARY THERAPEUTIC BUDDHISM AND BUDDHAGHOSA

We begin with contemporary therapeutic Buddhism. In 1979, the year of Christopher Lasch’s *The Culture of Narcissism*, and the year in which Walter Susman published his essay on twentieth-century ‘personality culture,’ the Buddhist teacher Stephen Levine dedicated a chapter of his book *A Gradual Awakening* to the problem of unworthiness: “I see in some of the most beautiful beings I know,” wrote Levine, “that the hottest fire they have to work with is their sense of unworthiness.”\(^{157}\)

Levine initially presented this unworthiness as an almost timeless human conditioning, but simultaneously expressed a basic uncertainty about the true sources of that negativity. Unworthiness has been, he wrote, “acquired over many lifetimes—if

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not billions of mind-moments in this life—when we were told or thought we were wrong or inadequate. Everybody seems to have it to some degree. I don’t know if every culture encourages it to the same degree as ours, but it is very prevalent in this society.”

Similar questions became increasingly prominent over the following decade.

Jack Kornfield recalls the following exchange:

In 1989, at one of the first international Buddhist teacher meetings, we Western teachers brought up the enormous problem of unworthiness and self-criticism, shame and self-hatred, and how frequently they arose in Western students’ practice. The Dalai Lama and other Asian teachers were shocked. They could not quite comprehend the word self-hatred. It took the Dalai Lama ten minutes of conferring with Geshe Thupten Jinpa, his translator, even to understand it.

The basic confusion is not, in the end, the Dalai Lama’s.

Self-aversion is intrinsic to personality culture. For Stephen Levine, those who are ‘most beautiful’ are also most exposed to feelings of unworthiness. Personality cultures foster performative power as a force of attraction. Such power, however, depends upon a capacity for controlling judgment toward those aspects of self that cannot command the attention of others. In an economy of intensified competition,

158 Levine, 52.
160 I have already noted that there is really no such thing as a personality ‘culture,’ in any coherent sense. I retain the phrase here to keep continuity with Susman’s analysis. ‘Character,’ in Susman’s work, is the real foundation of shared moral, economic, and social life. Character, however, depends for its formation upon shame, albeit a shame rooted in the basic desire for greater connection to the life of the community. This shame is quite different from the self-aversion of personality culture, which is a desire not so much to be connected, but to be recognized.
161 Levine: “We are encouraged to be someone special, to be praiseworthy, to be outstanding” (49).
162 Perfectionism and competitiveness are closely related. See lojong slogan thirty-five: Don’t try to be the fastest.
we must quickly become competent in the marketing and sale of selfhood. Such competencies depend in turn on our ability to generate, from a very young age, the recognition of others—accepted into the right schools and circumstances, valued precisely for our performative abilities, rather than for any intrinsic worthiness.\footnote{I'm indebted here to Professor John Makransky, who has helpfully influenced the framing of these issues.}

The restlessly reinvented self, because it is so invested in producing the circumstances of its own recognition and success, is less able to perceive or receive those forms of love that cannot be earned, but only trusted. Put another way, we lose the ability to accept the sort of love that already recognizes us as unconditionally worthy, whenever we accept our unworthiness.\footnote{John Makransky, personal communication, September 17, 2014.}

Love that is earned is always scarce and impermanent: not all persons, it would seem, can be a consistent focus of equal social acclamation; and all such acclamation must be constantly renewed.\footnote{Buddhist traditions emphasize the necessary interrelation of ‘praise and blame’ as an inextricable pair.} Wherever worthiness is limited enough that we must compete with others in order to access it—a basic condition of secularity—the always underlying threat of unworthiness will necessarily produce a fundamental anxiety.\footnote{One might object that character is simply invested in a socially constructed set of rules—rules that individuals use to present or perform themselves in a certain way. Character, just like personality, is about ‘earned care.’ Character cultures, however, depend on relatively stable accounts of human maturity that give us deepened access to ultimate sources of care and love, not just social approbation. Character cultures depend on affirmations of human persons that explicitly transcend particular cultural rules; character, to achieve stability, must be grounded in sources of uncontrollable, unearned care. Character is ultimately the expression of such care, rather than the earning of mere social acceptance.}

It is also true, however, that to be unworthy is to be a potential focus of concern, attention, and special care. There are benefits to self-aversion as a basic mode of samsaric attachment. To perceive oneself as unworthy, to be worse than others, is to
sense, in a very direct way, one’s own distinctiveness. If ultimate acceptance is always there to be received, performance in search of such acceptance quickly becomes unnecessary. Ultimate acceptance is not controllable; self-aversion, on the other hand, is a form of control. “Interestingly enough,” wrote Levine in 1979, as he speculated briefly on the etiologies of unworthiness, “it’s the sense of unworthiness which maintains ego.”

Within families and within cultures, human beings are often terrifyingly exposed to forms of abuse, degradation, and hatred that make it far more difficult for us to sense ourselves as loved. Feminist and psychotherapeutic thinkers are right to emphasize the destructive and epidemiological aspects of those hatreds. External violence is internalized. Violence seeks out, with observant skill, those already subjected to pain.

Public narratives or confessions of personal suffering are increasingly and understandably unassailable—perhaps rightly so: the silencing of victims makes the violent less accountable. Therapeutic culture suggests that the narrative of pain is the overcoming of pain, and at this point, therapeutic and personality cultures coincide: the self-representation of pain is a method of receiving ‘recognition’ (See Illouz, above).

Personality culture has found that pain, as much as joy, is capable of projecting authenticity and producing attraction. This is one source of the commodification of self-expressive confession during the past half-century. It may also be the case that to

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167 Levine, 49.
168 Also Matthew 6:16-18.
confess one’s trauma is to project one’s own life as a narrative of secular self-redemption.

“While trying to be good,” writes Kornfield, recalling his early life, “underneath I had a feeling of being unloved, of forever seeking acceptance.”169 He goes on to narrate a visceral vision of a childhood dominated by an unsatiated hunger for love. Sharon Salzberg, the teacher who had actually asked the Dalai Lama the question about the prominence of shame and self-hatred among Western Buddhist practitioners, narrates a striking moment of emotional catharsis while on meditation retreat. In the midst of her sitting practice, the memory of the truly horrible circumstances surrounding her mother’s death (Salzberg herself had been nine years old) comes to consciousness:

This was more than I could handle sitting in the meditation hall, and I got up and went back to my room. I lay on my bed sweating, too stunned to cry, almost unable to breathe. The swelling of grief that had once closed off my heart drew tightly again. I found myself in a mapless terrain of suffering, a flat, uncontoured land where no change seemed possible. Haunted by my mother’s death, I watched the world turn vague and very cold. The despair of feeling completely alone, the anguish and desolation of my childhood once again suffused all time and eradicated all space.170

The first of the Buddhist ennobling truths, that of dukkha, is an unflinching admission that suffering occurs on both the obvious levels of intense loss and on the micro-levels of more subtle self-concern and its conditioning. There is clearly something important about naming suffering as a fundamental aspect of normal human reality. But Salzberg represents the encounter with her own pain explicitly as a form of counter-cultural,

169 Kornfield, 28.
redemptive heroism. She recounts a conversation with the great Indian adept, Dipa Ma, in which Salzberg is encouraged to become a teacher of meditation precisely because of her status as one who has been exposed to great suffering: “The notion that the unhappiness of my earlier life could serve as the distinction of my abilities [as a meditation teacher] seemed most peculiar. She hadn’t said, ‘You have a full grasp of the Buddhist cosmology and all theoretical applications, therefore you should teach.’ Instead, her criteria were based in the power of moving through great heartache and, rather than being destroyed by it, coming to greater faith—faith in one’s self, faith in the power of love, faith in the movement of life itself.” 171 This is a therapeutic faith, ‘faith in one’s self.’ It effectively replaces ‘the Buddhist cosmology and all theoretical applications.’

Relationships between autobiographical narratives of pain and therapeutic faith have shaped Western Buddhist understandings and experience in profound ways. I want briefly to note that I believe Buddhist-therapeutic teachers have done very beneficial work. I admire these teachers, and I am not opposed to practices of therapeutic self-compassion. I seek, in fact, to enable an increased receptivity to compassion. However, I also argue that the therapeutic Buddhist failure to place compassion in relationship with creative self-critique may actually prevent practitioners from fully accessing compassion itself. This is in large part why I have chosen Drive all blames into one as the pre-modern Buddhist teaching that can be most clearly distinguished, in its assumptions and purposes, from therapeutic Buddhist teaching.

171 Salzberg, 109.
Modern Buddhist teachers of self-compassion as a healing of self-aversion have not usually reflected on self-aversion as an intensive karmic conditioning and self-centered self-invention. The modernist therapeutic sees self-aversion as the result of conditioning by others—shame is, for Tangney and Gilligan, as we saw in Chapter 1, primarily a result of familial abuse and socialization (in this we can now see that they follow Nietzsche). Of course these forms of conditioning are quite strong. But contemporary writing on self-compassion tends to understate the degree to which self-aversion is a strong, and perhaps the strongest, form of continued self-conditioning. Self-aversion is an illusory creation of the damnable self, but a strong vision of self nonetheless.

After consulting with Thubten Jinpa about the strange problem of Western self-hatred, the Dalai Lama turned finally to the assembled teachers and said: “But that’s a mistake. Every being is precious!”172 This work takes the same view.

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Therapeutic psychology often takes on the prestige of an ancient soteriology without being clear about the striking differences between therapeutic and soteriological understandings of Buddhist practices. The pre-modern history of Buddhist thought has viewed critical self-evaluation as essential to liberation. And so the modernist representation of Buddhist practice as a self-compassionate confrontation with self-aversion conceals basic differences between the goals and assumptions of pre-

172 Kornfield, 27.
modern Buddhist thought, on the one hand, and therapeutic culture, on the other. Pre-modern Buddhism is far less interested in self-compassion than has been admitted.

Jack Kornfield, Stephen Levine, Sharon Salzberg, Christopher Germer, Tara Brach and other teachers of the past several decades have spoken of self-aversion as an apparently universal human experience, rooted in the natural damages and distortions of family and culture. (A majority of the teachers just listed hold doctoral degrees in psychology.) But in this, Western teachers have simply answered their own question to the Dalai Lama, from one quite limited perspective.

Christopher Germer has written, “I often wonder why the Dalai Lama was so surprised by this phenomenon [of self-hatred].”173 But the Dalai Lama named a truth that none of the author-teachers mentioned here have actually pursued: self-hatred is a profound mistake of religious vision, a fundamental error of self-reifying karma. Self-hatred is self-invention.

No Western teachers wish to suggest, of course, that the Dalai Lama is ignorant of his own tradition, but if self-compassion as an antidote to supposedly natural self-hatred had been so central to earlier forms of Buddhism as Western Buddhist teachers have regularly claimed, then both the Dalai Lama’s initial confusion about the question, and his answer, cannot make much sense.

One temptation for psychotherapeutic thinkers has been to suggest that cultures where self-hatred is prominent have simply been insufficiently exposed to therapeutic Buddhism itself. Sharon Salzberg asks, “Why is it so hard to extend the same kindness

to ourselves that many of us gladly offer to others? Maybe it’s because in our conventional way of thinking in the West we tend to view compassion as a gift, and bestowing it on ourselves seems selfish or inappropriate. But the ancient wisdom of the East tells us that loving-kindness is something everyone needs and deserves.”

If, however, in ‘Western’ religions such as Christianity, compassion is a gift (the root meaning of *gratia*, grace), it is not clear why self-compassion would become necessary. It is not so much that self-focused compassion would seem selfish, in a situation of grace, but that it would seem redundant. There are almost certainly other reasons why practices of self-compassion feel strange or difficult in our own context.

In “Self-Compassion and Self-Construal in the United States, Thailand, and Taiwan,” psychologists Kristin D. Neff, Kullaya Pisitsungkagarn and Ya-Ping Hsieh found that self-compassion is more prominent in Theravada Buddhist Thailand than it is in the United States or Taiwan. The differential level of self-compassion is tentatively ascribed to the influence of Buddhist practice. The entire article, however, naively reproduces a false equivalence between self-compassionate psychotherapeutic theorizing and Buddhist psychology itself. The authors suggest at the outset that the writings of Jack Kornfield, Sharon Salzberg, and Tara Brach represent “Theravada”

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175 Self-compassion is perhaps most relevant for those who do not sense their own participation in a broader field of affirmation. The supposedly ancient wisdom of self-compassion is surprisingly rooted in modernist autonomy.
Buddhist teachings, when in fact this claim is quite misleading.\(^{177}\) Modern therapeutic writers may have borrowed heavily from Southeast Asian Buddhist insights and practices, and the association with Buddhism affords those psychological writings a certain prestige of origin. But modern therapeutic adaptations of Buddhist practice for purposes of self-soothing, and therapeutic alliances with Buddhist models of mind, do not make therapeutic psychology and Theravada Buddhism (an immensely diverse sociological and historical phenomenon) at all equivalent.\(^{178}\)

When Neff, et al., write that “An interesting question is whether individuals in Asian societies tend to have more self-compassion than those in the West, given that the construct of self-compassion is Asian in origin,” they are presuming a great deal about the origins of ‘the construct.’\(^{179}\)

It would be much more accurate for self-compassion to be understood as a modernist therapeutic usage of Buddhist thought and practice—which would be completely legitimate, and an extension of Buddhism’s own practical experimentation over more than two millennia. This therapeutic usage of Buddhism would be quite

\(^{177}\) Vipassana or ‘insight’ meditation is one aspect of Theravada Buddhism, just as it is an aspect of Tibetan forms of analytic meditation and Japanese Zen. Theravada and Vipassana are not the same thing.

\(^{178}\) Theravada Buddhism as it exists in Burma, Thailand, and Sri Lanka is internally and locally diverse—the ‘Theravada’ includes spirit exorcisms, divination practices, astrological inquiry, and monastic rituals that modernist psychology totally eschews. Most Thai (and many Thai monks) have never meditated in any sustained way at all. The claim by Neff, et al., that “the type of Buddhism practiced in Thailand... is the closest to original Buddhist teachings” is dubious. Other Buddhist traditions, of course, also claim to be rooted in the original teachings of the Buddha.

\(^{179}\) Neff, et al., 267. It is widely thought that nineteenth-century Western constructions of Asian religions (re-constructs, for purposes of classification and control) came, ironically, to inform indigenous Asian religious identities and Asian resistance to Western political control. Western religious scholarship may run a particularly strong risk of finding its own presumptions in non-Western traditions. See, for instance, the notion of a rational and textual “Protestant Buddhism” in Richard Gombrich and Gananath Obeyesekere, *Buddhism Transformed* (Princeton University Press, 1990) and “Buddhist Modernism” in David McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
different, though, from claiming that therapeutic psychology is itself a central form of Buddhism. The conflation of therapeutic thought with Buddhist traditions conceals the richness and diversity of potential Buddhist responses to suffering.

Take the following example. Germer writes, “Detailed instructions for cultivating loving-kindness [toward the self] were first introduced by the Buddhist monk Buddhaghosa, in the 5th century CE, in the Visuddhimagga (‘Path of Purification’). To our knowledge, the Buddha gave only brief instructions for loving-kindness (metta) meditation. The way we practice metta today is essentially Buddhaghosa’s elaboration of a discourse given by the Buddha to a group of monks who were afraid to live in the forest.”

There are several relevant things to say in response to this account. First, in practice, the Metta Sutta (Karaniyametta Sutta, Sutta Nipata 1.8), is not used as an antidote to self-aversion in the Southeast Asian Theravada. It most often functions instead as a prominent apotropaic, not unlike the Heart Sutra as that text has been used in East Asia. (Theravada monks opposing the martial regime in Burma chanted the Metta Sutta, for instance, during their 2007 protests.) Those who chant the sutta appear to understand themselves and others, very reasonably, as embedded within a set of competing forces, and they view the sutta as a vehicle for producing positive, protective force.

Second, when Buddhaghosa himself discusses self-compassion, he is interested not so much in the Metta Sutta itself, but rather in the broader set of Brahmavihāras or

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180 Germer, 130.
‘divine abidings’ discussed by the Buddha in a range of Pali suttas (and not in the Metta Sutta). The Brahmavihāras, the ‘divine abidings’ that include metta (expansive friendliness), karuna (compassion), mudita (shared joy), andupekkha (equanimity), are often presented as practices that offer the practitioner greater access to concentration in strong states of deep absorption, or jhānas. Samādhi, concentration, is Buddhaghosa’s fundamental concern throughout his discussion of metta—the cultivation of metta is a tool of that sati or mindfulness which allows for the arising of such intensive concentration and its graduated states of jhana.

Metta is mentioned prominently throughout the Pali Canon, then, as a path to samādhi (Majjhima Nikaya 7, Digha Nikaya 13, Anguttara Nikaya 10.208, etc.), but metta is not mentioned anywhere as an antidote to self-aversion. When Buddhaghosa himself does discuss self-compassion, he calls attention to his own status as an innovator, and is very explicit about the purposes of self-metta in his discussion: “First of all [metta] should be developed towards oneself, doing it repeatedly thus: ‘May I be happy and free from suffering’ or ‘May I keep myself free from enmity, affliction and anxiety and live happily.’ If that is so, does it not conflict with what is said in the [canonical]
texts? For there is no mention of any development of it towards oneself\textsuperscript{182} in what is said in the [Pali canon]” (Vism. 9.7-8; ital. added).

Buddhaghosa’s own monastic audience would recognize, in self-lovingkindness or self-compassion, a practice that is formally absent from the canon. Buddhaghosa notes that although self-focused metta does not actively conflict with Buddhavacana, the word or teaching of the Buddha, neither is self-directed metta sufficient as a practice of liberation: “But this [initial development towards oneself] refers to [making oneself] an example. For even if he developed loving-kindness for a hundred or a thousand years in this way, ‘I am happy’ and so on, absorption [concentration] would never arise. But if he develops it in this way... making himself the example, then desire for others beings’ welfare and happiness arises in him” (Vism. 9.10).

Self-focused metta, therefore, is only an expedient to help us properly develop metta for others, and metta for others is the proper foundation for concentration—emphases that are often overlooked in contemporary discussions of therapeutic self-compassion. As we come more thoroughly to recognize our own desire to be happy and free from suffering, we become more likely to see that the pain of others is as urgent as our own.\textsuperscript{183} And for reasons that are left unarticulated by Buddhaghosa, only metta for others helps us to actually cultivate the highest levels of concentration.

\textsuperscript{182} This is technically true, but Buddhaghosa does seem to draw upon a brief analogy that the Buddha suggests in the Pali teachings on the Brahmavihāras. See MN 7.13: “He abides pervading one quarter [direction] with a mind imbued with loving-kindness, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above, below, around, and everywhere, and to all as to himself, he abides pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with loving-kindness...” (trans. Bodhi/Ñānamoli).

\textsuperscript{183} Buddhaghosa’s analogical approach to motivation resembles similar strategies in Mahayana literatures. In the Bodhicharyavatara, Shantideva writes: “Since I and other beings both, / In wanting happiness, are...
Self-compassion alone is clearly deficient in some crucial way, when it comes to developing the concentration that can support the insight that liberates us from the most subtle patterns of self-grasping and misguided desire. Buddhaghosa’s account of metta explicitly avoids a too-intensive focus on the self, in part, perhaps, to avoid the very reification of selfhood that the Buddhist teachings of anattā (no abiding selfhood) and anicca (impermanence) so directly challenge and disentangle. Pre-modern Buddhism emphasizes metta primarily as a quality that should pervade and encompass the world beyond the self. For Buddhist modernism, metta is autonomous and self-contained in ways that it has never been before.

Modern practitioners of self-compassion often seem to develop a subtle sense that this modern form of self-focused metta can at times become difficult or alienating, reporting a sense of inner resistance to practices of self-compassion. This sense of resistance and difficulty has often been interpreted simply as evidence of the very self-aversion that stands in such need of self-compassion in the first place: “Ironically,”

equal and alike, / What difference is there to distinguish us, / That I should strive to have my bliss alone?” (Bodhicharyāvatāra 8.95; The Way of the Bodhisattva, Padmakara Translation Group [Boston, Massachusetts: Shambhala Publications, 1997]).

“Again, a bhikkhu abides... pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with loving-kindness, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill will. [But he] considers this and understands it thus: ‘This deliverance of mind through loving-kindness is conditioned and volitionally produced. But whatever is conditioned and volitionally produced is impermanent, subject to cessation’” (Majjhima Nikaya 52.8; The Middle Length Discourses, ed. and trans. Bhikkhu Bodhi [Somerville, Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications, 1995]).

David McMahan writes, “Meditation in the [North Atlantic] modern context is detraditionalized precisely at the point where it can now become a mode of open-ended inquiry, a tool of self-investigation that may lead to any conclusion whatever. Here is where it has become disembedded from the traditional worlds of Buddhist practice and has taken up residence in an entirely new realm as one among other tools of psychology and self-exploration. In this context, its ends are no longer determined solely by the authority of Buddhist tradition but also by modern psychology, which in turn is embedded in the broader discourses of modernity that stress autonomy, self-direction, and self-discovery.” See McMahan, p. 211.
writes Germer, “it’s precisely when we need love the most that it is hardest to give it to ourselves.”¹⁸⁶ (This in itself should suggest to us that self-aversion offers certain ongoing benefits, however illusory the benefits may be.) The psychologist Paul Gilbert and his colleagues have argued that, where a person’s patterns of connection or attachment have been previously disrupted due to abuse or neglect, the re-awakening of capacities for connection through practices of self-compassion may result in a basic fear that traumas of disconnection may re-occur.¹⁸⁷

Self-compassion may, no doubt, sometimes accentuate the internal pressures of our conditioning, creating ‘backdrafts’ of long-held negativities, which may suddenly be more free to find expression within more accepting forms of awareness. However, there are other reasons why one may feel a sense of difficulty or strangeness when directing compassion toward oneself.

Self-compassion is imbued in much recent Buddhist literature with the aura of an ancient path of awakening. But these discussions of self-compassion actually rest upon a quiet presumption that one’s own flawed and pain-producing prior conditioning can successfully create, on its own power, a less conditioned state. The common resistance to self-compassion is, perhaps, not always evidence of self-aversion, as it is a different kind of aspiration making itself known—a desire to access a source of love from beyond the divided and conditioned self.

¹⁸⁶ Germer, 141.
The subtle feeling of resistance may be a search, in part, for access to a less conditioned form of compassion than what we can provide, autonomously, for ourselves.

3.3 UNRAVELING AUTONOMY PART I: MINDFULNESS, DEPENDENT CO-ORIGINATION, ANATTA, NIRVANA

Not only is autonomous self-compassion largely absent from pre-modern Buddhist traditions, but those traditions have also consistently emphasized the essential importance of critical self-evaluation in the process of liberation from an illusory self-enclosure.

This section looks briefly at self-evaluative aspects of early Buddhist understandings of mindfulness (Pali: *sati*), particularly the crucial qualities of *hiri* (capacity for moral shame) and *ottappa* (karmic imagination). These critical aspects of mindfulness, however, can only be creative in the context of a larger goal: a deep recognition of the fundamental truth of *anattā* (non-self), which in turn gradually de-conditions the negativities (Skt.: *kleśa*, chiefly greed, hatred, and ignorance) that result or flow from our unconscious misrecognition of self.\(^{188}\)

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\(^{188}\) See Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *The Paradox of Becoming* (Self-Published 2008. Available in PDF Format at: http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/index.html#bmc1), p.5. “Many writers have tried to resolve this paradox by defining non-becoming in such a way that the desire for Unbinding (*nibbāna*) would not fall into that category [of ‘becoming,’ *bhavana*]. However, the Buddha himself taught a strategic resolution to this paradox, in which the fourth noble truth—the path to the end of suffering—involves creating a type of becoming where the mind is so steady and alert that it can simply allow what has come into being to pass away of its own accord, thus avoiding the twin dangers of craving for becoming or for non-becoming.” This bears some superficial resemblance to the allowing of experience that one finds in the *lojong* slogan: *In post-meditation, be a child of illusion.*
For therapeutic Buddhism, self-acceptance and self-compassion are consistently represented as the most direct antidotes to human negativity. In early Buddhist discourse, however, our proliferating negativities (Skt.: kleśas) cannot be confronted or finally ended without a careful evaluation of the ‘self’ as the true source of that ongoing karmic confusion. In the next several pages, we will examine early Buddhist understandings of mindfulness, non-self, and nirvana as direct confrontations with the unconscious assumption of autonomy that is the most fundamental form of human ignorance—a form of ignorance that the therapeutic risks rendering increasingly difficult to perceive.

Therapeutic and colloquial uses of ‘mindfulness’ leave this basic question unanswered: mindfulness of what? ‘Mindfulness’ (Pali: sati), remembrance, or skilled recollection, is a practice of attention repeatedly outlined in early Buddhist discourses as a foundational commitment for anyone seeking access to unconditioned nirvana. Its purpose is therefore soteriological rather than therapeutic. For the earliest stratum of Buddhist literature, sati involves the deployment of attention to four broad areas: processes of the body, anchored in awareness of the breath; changing sensation tones

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189 If we assume that all religious forms of critical self-evaluation must simply be outdated forms of penitential self-aversion, we will have cut ourselves off from significant access to any progressive path (Skt.: marga).
190 “Bhikkhus, this is the direct path for the purification of beings, for the surmounting of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of pain and grief, for the attainment of the true way, for the realization of Nibbāna—namely, the four foundations of mindfulness” (MN 10.2 and 10.47, beginning and end of the sutta). Bodhi, 1995.
191 The Pali discourse collections (nikāyas) and associated literatures were passed down only orally for approximately two centuries following the Buddha’s death. Different monastic groups likely took on responsibility for the memorization of separate sections of the three pitakas, or ‘baskets,’ of early teachings. Nonetheless, the oldest known written Buddhist manuscripts are in fact Mahayana works, roughly contemporaneous with the Dead Sea Scrolls or early New Testament manuscripts.
of positive, negative, and neutral; the nature of consciousness in relationship to its objects; and evolving mind-states themselves, including hindrances such as doubt or agitation, as well as positive factors of awakening such as energy or joy.192

Sati involves relevant recognition both of current experiential patterns and an intentional recollection of the specific factors of awakening that must be developed in response to current experience. In response, for instance, to the arising of agitation, one might activate the skill of equanimity: “If the enlightenment-factor of equanimity is absent in himself, he knows that it is absent. And he knows how the unarisen enlightenment-factor of equanimity comes to arise, and he knows how the complete development of the enlightenment-factor of equanimity comes about”193 [ital. added]. Sati in this canonical sense requires a significant range of conceptual resources, as well as a sense for which mind-states should be aroused or activated in particular contexts of experience.194

Sati is a skill that expresses something like an Aristotelian phronesis, or practical wisdom; the Buddha often compares the mindful practitioner to a careful craftsperson (e.g., MN 10.4). If we are unable to carefully recognize the specific conditionality (idapaccayatā) for a given sort of wholesome or unwholesome experience, we will be unable to intervene in that particular karmic formation—whether it be one of rage, or

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192 See the four ‘foundations’ of mindfulness (satipatthāna) as outlined in Majjhima Nikāya 10 and Digha Nikāya 22.


one of deep and attractive tranquility—for the purpose of liberation.\textsuperscript{195} And without a map of the foundational causes and conditions for suffering, it would be difficult to traverse the terrain of awakening with any sense of purpose at all. In the early Buddhist suttas, \textit{dependent co-origination} (Skt: \textit{pratītyasamutpāda}; Pali: \textit{patīcasamuppāda}) provides the crucial description of the ongoing conditioned nature of samsaric experience, as well as the possible cessation of that experience.

\textit{Dependent co-origination} is so central to the early discourses that the Buddha himself insists: “One who sees \textit{patīcasamuppāda} sees the \textit{Dhamma} [reality itself]; who sees the \textit{Dhamma} sees \textit{patīcasamuppāda}.”\textsuperscript{196} The twelve factors or links\textsuperscript{197} of \textit{dependent co-origination} delineate the way in which “blinded by ignorance [\textit{avijjā}] and driven by craving [\textit{taṇhā}], a person engages in various unwholesome and mundane wholesome activities [\textit{kammas}].”\textsuperscript{198}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{197} Dependent on (1) ignorance arise (2) kammic formations.
\item (3) Dependent on kammic formations arises consciousness.
\item (4) Dependent on consciousness arises mind-and-matter.
\item (5) Dependent on mind-and-matter arise the six sense bases.
\item (6) Dependent on the six sense bases arises contact.
\item (7) Dependent on contact arises feeling.
\item (8) Dependent on feeling arises craving.
\item (9) Dependent on craving arises clinging.
\item (10) Dependent on clinging arises existence.
\item (11) Dependent on existence arises birth.
\item (12) Dependent on birth arise decay-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair.
\item Thus arises this whole mass of suffering.
\item \textsuperscript{198} Ibid, 301. This is a good representative of the difference between soteriological and therapeutic discourse.
The point of dependent co-origination is not that these links somehow arise in a linear sequence, but that the complex originations of suffering all involve multiple conditions rooted directly in our misperception of experience as ‘self.’ The fifth-century CE Theravada commentator Buddhaghosa, writing about the Mahānidāna Sutta (Dīgha Nikāya 15), suggests that the sutta is “bound together” by the Buddha’s consistent use of a particular image for the way that this misperception of self leads to suffering—the image of the ‘tangled skein’: “When weaver’s yarn which has been badly kept and gnawed by mice becomes tangled all over, it is difficult to distinguish its beginning and end and to straighten it out from beginning to end. Similarly, beings have stumbled over the principle of [dependent] conditionality…”199

The process of destroying the causes of suffering200 cannot occur without directly perceiving, in progressive states of deepening concentration (Pali: jhāna), the way that ignorance about the nature of the self leads to anxiety, aggression, and desire: “Not knowing [dependent co-arising] for what it truly is,” writes Phra Prayudh Payutto,

199 Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans. The Great Discourse on Causation: The Mahānidāna Sutta and its Commentaries (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1984), pp. 87, 85. Wittgenstein notes: “Why is philosophy so complicated? It ought to be entirely simple. Philosophy unties the knots in our thinking that we have, in a senseless way, put there. To do this it must make movements as complicated as these knots are. Although the results of philosophy are simple, its method cannot be, if it is to succeed. The complexity of philosophy is not its subject matter, but our knotted understanding.” Quoted in Karl Brunnhölzl, The Heart Attack Sutra (Boston: Snow Lion, 2012), p. 40.

200 We will see shortly that drive all blames into one is itself a deep expression of the creative destruction of basic ignorance. ‘Self-blame’ re-perceives the conventional reality of aversive blame from a new perspective—that of dependent co-origination, which focuses instead on ignorance as the true origin of suffering. This is not even really our ‘own’ ignorance in an ultimate sense, because there is no true owner; we need not take ‘self-blame’ too personally.
“results in the mistaken belief in a self and causes people to cling to a notion of a self, which is fraught with inherent fears…”201

The purpose of sati, then, is to enter skillfully into this unfolding of karmic activity, such that our damaging ignorance about ‘self’ can be dispelled by insight into the true nature of non-self, anattā. The process of dependent co-origination, rooted in ignorance, can therefore be ‘reversed’ (e.g., MN 38.20) by a de-conditioning of ignorance itself.202 Dependent co-origination is not, in the Pali canon, awakening itself, but a diagnosis of the basic conditioning that must be skillfully discarded on the path to awakening.

The path of sati, then cannot be limited to a form of self-kindness, though certainly it is not an aversion, either; it involves, simultaneously, the cultivation of positive qualities that aid awakening, and the careful abandonment of unskillful mind-states (e.g., DN 2.68) that strengthen the ferocious but false sense of a separate and defendable self.

In order to determine which states are to be cultivated, and which to be abandoned, sati must involve some form of prudence, some imaginative capacity that will allow the practitioner to distinguish between the skillful and the unskillful, in relationship to an ultimate goal. In the Pali canon, two qualities of self-evaluation in particular, hiri and ottappa, are described as ‘bright guardians.’ The Pali scholar and

202 The ca. sixth-century CE commentator Bhadantācariya Dhammapāla writes, “‘Reverse order’ means: through the cessation of the condition the conditionally arisen phenomena ceases [not literally that the links of dependent origination simply go ‘backwards’].” See Bodhi, 1984, p. 76.
translator Bhikkhu Bodhi, following the medieval commentator Anuruddha, discusses *hiri* as “an innate sense of shame over moral transgression; *ottappa* is... fear of the results of wrongdoing.... It is the voice of conscience that warns us of the dire consequences of moral transgression: blame and punishment by others, the painful kammic results of evil deeds, the impediment to our desire for liberation from suffering.”

Here, again, shame is a deeply humanizing necessity, rather than something in need of therapeutic revision.

The roots of *ottappa*—ut (fear) + tappati (to regret or grieve)—specifically invoke a capacity to imagine the potential future causes of remorse. Taken in the context of the Buddha’s discourses, *ottappa* involves a moral imagination for what is and isn’t likely to produce negative consequences. *Ottappa* implies a mature realization that human beings are often sources of karmic harm to themselves and others; we can speak of *ottappa* as karmic imagination.

Andrew Olendzki writes that “everything we do that is unwholesome can only be done when these moral guides [*hiri* and *ottappa*] are disregarded. So if there is something morally reprehensible occurring in an individual or in a society, it means that we lack sufficient clarity of awareness of what we are doing. It means we are temporarily blinded by our greed, hatred, or delusion, or by some combination of the three, such that we refuse to attend openly to the deeds we are committing.”

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However, the notion that we can always correctly perceive our own negativities of ignorance, greed, and aversion is perhaps a kind of moral naïvete intrinsic to Buddhist Modernism. Certainly we should try to perceive these negativities and their effects, wherever possible—but these negativities damage our ability to perceive them in the first place.\(^{205}\)

Without a developed imagination for the seriousness of samsaric suffering, and for our own very active participation in that suffering, we will pursue no thorough renunciation of conditioning itself.\(^{206}\) In the early Buddhist suttas, the *ariya*, the noble one,\(^{207}\) is defined quite clearly by a series of ethical and characterological guidelines—including faith, mindfulness, and strong energy, but also, quite prominently, the core self-evaluative capacities of *hiri* and *ottappa* (*Sekha Sutta*, MN 53.11-12; *Jhana Sutta*, AN 7.6). Without a strong model of karmic moral imagination to help us envision the real and potential harms that we do or might do, no progress toward freedom is possible (*Anottāpi* [Unconcerned] *Sutta* SN 16.2).

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\(^{205}\) Shantideva writes:

For beings do not wish their own true good,
So how could they intend such good for others’ sake?
...They long for joy, but in their ignorance
Destroy it, as they would a hatred enemy.  
(Bodhicharyāvatāra 1.25; 1.29)

Shantideva, pp. 36-7.

\(^{206}\) Levinas writes, “Morality begins when freedom [the human propensity to follow the will unskilfully wherever it leads], instead of being justified by itself, feels itself to be arbitrary and violent.” For Levinas, however, unlike the Buddhist, the moment of arbitrariness or violence is followed by no clear turn toward deep refuge in that which transcends the conditioning of violence itself. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 84.

\(^{207}\) The Buddha, unlike the Matthean portrait of Jesus, is not interested in the active disruption of the family (Mt. 10:34), but he does often address his followers as members of a new family of re-habituation, as ‘sons and daughters of noble lineage.’ Families form, or fail to form, our habits, and both Jesus and the Buddha are explicit in offering new habituating relationships.
Sati, with its careful deployments of karmic moral imagination, as well as its honesty about the basic violence implied in views of self that require us to endlessly confirm and protect that self,\(^{208}\) undercuts the very assumptions upon which autonomy depends: separate reified identity and the supposed capacity of that identity to generate its own belonging or importance. The pursuit of awakening is not a bourgeois hobby of self-realization, but a necessity for any who truly perceive the unawakened self as a genuine source of suffering and violence. Unless we come to identify potential patterns of pain \textit{before} they become even further entrenched as habit, the liberating cessation of greed, hatred and delusion will always remain an abstraction. And it is only the sustained protective working of \textit{hiri} and \textit{ottappa} that can help us to \textit{actively identify and uproot our own negativities}, particularly in their embryonic form as intention (\textit{cetenā}), so that the karmic imprinting of those negativities does not continue to generate new patterns of pain.\(^{209}\)

\textit{Hiri} and \textit{ottappa} help the practitioner to distinguish between a skillful karmic imagination and far less skillful forms of self-critique, such as the compulsive remorse described by the Buddha in the \textit{Sankha} [Conch] \textit{Sutta} (SN 42.8): “A disciple has faith in that teacher and reflects: ‘The Blessed One in a variety of ways criticizes & censures the

\(^{208}\) Thanissaro Bhikkhu is characteristically direct: “As the Buddha points out, the end of suffering requires that we abandon craving and ignorance, but if we can’t be honest with ourselves about our intentions, how can we perceive craving in time to abandon it?” See “The Road to Nirvana Is Paved with Skillful Intentions,” \textit{Access to Insight}, 8 March 2011, http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/intentions.html. Retrieved on 3 May 2013.

\(^{209}\) Critical inquiry into the causes and conditions of our deepest negativities is not at all the same thing as self-aversion, and such critical inquiry may actually have to be guided in some way by kindness. Critical investigation (Pali: \textit{dhammavicaya}) is a core ‘factor’ (Pali: \textit{bojhanga}) of awakening, and is, in the Abhidhamma literature of the Theravada, “a designation for wisdom.” See Bodhi, 1993, p. 281.
taking of life, and says, "Abstain from taking life." There are living beings that I have killed... That was not right. That was not good. But if I become [compulsively] remorseful for that reason, that evil deed of mine will not be undone."\(^{210}\) Rather than helping to prevent future harm, this form of compulsive remorse is unskillfully destructive. (Among the *lojong* slogans, we find this: “Do not wallow in self-pity.”)

The Buddha of the Pali literature nowhere discusses self-aversion as a discreet phenomenon.\(^{211}\) However, the Buddha does insist that “When a Bhikkhu is practicing in accordance with the Dhamma, he should dwell engrossed in revulsion [nibbida] toward the aggregates.”\(^{212}\) These words move us somewhat closer to *drive all blames into one*. To witness the actual process by which the five aggregates\(^{213}\) generate mistaken views of self and other is simultaneously to recognize the total, even horrifying\(^{214}\) impotence of our normal strategies of self-construction. The resulting disenchantment with that

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\(^{210}\) This sutta, the Conch Trumpet Sutta, instructs the listener that when unskillful actions are ended, the Brahmaviharas—compassion, equanimity, considerate care or love, and sympathetic joy—become boundless, like the unrestrained notes of the conch: “Thus above, below, & all around, everywhere, in its entirety, he keeps pervading the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with [the Brahmaviharas]—abundant, expansive, immeasurable, without hostility, without ill will.” Thanissaro Bhikkhu, trans. “Sankha Sutta,” *Access to Insight*, www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn42/sn42.008.than.html. Retrieved on May 10, 2013. The Mahayana would later amplify this early suggestion that positive qualities such as compassion and love could be experienced as immeasurable, when moral and characterological obscurations have been brought to an end.

\(^{211}\) Vibhavatanaḥ, ‘craving for non-existence,’ is one expression of the second noble truth (Dhammacakka-pavattana Sutta: SN 56.11), and thus an object of the Buddha’s critique. And while self-aversion may include a form of such craving for non-existence, it is also an acceptance of a *certain kind of existence*—the unloved or unlovable.


\(^{213}\) Material form, sensation, perception, conception, consciousness.

\(^{214}\) Buddaghosa, in the *Visuddhimagga*, notes that nibbida is not essentially different from “knowledge arising from the contemplation of terror (bhayapatathānañāna).” Quoted in Robert E. Buswell, Jr. and Donald S. Lopez, Jr., eds., *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2013), p. 581. This is relevant also to Marvin Shaw’s discussion of anattā as a confrontation with potentially frightening vulnerability.
process of mutually conditioned ignorance and suffering is one foundation for the relinquishment discussed above. But neither is nibbida a globalized, reifying self-disgust. What ultimate selfhood is there to hate? Again: self-hatred depends upon, and reinforces, just such a reified vision; whereas nibbida is rooted in a commitment to some real option for bringing our most profound negativities to an end.

Here, too, is the structure of religious self-evaluation we explore throughout these pages: the limited and mistaken understanding of ‘self,’ including the damnable self, is acknowledged and renounced only in relationship to a larger context of peace or compassion. This is a movement beyond what William Blake called ‘single vision.’

One outcome of this more complex vision is a gentle irony about our habits of denial, and about our constant avoidance of peace—an irony found both in Buddhist literatures and in the Desert Fathers’ narratives of ‘self-reproach.’ Sati is a skill of seeing two things at once: the conditioned self and an unconditioned reality, connected.

How, then, does sati as a path of cultivation (Pali: bhavana) lead toward the complete cessation of self-concerned conditioning?

Sati is a form of intentionality (Pali: cetenā) that shapes subsequent intentionality, refining the feedback loops of habitual karmic activity in such a way that

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216 Nietzsche could perceive no humor in religious self-reproach. This has been a serious loss for later interpretations of religious selfhood.

217 Nāgārjuna’s work on the relationship between dependent co-origination and emptiness is a particularly representative example of such creatively multiple vision. See following section.
this karmic intentionality can allow itself, in the end, to be given up.\textsuperscript{218} At the end of the path, “the final development is that of relinquishment (vossagga), the relinquishment of intention. And with that there is an abandonment of the kammic [karmic] domain.”\textsuperscript{219} That is, the entry into unconditioned \textit{nirvana}, into some form of final safety, involves the complete relinquishing of our attempts to control or generate the conditions of illusory forms of safety for ourselves.\textsuperscript{220} This is a capacity of relinquishment that the therapeutic does not cultivate, and therapeutic psychology risks an endless investigation of the traumatic past in order to conceptualize and control its power.

The passage to \textit{nirvana} involves what Marvin Shaw has called a ‘paradox of intention’—an attainment that comes about only through a final renunciation of attainment. In a discussion of the Buddhist doctrine of non-self (Pali: \textit{anattā}), Shaw writes that “this may not be the situation we choose, but we do not come to ourselves until we accept it.”\textsuperscript{221} The “attainment ethic” of the autonomously willful and defendable self is ultimately “based on denial of that which is disclosed about our

\begin{itemize}
\item ‘I, without grasping, will pass beyond sorrow,
And I will attain \textit{nirvana},’ one says.
Whoever grasps like this
Has a great grasping.

\textit{(Mūlamadhyamakakārikā} 16.9; Garfield, 1995, p. 229)
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{218} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{220} Later Mahayana or great-vehicle practitioners would seek new, more efficient ways to allow for this fundamental relinquishment, and sometimes suggested that certain abhidharma ways of conceptualizing perception and its objects could devolve into the very sorts of self-centered control that must ultimately be given up. The early Mahayana philosopher Nāgārjuna, whom we will meet again in a moment, insists:

\begin{itemize}
\item ‘I, without grasping, will pass beyond sorrow,
And I will attain \textit{nirvana},’ one says.
Whoever grasps like this
Has a great grasping.

\textit{(Mūlamadhyamakakārikā} 16.9; Garfield, 1995, p. 229)
\end{itemize}

situation by the experience of anxiety.” Shaw’s emphasis on *anattā* as a confrontation with habitual denial also allows him to insist, interestingly, that self-aversion is in part an attempt to avoid precisely that vulnerability. Self-aversion, writes Shaw, “is either a form of magic which seeks to coerce divine aid through the use of suffering, or a stratagem which seeks escape by annihilating the self before anything painful occurs to it.” Self-aversion is control. The self that is in such constant need of defense and augmentation, however, turns out not to exist.

The intentionality that directs the process of its own skillful dissolution is also, finally, non-self. We have already noted above the paradox that *nirvana* is the

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222 Ibid, 199.
223 Ibid, 201.
224 *Sati*, as a skill that intentionally uses conditioned patterns of experience in an encounter with other conditioned patterns, increasingly comes to recognizes the impermanent (Pali: *anicca*) nature of the conditioned patterns themselves. The *Satipatthāna Sutta* directs the practitioner to attend not only to the skillful generation of ‘factors of awakening,’ but also to the passing-away of those always-impermanent conditions: “In this way he abides... contemplating in the body its nature of arising, or he abides contemplating in the body its nature of vanishing, or he abides contemplating in the body its nature of both arising and vanishing” (MN 10.5). The intensive concentration necessary for such careful observation ideally proceeds through ever more refined states of absorption, or *jhānas*.
225 Ibid.
unconditioned result of a conditioned process or path. A similar paradox is embedded in attempts to use conditioned language to describe that which is beyond conditioning. In the Questions of King Milinda, a set of dialogues between the second-century BCE Greek King Milinda (Menander) and the Buddhist monk Nagasena, Nagasena speaks of nirvana as an unfathomable ocean, so that “although Nibbana [i.e., nirvana] really exists, it is impossible to make clear the form or figure of age or dimensions of Nibbana, either by an illustration or by a reason or by a cause or by a method.”

Considered from the perspective of what it is not, nirvana is ‘empty’ (Pali: suññata) precisely of those negativities that flow from our mistaken unconscious views of self and other: “Nibbana is called [suññata] because it is devoid of greed, hatred, and delusion, and because it is devoid of all that is conditioned.” The negative definitions of nirvana in the Pali canon include ajāta, the unborn, and amata, the deathless—terms that will recur, like ‘emptiness,’ in the interpretative shifts of the Mahāyāna.

226 “The path to the goal,” writes Steven Collins, “cannot be said straightforwardly to cause the goal, since that would make it part of the conditioned universe from which liberation is sought; but at the same time the goal cannot be completely unrelated to the path to it. … [P]erhaps the most general formal solution has been to hold that the path is a necessary but not sufficient condition for attaining the goal.” See Steven Collins, Nirvana: Concept, Imagery, Narrative (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 55.

227 “In the face of Nirvana, words falter, for language is a product of human needs in this world, and has few resources with which to deal with that which transcends all worlds.” Peter Harvey, An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices, 2nd Edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 74-5.


230 Pasanno and Amaro, pp. 30-31. The authors draw from Samyutta Nikaya 43.
However, *nirvana* is also spoken of in Pali literature as *asankhatadhātu*, the positive unconditioned element.\(^{231}\) “[Nirvana] is not merely an absence,” writes Steven Collins.\(^ {232}\) “In the lexicon of Buddhist systematic discourse, nirvana is a real Existent, not merely a conceptual one; it is an element in the classificatory scheme of ultimately existing things.”\(^ {233}\) That is, *nirvana* “can be an object of awareness,” though it is not in fact viewed as “part of the mind of a person to whom it appears as a mental object.”\(^ {234}\)

This understanding of *nirvana* as ‘external’ will become a significant target of later Mahāyāna critique, but the notion of *nirvana* as an element or dimension of reality is important for understanding how *nirvana* can be a focus of reliance and trust.\(^ {235}\) The ennobling truth of *nirvana* may be ultimately unfathomable, but it must also be understood as a genuine end of the path:

... [T]here is no pointing to the bourn [i.e., destination]  
Of those perfectly released,  
Who have crossed the flood  
Of bondage to sense desires  
And attained unshakeable bliss. (*Udāna* 8.10)\(^ {236}\)

This invocation of bliss as a primary form of *nirvanic* experience is also echoed in the *Dhammapada* (vv. 202-204), where *nirvana* is spoken of as a supreme peace; in the *Suttanipāta* (vv. 369-373), which frames *nirvana* as that which is ‘secure,’ a trustworthy

\(^{232}\) Collins, 54.  
\(^{233}\) Collins, 47  
\(^{234}\) Collins, 53.  
\(^{235}\) Collins translates a Pali commentary on the Buddha’s awakening-utterance in *Udāna* 3 as follows: “Monks, if there were no Unconditioned Element whose individual nature is to be without birth, etc., then there would be no escape in this world... remainderless calming would not be made known, would not occur, would not come about” (Collins, 50).  
‘refuge’ \(^{237}\); and in the *Samyutta Nikāya* (36.31), where the final destruction of self-concerned negativities (as opposed to the pursuit of mere satisfaction) results in a happiness beyond that of any prior experience.\(^ {238}\)

Religious self-evaluation, like that embedded in the early Buddhist path of *sati* as skillful recollection, only functions from a perspective that thoroughly trusts in a relationship to what is unconditioned—understood in early Buddhist sources as peace, tranquility, refuge, and joy. *Nirvana* is the final destruction of the very self-concern that offers us the false sense of separate, autonomous selfhood in the first place.

Therapeutic Buddhism offers a vision of ‘mindfulness’ that assumes *sati* can function apart from a deep trust in some full soteriological goal, and apart from relationship to sources of awakening and instruction that transcend the limited conditioned self. The modernist therapeutic thereby fails to confront the real mercilessness of our habitual clinging to an intrinsic, separate self. It is no accident that reliance on the refuges of *Buddha, dharma*, and *sangha* are so central in pre-modern forms of Buddhism. We should not confuse the nobility of the *ariya* with a self-sufficient therapeutic individualism.

In the next section, we will discuss several Mahāyāna developments of thought and practice which further confront all vestiges of self-concerned autonomy, and which, in so doing, expand the soteriological goals of the path in a way that brings us closer to the purposes of *lojong*.


\(^{238}\) Pasanno and Amaro, Chapter 20.
3.4 UNRAVELING AUTONOMY PART II: EMPTINESS, COMPASSION, AND THE BODHISATTVA IN THE EARLY MAHĀYĀNA PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ

In order to understand the full implications of lojong as a path that directly deconstructs autonomy while simultaneously accessing qualities of compassionate awareness, freedom, and basic openness, it is first necessary to understand several further developments in Mahāyāna Buddhist doctrine that will inform lojong itself. The following discussion of ‘emptiness,’ compassion, and the figure of the bodhisattva will also help us to confront the tendency of some Western commentators to present lojong in a way that obscures its full devotional and aspirational contexts.239

We have already noted that in Pali literature, the term ‘emptiness’ (Pali: suññata) referred in part to the final absence of those negativities which unfold from our basic ignorance about self.240 For the medieval Abhidhamma commentator Anuruddha, “Nibbana is called void [empty: suññata] because it is devoid of greed, hatred, and delusion, and because it is devoid of all that is conditioned.”241 This absence of conditioned negativities is the goal of the early Buddhist path; emptiness, here, refers to a full cessation of dependent co-origination, but suññata is not a central or common term in the early suttas.

Understandings of ‘emptiness’ underwent a series of important shifts in the sutras and doctrinal elaborations of the early Buddhist Mahāyāna, or ‘great-vehicle,’

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239 See in particular the commentarial work of Norman Fischer, discussed below.
240 Suññata also referred, in the Pali suttas, to the lack of ‘cleanliness’ in the five aggregates that make up the human person—so that the Buddha regularly directs monks to examine the foulness of the body in part to cultivate nibbida towards the aggregates. See Buswell and Lopez, 2013, pp. 871-72.
beginning with the family of texts known as the *Prajñāpāramitā*: ‘perfection of wisdom.’ These sutra texts—which include the *Perfection of Wisdom in 8,000 Lines; 18,000 lines; 25,000 Lines; 100,000 Lines*; the far more concise 300-line *Diamond Sutra*; and the one-page *Heart Sutra*—detail the path of those who pursue complete awakening, not for themselves alone, but on behalf of all beings; this is the path of the *bodhisattva*.

We turn to the *Prajñāpāramitā* because these texts first delineate connections between new understandings of ‘emptiness,’ compassion, and the *bodhisattva*’s aspiration to the complete awakening of the Buddhas—all of which are foundational themes of *lojong*. To enter the *Prajñāpāramitā* is to join a world of expansive power and possibility. At the outset of Edward Conze’s translation of the *Prajñāpāramitā Sutra in 25,000 lines* (hereafter the *Large Sutra*), and here at the outset of the Mahāyāna, we find the Buddha Shakyamuni, the Buddha of our own epoch, as a radiant cosmic presence, perceiving and affecting immense realms with extraordinary capacities of insight: “[W]orld systems as numerous as the sands of the Ganges were illumined by His splendor. And the beings who were touched by this splendor, they were all fixed on

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242 Harvey, 114.
244 “The ‘greatness’ of the new vehicle was seen to lie in three areas: its compassionate motivation, directed at the salvation of countless beings; the profundity of the wisdom it cultivated; and its superior goal, omniscient Buddhahood.” See Harvey, 110.
245 Conze’s text is in fact a redaction of components of the *Prajñāpāramitā* sutras of 18,000 lines, 25,000 lines, and 100,000 lines, but Conze takes the sutra of 25,000 lines as a primary organizing focus, allowing him to align his text with the divisions of the *Abhisamayālankāra*—a compact summary-analysis of *Prajñāpāramitā* thought that became influential in medieval Tibet. See Edward Conze, trans., *The Large Sutra on Perfect Wisdom* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1975), Preface. See also John Makransky, *Buddhahood Embodied: Sources of Controversy in India and Tibet* (Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications, 1997), p. 109.
the utmost, right and perfect enlightenment.” The Buddha of the nascent Mahāyāna Prajñāpāramitā is imbued with qualities and capacities that far exceed any psychological naturalism: in the omniscience and purity of his perception, he directs his healing power and skillful healing means (Skt: upayakauśālya) not only to the original sangha of monks, nuns, and laypersons, but also to “hundreds of thousand of niyutas or kotis of Bodhisattvas”—that is, the Prajñāpāramitā addresses its empowering qualities to beings beyond conception on the path to Buddhahood. The ‘whole universe,’ the cosmos itself, gathers to hear the Prajñāpāramitā.

This vision of an empowering Buddhahood will be important at the outset of lojong practice as a fundamental commitment of the lojong practitioner. We will see, in the final part of this chapter, how the lojong practitioner’s access to transcendent sources of compassion and awakening will depend directly on the initial framing practice of guru yoga—in which the practitioner encounters the embodiment of the Buddha’s clarity and compassion as manifested by their own teacher or guru, descending into the heart where the guru rests in a pavilion of light. Guru yoga allows the practitioner to access the awakened empowerment of beings that is first expressed by the radiant Buddha of the Prajñāpāramitā.

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246 Ibid, 39.
247 Ibid, 37. It might even be said that the reader’s capacity to envision this full radiance of Buddhahood marks the reader himself or herself as a potential bodhisattva; if these characteristics of Buddhahood were not fully visible to prior traditions, was this not a fault of vision? The Prajñāpāramitā draws the reader into its world.
248 Ibid, 534, 572, and 621.
In the *Large Sutra*, following this display of expansively luminous perception, the first words spoken by the Buddha to the great assembly gathered to hear this sutra are addressed specifically to the disciple Ven. Śāriputra: “A Bodhisattva, a great being who wants to fully know all dharmas in all their modes should make endeavors in the perfection of wisdom.”

The polemic force of this opening utterance is directed toward Śāriputra as a symbolic representative of early Buddhist Abhidharma classificatory and commentarial systems, which were ostensibly developed to discipline and guide the intimate meditative discernment of the arising and passing away of distinguishable mind-states. In the Abhidharma of the early Sarvastivāda school, which survives in Chinese translation, practitioners were encouraged to analyze “physical and mental phenomena into their ultimate components” as an aid to meditative concentration; in this system, Buddhahood was also viewed as a set of undefiled and ‘real’ dharmas, thereby offering an authentic, but quietly reified, focus for refuge.

These reifications likely had practical consequences. Practitioners may have become adept at the analytic identification of dharmas as a mark of intellectualistic distinction (not unlike the contemporary practice of sharing psychologized insights.

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250 *Large Sutra*, 45.
251 In Conze’s *Large Sutra* redaction, we find the following implicit rejection of any abhidhamma emphasis on the arising and falling away of unique dharmas: “Thus a Bodhisattva, a great being who courses in the perfection of wisdom, also does not review the production (of any dharma); not its stopping (or abiding, its decrease or increase), defilement or purification” (*Large Sutra*, 57).
253 Harvey, 93.
254 Makransky, p. 30.
about oneself and others, to no apparent purpose beyond the display of analytic prestige).\textsuperscript{255} It may be easy to substitute an obsessive \textit{identification} of dharmas for the actual relinquishment of those modes of experience.

From the perspective of the \textit{Prajñāpāramitā} authors, earlier traditions pursued \textit{nirvana} far too narrowly as an individualized achievement—a critique that is almost certainly related to the reification of dharmas as objects of analysis for supposedly superior or inferior perceptive skills. Reification and competition are somehow intimate. The \textit{Prajñāpāramitā} distinguishes forcefully between the figures of the \textit{arahant} and the \textit{bodhisattva}, between the path to personal \textit{nirvana} and the way to the supreme and shared awakening of the Buddhas (Skt.: \textit{anuttarā samyak sambodhi}). This important distinction has to do above all with the \textit{bodhisattva}'s quality of motivation:

\begin{quote}
If this Continent of Jambudvipa were filled with monks similar in worth to Śāriputra... like a thicket of reeds, bamboos, or sugar cane, of tall grass, or rice, or sesame plants— their [combined] wisdom does not approach the wisdom of a Bodhisattva who courses in perfect wisdom by one hundredth part, nor by one thousandth part, nor by one-hundred-thousandth part; it does not bear number, nor fraction, nor counting, nor similarity, nor comparison, nor resemblance. To such an extent does the wisdom of a Bodhisattva, who, coursing in perfect wisdom, develops it for one day only, surpass the wisdom of all the Disciples... And why? Because that wisdom of a Bodhisattva... is concerned with Nirvana for all beings.\textsuperscript{256}
\end{quote}

What, then, is the relationship between the \textit{Prajñāpāramitā}'s deconstruction of all reifications, on the one hand, and this basic concern for the awakening of all beings?

\textsuperscript{255} This is necessarily speculative. However, the \textit{Prajñāpāramitā} polemic is almost certainly addressed not only to a doctrinal problem, but to issues of soteriology and community that are always embedded in doctrinal problems.

\textsuperscript{256} Conze, \textit{Larger Sutra}, pp. 57-58.
Here we come to the *Prajñāparamitā*’s fundamental exposition of ‘emptiness’—śunyatā, the essencelessness of all things, including or especially ‘dharmas.’ In the *Large Sutra*, the Buddha and the bodhisattva Subhuti engage in the following key dialogue:

Subhuti: What is the real truth about dharmas such as they are?
The Lord [Buddha]: Emptiness.
Subhuti: What emptiness?
The Lord: The emptiness of own-marks [i.e., separate intrinsic existence; *svabhāva*]. Through this kind of insight he discerns that ‘all dharmas are empty.’ Not of any dharma does he see [intrinsic existence] which would provide him with an existent on which he has stood when fully knowing enlightenment.257

*Prajñāpāramitā* is the perception that there is no self-existent thing, no separate identity or essence, anywhere—not even in nirvana itself:

Subhuti: Is, then, enlightenment nonexistent?
The Lord: So it is, Subhuti, so it is, as you say. Enlightenment also is a nonexistent.258

This is not the assertion of a total nihilistic nothingness. The Buddha of the *Prajñāpāramitā* does not deny the phenomenal realm—that is the realm which is empty of any separate existents259: “[Physical form; *rūpa*] is not one thing, and emptiness another; emptiness is not one thing, and form another.”260 Nirvana is not a separate reality; it is intimately nondual with the experience of ‘samsara’; nirvana is nondual in fact with all dharmas, which “have non-existence for their own-being, and [which] are

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257 Ibid, 631.
258 Ibid. Compare to Steven Collins’s exposition of Pali Abhidharma accounts of nirvana, above.
259 “The perfection of wisdom does not destroy the existence of anything, but is the very mode by which one investigates and truly perceives the essential nature of phenomenal reality as it is, a universal correlativity and mutual interdependence” (Brian Edward Brown, *The Buddha Nature: A Study of the Tathāgatagarbha and Ālayavijñāna* [Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991], p. 152).
the same as final Nirvana, because of their [ultimate] unreality.” 261 For the
Prajñāpāramitā and its Madhyamaka interpreters (Madhyamaka meaning a ‘middle
way’ between extremes of naïve believe in intrinsic identities, on the one hand, and
total denials of any conditionality at all, on the other) interpreters, even the fullest
awakening of the Buddhas cannot be “a collection of dharmas, no matter how exalted,
but [are instead] the nondual realization of the real nature of all dharmas (dharmatā),
which is their emptiness (śunyatā).”262

Here is the realization in which the bodhisattva ‘courses,’ completely
unsupported by any intrinsic identity or essence. For the Large Sutra, if a bodhisattva,
“thus coursing in the perfect wisdom, does not become cowed or stolid, does not
tremble, is not frightened or terrified, then it should be known that that Bodhisattva is
near to the knowledge of all modes.”263 That is, the bodhisattva who can fully accept a
total immersion in foundationless conditionality, or emptiness, is close to the supreme
awakening to which the Mahāyāna aspires.

Several issues can now be raised in a new way. First, the absolute emptiness of
all dharmas means that the ‘attainment’ of a separate existing reality, whether that of
nirvana or anything else, is not relevant to the bodhisattva. Emptiness, on this account,
is no longer the effect of the cessation of dependent co-origination, but is instead the
ultimate nature of dependent co-origination itself.264 The wisdom that non-dually

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261 Ibid, 571.
262 Makransky, 31.
263 Conze, Larger Sutra, 105.
264 The paradigmatic and foundational version of this teaching can be found in the twenty-fourth chapter
of Nāgārjuna’s Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way:
realizes emptiness thus cuts off any sense of the need to enter into some reality other than this one. The *Prajñāpāramitā*, in its radical insistence on the ultimate non-existence of the very objects, experiences, and projections that we so often take to be truly real, directly deconstructs our basic habit of forging the perceptual-emotional grounds for a security that ultimately does not and cannot exist.

It should be clear that, for one thoroughly coursing in *śunyatā* or ‘suchness’ (*tathatā*: ‘supreme truth apprehended by nondiscriminating wisdom’), the notion of an intrinsically autonomous individual (Skt.: *satkāya-dṛṣṭi*) does not arise. The *bodhisattva* does not cling even to the idea of a *bodhisattva*. The residual adherence to any false projection of an intrinsically separate, autonomous existence is what the epistemology of the *Prajñāpāramitā* overcomes.

In as far as the *bodhisattva* delivers others from suffering, he or she introduces those others to their own basic groundlessness or non-separation—a redefinition of the third noble truth of *nirvana*, away from any final recognition of an ultimately separate

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Whatever is dependently co-arisen
That is explained to be emptiness.
That, being a dependent designation
Is itself the middle way. (*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 24.18)


265 William H. Grosnick, “Tathagatagarbha,” in Buswell, 2004, p. 827. In the *Large Sutra*, the *bodhisattva* Subhuti has the following exchange with the Buddha:

Subhuti: What then is that which the Lord has expounded as purification?
The Lord: It is the sameness of all dharmas.
Subhuti: And what is the sameness of all dharmas?
The Lord: It is Suchness, nonfalseness, unaltered Suchness, the nature of Dharma... (*Large Sutra*, 636)

266 Ibid, 77.
267 Ibid, 56.
existental or reality. The early Mahāyāna Madhyamaka thinker Nāgārjuna, reflecting systematically on the *Prajñāpāramitā*, writes:

If nirvana were existental,
Nirvana would be compounded.
A non-compounded existental
Does not exist anywhere.
...There is not the slightest difference
Between cyclic existence [*samsara*] and nirvana.

(Mūlamadhyamakakārikā 22:5-6; 22:19)²⁶⁸

Nirvana, then, is not some other thing, some other place to go, or a separate state to achieve, but is rather a mode of apprehending the conditionality that only unfolds in relationship to other conditions; nirvana is no longer understood as the opposite of conditioned samsara, but is instead a nondual awareness of interconnected conditionality itself. This renegotiation of nirvana, for the *Prajñāpāramitā* and its Madhyamaka expositors, is in part a rejection of any assumption, implicit or explicit, of an intrinsic autonomy, and also subverts any temptation to view nirvana as a pleasant, autonomous, distant escape from conditionality.

Importantly, our habitual refuge in a false autonomy is predicated upon, and in turn produces, the experience of fear, because the assumption of autonomy requires endless defense and assertion. To take refuge so thoroughly and consistently in our own sense of a separate selfhood may offer us the sensation of control, but our strategies for managing life’s conditions cannot ultimately succeed if reality itself is so fundamentally impermanent, empty, and therefore impervious to lasting control. Fear and anxiety are the result of this basic disjunction between our strategies of safety, on

the one hand, and the world as it is, on the other. It might even be said that self-aversion has recently become a primary strategy for deepening the powerful sensation of control. And so, while self-aversion may necessarily be induced and encouraged by familial or cultural conditions—the psychologists and sociologists are not wrong on this point—it is also the case that self-aversion offers persons a certain sense of their own intrinsic, autonomous reality, however costly that sensation of being real may become for them and others.

The work of the bodhisattva goes against the grain of that habitual refuge in aversion. The bodhisattva's path is instead a process of increasingly fearless engagement with conditionality. And in order to skillfully enter into that foundationlessness on behalf of all beings, the bodhisattva must be one who increasingly recognizes two aspects of truth—the ‘conventional’ aspect of truth, which is everyday reality as we habitually experience, perceive, and name it in terms of concrete, separate essences; and the ‘ultimate’ aspect of truth, which does not refer to some other reality, but to the way in which, as Atiśa writes, “If one examines... the conventional as it appears, nothing [stable or permanent] is found. That nonfindingness

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269 Fearlessness, ‘engaged Buddhism,’ is a primary Prajñāpāramitā outcome. Shantideva expresses this most directly:

If such a thing as ‘I’ exists indeed,  
Then terrors, granted, will torment it.  
But since no self or ‘I’ exists at all,  
What is there left for fears to terrify?  
(Bodhisattvacharyāvatāra 9.56) Shantideva, p. 145.
is the ultimate. It is the true nature of things.” The contemporary philosopher Jay Garfield, in an attempt to prevent readers from viewing ultimate truth as somehow separate from the conventional, writes, “The ultimate truth about any phenomenon is that it is merely a conventional truth. ...To fail to take conventional truth seriously as truth is therefore not only to deprecate the conventional in favor of the ultimate but also to deprecate truth per se.” It is nonetheless crucial, for the bodhisattva, to be able to skillfully distinguish between the conventional and the ultimate, in order to creatively release himself and all others from doomed attempts to create safety through endless manipulation of conventional conditions alone.

The practical relevance of the early Mahāyāna’s redefinition of emptiness as the dependent co-origination (Skt: pratītyasamutpāda) of interconnected conditionality cannot be overstated, in part because it directs the Buddhist practitioner epistemologically and affectively toward suffering as a shared phenomenon. Perhaps the most visible and striking practice in the set of teachings encompassed by medieval Tibetan lojong, for example, is that of tonglen, or ‘giving-taking.’ Tonglen intensifies and formalizes an engagement with suffering in and beyond the self—an engagement articulated with particular force by Shantideva, an eighth-century CE Indian Madhyamaka author, in his Training in the Way of the Bodhisattva:

> Is there need for lengthy explanation?
> Childish beings look out for themselves,

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While Buddhas labor for the good of others...

If I do not give away
My happiness for others’ pain,
Awakening will never be attained. (Bodhisattvacharyāvatāra 8.130-31)

The lojong practice of taking on others’ suffering for oneself, and offering of all our resources of joy and freedom to those others, is deeply indebted to this practical radicalization of śunyatā in the Prajñāpāramitā and in the works of Madhyamaka thinkers like Nāgārjuna and Shantideva. No exchange or substitution is possible in a world of intrinsically separate persons. From the perspective of śunyatā, there is in fact no reason to privilege our own pain above that of another:

Strive at first to meditate
Upon the sameness of yourself and others.
In joy and sorrow all are equal.
Thus be guardian of all, as of yourself. (Bodhisattvacharyāvatāra 8.90)

Here the basic truth of śunyata is implicit as the foundation for the cultivation of a compassionate attitude toward all beings, even as this same compassion begins to loosen the seemingly Gordian knot of habitual self-concern that constrains our perception of śunyatā in the first place.

For the Madhyamaka thinkers Nāgārjuna, Candrakīrti, and Shantideva, the relentless emphasis on śunyata does not at all result in a denial of the problem of suffering (e.g., Mūlamadhyamakakārikā 12; Madhyamakavātāra 1; Bodhisattvacharyāvatāra 6). Śunyatā is not only a refutation of any intrinsic identity anywhere, but also expresses a potentially positive valence: to recognize śunyata is to

272 Shantideva, 128-29.
273 Ibid, 123.
recognize the inseparability of others’ suffering, and others’ awakening, from our own. This is no doubt part of the immense power of the *Prajñāpāramitā*: its deconstruction of autonomy is simultaneously an introduction to compassion. This will be true of *Drive all blames into one* as well.

The pages below will suggest further that the *lojong* teaching *Drive all blames into one* is best understood as a form of refuge. This raises, of course, a basic question: refuge in what?

### 3.5 UNRAVELING AUTONOMY PART III: BUDDHA NATURE AND MIND

Let us begin our discussion of Buddha Nature, an important foundation for the exploration of *lojong* below, by noting some doctrinal tensions that can be traced in part to the *Prajñāpāramitā* itself. Glimpsing these tensions will also help us to better understand some distinctions between the Madhyamaka doctrinal commitments of the Tibetan Geluk order and the Nyingma274—Kagyü275 revitalization of more diverse Mahāyāna practical and doctrinal commitments during the Ri-mé (*‘impartial’; ‘unlimited’) movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.276

274 Nyingma, ‘ancient’ in Tibetan, is also one of the four major sects of Tibetan Buddhism, and traces its origins to the ‘early dissemination’ of Buddhism in Tibet, and particularly to the semi-mythic figure, Padmasambhava, in the eighth century CE. The Nyingma is known particularly for its emphasis on tantric study and practice, and for its emphasis on atiyoga or Dzogchen, the practice of the ‘great perfection’ (Buswell and Lopez, 719).

275 The Karma Kagyü sect is one of the four major sects of Tibetan Buddhism, founded by the first Karmapa, Dusum Kyenpa, in the twelfth century CE. In the realm of practice, the Kagyü are known for their emphasis on Mahamudra (see below; Ibid, 419).

276 The Ri-mé sought to revitalize a range of Tibetan textual and practice traditions, including *lojong*, which had fallen into relative decline following the rise to power of the Geluk order in the seventeenth century. Ringu Tulku writes, “Ri-me is not a way of uniting different schools and lineages by emphasizing their similarities. It is basically an appreciation of their differences and an acknowledgement of the importance of variety to benefit practitioners with different needs.” See Ringu Tulku, *The Ri-Me*
We have already seen that, for the Prajñāpāramitā, it is the quality of the practitioner’s motivation, his or her intention to awaken for all, which separates the Mahāyāna bodhisattva from those who seek nirvana primarily or only for themselves.²⁷⁷ More specifically, this is understood as bodhicitta—the wider scope or expanded quality of aspiration to awaken on behalf of all beings—which the Prajñāpāramitā seeks to introduce and develop.

I think there is good reason to view the Prajñāpāramitā sutras themselves as agents of compassionate activity for reasons that will become clear in a moment—though of course one reason to see them in this way is the fact that this is how they present themselves. The sutras of the Prajñāpāramitā (as well as other Mahāyāna sutras, e.g., the Saddharmapundarīka) proclaim that those who copy them will cultivate “a merit which is immeasurable, incalculable, inconceivable, incomparable, illimitable, if, having copied this perfection of wisdom and made it into a book, they will learn and study it, bear it in mind, preach it and wisely attend to it, and if, in addition, they will honor, revere, adore, and worship it...”²⁷⁸ It is easy for the contemporary academic reader to perceive, in passages such as this one, only the desire of a nascent sub-

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²⁷⁷ [A] Bodhisattva, a great being who wants to lead to Nirvana... all the beings who are in each of the ten quarters, in world systems as numerous as the sands of the Ganges...” (Large Sutra, 46).

²⁷⁸ Large Sutra, 236.
tradition to perpetuate itself; a text or scripture seeks such prominence only as the representative of a given sub-community vying for status. Gregory Schopen has suggested that such passages are rooted in a self-legitimating ‘cult of the book’ in the early Mahāyāna, which had to “contend at every step with the historical priority and dominance of the stūpa/relic cult of early Buddhism in the milieu in which [the cult] was attempting to establish itself.”

This hypothesis of mere legitimation may obscure, however, more central doctrinal and practical issues embedded in the process of sutra-copying. Schopen writes that because his “interest is merely ‘structural’ and ‘historical,’” he must “set aside for another time the rich material contained in our texts on the ideology or theology underlying the cult [of the book].” This is, I suspect, a mistake—one that has to do with bodhicitta, a term Schopen does not address.

It is important to note that the Prajñāpāramitā sutra is the vehicle that provides its reader with access to the new intentionality and aspiration of bodhicitta as a central norm—one that distinguishes the bodhisattva from other sorts of practitioners. It is an error, in my view, to deny that the sutra does actually bring some set of readers within the field of a larger purposiveness (to gain a more definitive and expansive purpose is not a rare human hope).

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280 Ibid.

281 “[I]n each direction countless world systems were lit up and illumined... and in all the world systems, the same thought occurred to each one of these gods and men: ‘It is for me that the Tathagata, seated there, demonstrates Dharma’” (Large Sutra, 41). See also Bodhicharyāvatāra 3.26.
received, the sutra itself functions as an expression of skillful means; the sutra is in some sense an expression of awakened power and agency.

This question of agency, however, exposes an important potential ambiguity in the Prajñāpāramitā. The path that leads to a full awakening, the path capable of bringing all beings to nirvana, depends upon a multi-lifetime access to bodhicitta—but the exact nature of that ongoing access is not fully articulated. For the Prajñāpāramitā, bodhicitta is not intrinsic, because nothing is; it is not even a purpose we come to on our own, apart from the ‘external’ power and compassion expressed by

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282 For I am like a blind man who has found A precious gem within a mound of filth. Exactly so, as if by some strange chance, [Bodhicitta] has come to birth in me. (Bodhichāryāvatāra 3.28) See Shantideva, p. 52.

283 The Large Sutra invites its readers to “worship [the text] with flowers” (Large Sutra, 236); in the first chapter of the sutra, we have already heard that “Both gods and men then strewed these flowers, etc., over the body of the Tathāgata” (41). The sutra thereby places itself in relationship to the reader as an emanation of Buddhahood. Note, too, that such ritual gifts allow the reader to relate to the text as a way of relating directly to the Buddha, who, when presented with lotuses early in the sutra, “threw them in the Eastern direction into countless world systems, which were lit up...” (43). Devotion is itself an aspect of the training in perfect generosity through which a bodhisattva fully realizes the full awakening of Buddhahood. The text, as an embodiment of Buddhahood, induces the practices of bodhisattva. Finally, note that by copying the text, the bodhisattva is extending the skillful means of the Buddha who speaks it, and the one who copies the text thereby becomes a vehicle for the expression of Buddhahood. A larger methodological point, of course, is that the ‘structural’ and ‘historical’ can hardly be separated from the ‘theological.’


285 The seventh-century CE Madhyamaka commentator Candrakīrti opens his Madhyamakavātāra by invoking bodhicitta’s long-term karmic efficacy. In this Candrakīrti may be responding indirectly to tathāgatagarbha thought, implicitly insisting that there is no need to posit any potentially reified Buddha Nature:

Compassion, nonduality, the wish for Buddhahood for others’ sake Are causes of the children of the Conqueror. (Madhyamakavātāra 1.1) See Chandrakīrti, 59

Although the last chapters of the Bodhicharyāvatāra offer a Madhyamaka account of emptiness and its ethical implications, the extraordinarily robust account of bodhicitta as a timeless source of soteriological power in the first chapters of the Bodhicharyāvatāra appears to draw upon Yogācāra and tathāgatagarbha concepts and literatures (e.g., 1.14-15).
the Buddha in and through the Prajñāpāramitā sutras themselves, which therefore function in part as Buddhas.

What, then, can be the ongoing basis for the bodhisattva path?

For the Prajñāpāramitā sutras, śunyatā allows for the complete mutability of awareness and its capacities—the lack of any intrinsic identity is an opportunity for immense soteriological transformability and creativity. However, there is no reason why inherent mutability should necessarily, on its own, lead to Buddhahood. The wisdom that realizes śunyatā must be continually informed by bodhicitta itself, in order for Buddhahood to be ‘achieved.’ This creates a dualism not only between the bodhisattva as he or she actually is, on the one hand, and ultimate awakening, on the other, but also results in a dualism between those persons who are on the path toward that ultimate awakening, and some set of lesser others, who are not. Emptiness without qualities demands a relentless effort to achieve those qualities—precisely the sort of dualistic achievement-orientation that the Prajñāpāramitā itself so sharply critiques.

On the path of the bodhisattva, then, a significant question becomes: how should the relationship between emptiness and bodhicitta be understood, so that the path of bodhicitta may be sustained without devolving into dualisms of achievement and status?

286 For Yogācāra and tathāgatagarbha texts, “The tathāgatagarbha is the basis of aspiration towards nirvana because it is the tathāgatagarbha which experiences suffering. There can be no experience and retention (no learning from experience) in the case of an impermanent flow of everyday consciousness” (Williams, 106-7, discussing the Śrīmālādevīsimhanādasūtra).
One doctrinal strategy for addressing these issue can be found in the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra* (ca. first through third centuries CE), which distinguishes between a bodhicitta that is ultimate (paramārtha), and that which is relative or conventional (smvrtti). Ultimate bodhicitta, for the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra*, is “beyond this world, cannot be formulated by concept or speech, is extremely radiant, the image of the Ultimate, immaculate, unshakeable, and very bright like the steady glow of a lamp on a calm night.” Conventional bodhicitta, generated within ritual and meditation as an initial aspiration (bodhicittopāda) and then as an increasingly active imaginative and practical compassionate engagement with others, is necessarily dependent upon ultimate bodhicitta as its ground or foundation—an open and compassionate reality which is “both the innate potency to become awakened and the mind that has attained the ultimate goal, awakening itself.” Ultimate bodhicitta may thus function as the ongoing basis of the path itself without creating sharp dualisms between completely different sorts of persons, or between current reality and an inaccessible compassionate future. Compassion is not a distant goal to be achieved, but a reality to be relied upon.

In an important sense, from the perspective of ultimate bodhicitta, emptiness and compassion are indivisible. It is not that compassion results from our recognition of emptiness, but that emptiness expresses or has the quality of compassion itself. Atiśa

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287 Williams, 2009, p. 199.
289 Ibid.
(982-1054), the Indian master whose pith instructions to his Tibetan disciples would become the foundation for lojong, insisted that

There is no emptiness meditation not permeated by compassion;  
For the practice of compassion is solely [the practice of] emptiness.  
As for emptiness, even those seeking tranquil abiding must practice it.  
For this vehicle, however, emptiness is compassion;  
And the self-nature of this compassion is emptiness.  
So understand that compassion is the essential nature.\(^{290}\)

To better understand how Atiśa and others came to understand compassion and emptiness as a unity, or even as the kind of ‘self-nature’ or ‘essential nature’ that the Prajñāpāramitā wholly rejects, it is necessary first to look at a series of Mahāyāna sutras which locate beings’ capacity to progress toward supreme awakening in the tathāgatagarbha, that which ‘contains a Buddha,’ the ‘essence of the Buddha,’ or Buddha Nature.\(^{291}\)

Beginning in the third century CE, further articulations of the basis for the path of the bodhisattva were developed in several new Mahāyāna sutras that either explicitly or implicitly gestured toward Buddha Nature as a characteristic of beings—the Tathāgatagarbhasūtra, Śrīmālādeviśīṃhanādasūtra, Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra, Lankāvatārasūtra, and the Avatamsakasūtra.\(^{292}\) The Astasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitāsūtra (The Sūtra of the Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines) had taught that bodhicitta is, “in its essential original nature... transparently luminous,”\(^{293}\) a characterization that will become important for later tathāgatagarbha thought and

\(^{292}\) Buswell and Lopez, 897.  
\(^{293}\) Edward Conze, Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines, §5.
practice, but had not identified this luminosity with any essence or ‘self.’ 294 The 
Mahāparinirvānasūtra, however, explicitly speaks of the tathāgatagarbha as an ātman, 
or ‘self’ 295—a characterization later taken up by Dölpopa, the fourteenth-century 
Jonangpa thinker whose unique presentations of emptiness and Buddha Nature became 
influent for Nyingma and Kagyū thinkers (see below). 296 The third-century CE 
Tathāgatagarbhasūtra presents a particularly strong view of Buddha Nature through a 
series of striking similes: “[G]ood sons, all sentient beings have the tathāgatagarbha. It 
is like pure honey in a cave or tree, but it is covered by kleśas [negativities; see above], 
which, like a swarm of bees, keep one from getting to it.” 297

Good sons, all beings, though they find themselves with all sorts of kleśas, have 
a tathāgatagarbha that is eternally unsullied, and that is replete with virtues no 
different from my own. …[T]he Buddha can really see the tathāgatagarbhas of 
sentient beings. And because he wants to disclose the tathāgatagarbha to 
them, he expounds the sūtras and the dharma, in order to destroy kleśas and 
reveal the buddha nature. 298

This is no longer a bodhicitta initiated from without, as in the Prajñāpāramitā, but 
rather a set of innate qualities to be more and more thoroughly actualized. 299 This 
process of activation, the process of being perceived in our true nature, is precisely what

294 Harvey, 143.
295 Williams, 108.
296 Jeffrey Hopkins, trans., Mountain Doctrine: Tibet’s Fundamental Treatise on Other-Emptiness and the 
297 William H. Grosnick, “The Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra,” in Donald S. Lopez, Jr., ed., Buddhism in Practice 
Sūtra’s similes portray something extremely precious, valuable, or noble (such as buddhas, honey, kernels 
of wheat, gold, treasure, golden statues, or future princes), contained within something abhorrent and 
vile (such as rotting petals, angry bees, useless husks, poor hovels, dirty rags, soot-covered 
molds, and impoverished, ugly women)” (Grosnick, 93).
298 Ibid, 96.
299 Both reception and activation, of course, require ongoing cultivation or development.
develops in us the awakened capacity to perceive others in this same way. Buddhahood perceives—and, in so perceiving, activates—what is most true in persons.300

This process of mutual perception between beings and fully awakened Buddhahood can be seen with increasing clarity in the Gandhavyuhasūtra, the capstone of the Avatamsakasūtra, in which the young pilgrim Sudhana proceeds toward awakening by encountering a sequence of awakening bodhisattvas. To be a bodhisattva is to seek connection with, and empowerment from, bodhisattvas—Sudhana, the paradigmatic bodhisattva, is necessarily a pilgrim toward others.301 Sudhana is addressed at length by Maitreya:

Look at Sudhana, pure in mind, born of enduring riches; Seeking the practice of supreme enlightenment, this wise one has come to me.

...From the embryo of the aspiration for enlightenment, compassion, and love... You will perfect beings, purify the world, and establish The realm of knowledge...302

300 “The practice of envisioning the Buddha... is not merely an expression of a human need but the enactment of a deep intuition about the nature of reality. Reality discloses itself as a communicative and transformative power present to anyone whose vision becomes sufficiently purified through practice. For this reason ‘devotional’ practices such as buddhānusmrti [recollection or mindfulness of the Buddha] were... one element within a wide framework of Mahāyāna practice: cultivation of bodhicitta and compassion, ritual practices, perfection of insight into emptiness, practice of perfections, etc. ...Thus, in the view of Mahāyāna systematians, ‘devotional’ practices are not merely expressions of human need but the forms needed to elicit and express basic intuitions concerning the nature of reality itself” (Makransky, 333).

301 Here again we can see the problem of the bodhisattva who insists upon saving lesser others—he or she cannot learn from the other as one who is on the path to awakening in their own right. This capacity to be awakened by others is, simultaneously, a way of awakening them, allowing them to function as bodhisattvas as well.

302 Timothy Cleary, The Flower Ornament Scripture (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1993), pp. 1463-67. The Avatamsakasūtra’s account of awakened cognition, ‘Buddha knowledge’ (buddhajñāna), very much seems to be a step in the direction of a full tathāgatakagārābhā. The Avatamsaka may even offer a rhetorical model for the similes of the Tathāgatakagārābhhasūtra:

Just as water flows under the ground So those who seek it find it, Without thought, without end, Its effective power all-pervasive,
It is important here that the bodhisattva Maitreya’s confirmation of Sudhana as a bodhisattva himself closely mirrors Sudhana’s own praise of the bodhisattvas he has encountered up to that point. Through a process of pilgrimage, during which Sudhana has repeatedly recognized the awakened potential and qualities of others, Sudhana’s own awakened potential has been gradually confirmed. One becomes a bodhisattva by recognizing bodhisattvas.

Sudhana’s pilgrimage of devotion is itself a fundamental training in a purity of perception—a perception increasingly able to commune with and actively value others as expressions of “holy mystery, beyond the grasp of self-centered, reductive thoughts.”

Who or what, however, actually performs this pure perception? John Makransky writes: “Only our inmost goodness can sense so directly the essential purity and goodness of others. We let our buddha nature, our primordial capacity of wisdom and love know others in their buddha nature, their intrinsic worthiness and holiness.”

The development of this primordial capacity depends, crucially, on our willingness to be known in our own intrinsic worthiness and holiness—a willingness that manifests itself in practices of visualization, devotion, confession, and offering, all of which place us in repeated relationship to the ground of awakened power and compassion.

Buddha knowledge is also like this,
Being in all creatures’ minds... (Cleary, p. 1004)

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304 Ibid.
305 This ground (Tib.: shī) can be described through “a set of three terms, ngowo or essence (described as both ‘open’ and ‘innately pure’), rangshin or ‘nature’ (described as characterized by ‘spontaneity’ and ‘luminosity’), and tukjé. Tukjé is the standard Tibetan term for ‘compassion’ (Skt.: karunā), but with a

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counter-repetitions are what allow us to reform our far less skillful repetitions of externalized and internalized aggression and fear—habits which utterly fail to produce the safety they at first appear to promise.

Self-aversion is the refusal of a greater refuge—aversion toward either self or other necessarily takes its shelter in the sense of control, power, and dualistic selfhood that aversion itself helps us to construct. The lojong instruction *Drive all blames into one* asks us to do something different; it interrupts or offers an intervention into the experience of aversion, so that we might choose, within that experience, the more formative refuge of our own and others’ true nature. This is not to say that such a choice is at all a simple or easy matter; it is almost certainly the case that most human beings will need to repeatedly turn toward an alternative refuge in primordial, timeless, unconditioned compassion and love, in order to give up the false safety offered by habitual aversion. I do not pretend that compassion and love are easy refuges, for anyone long given to the false safety of aversion—lojong offers no romanticism. But it will be difficult to understand *Drive all blames into one* without understanding the doctrinal and practical focus of that greater trust, and the way in which a deepening refuge in the Buddha and in the nature of mind creates new possibilities for the perception of both self and other.

If we accept ourselves instead under the identity of damage, thus limited and reified, we are likely to seek mere therapeutic relief from that damage, rather than somewhat different emphasis. *Tukjé* here is energy of activity, the compassion-driven movement that leads to the arising of phenomena out of the ‘ground’ or *shi*” (Geoffrey Samuels, *Introducing Tibetan Buddhism* [New York: Routledge, 2012], p. 84).
pursuing an awakening that connects us far more fully to the awakened potentiality of others. The commitment to *Drive all blames into one*, the refusal to blame others for our own suffering, functions in part as a protection for our own capacity to perceive the awakened nature of those others, which is one way to activate our own awakened nature. From the perspective of *tathāgatagarbha* thought, any externalizing and reifying blame forecloses the perceptual capacities of our own awakened nature; blame is rooted in, and further habituates, a misperception of reality.

The twelfth-century *lojong* author Sé Chilbu Chökyi Gyaltsen (1121-1189) writes: “If you lapse and find yourself noticing... [another’s] shortcoming, think, ‘This is my own deluded perception; no such flaw exists in them. All sentient beings are endowed with the essence that shares the Buddha’s own nature.’” The twentieth-century Nyingma teacher Zhechen Gyaltsab Padma Gyurmed Namgyal writes that “The essential nature of all sentient beings is the spontaneous Buddha-nature, the innate heart or potential for enlightenment. Therefore, do not dwell on the wrongdoing of others or on their mistakes. Rather, think of the vast possibilities of others, and think of their path as your own. Do not think about the faults of others; think about your own faults.”

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306 Some *lojong* teachings might be innovatively applied both to oneself and to others in our own cultural context. For instance, in the case of *Don’t talk about injured limbs*, we might understand the teaching to mean not only that we should avoid contemplating the defects of others, but also that we should avoid valorizing our own pain. *Lojong* rejects the glorification of the wounded self as a strategy of self-invention. After a certain age, we should not constantly ask others to sign our protective casts, or go around looking for casts to sign. To ruminate on defects, either our own or others’, obscures our own perception of Buddha Nature, which is itself the perception that Buddha Nature performs.


Both teachers, one from the twelfth century and one from the twentieth, orient us away from externalizing blame, and guide us toward a deepened perception of the essential nature of others. And while it may seem that considering our own faults could be a return to the path of aversion, it must be understood that in a context where Buddha Nature is taken seriously, faults and misperceptions are not ultimately real—there is in fact no ultimate identity of damage, and it is for this very reason that harms, damages, misperceptions, and faults can be fearlessly encountered and re-habituated. The nineteenth-century Nyingma- and Kagyü-trained polymath Jamgön Kongtrül writes that for “those individuals… who believe that buddha nature does not exist… [they come to] hold what is not true—[i.e.,] the relative, adventitious [moral] stains—to be truly existent.” The encounter with one’s own fault is necessarily an encounter with one’s own essential nature as the context within which any fault can make sense in the first place: “Supposing that [Buddha Nature] was definitely not present, not a single person would grow to feel sorrow and remorse over the suffering of samsara. ...[S]uch a person feels weariness with fault, which is the suffering of samsara, and joy over the quality, which is the happiness of nirvana. This weariness and joy arise from the presence of the disposition to buddhahood.” The recognition of fault is not separable from the path of awakening.

309 The doctrine of buddha nature thus allows aversion toward self, or what contemporary psychologists understand as ‘shame,’ to be converted into a generative guilt, which focuses on specific actions and habits instead of the person’s total worthiness.
311 Ibid., p. 125.
Buddha nature can be interpreted in different ways, and these differences matter for our understanding of *Drive all blames into one*. For Je Tsong Kha Pa and the subsequent Geluk tradition, the *tathāgatagarbha*, when properly interpreted, actually directs us back to the definitive final truth of *śūnyatā* understood in Madhyamaka terms. Paul Williams summarizes Geluk views toward *tathāgatagarbha* thought this way: “[W]hen the Buddha spoke of the *tathāgatagarbha* what he was really referring to, the real truth behind his teaching, was none other than emptiness (*śūnyatā*) understood in its Madhyamaka sense as simply a negation, absence of intrinsic existence... After all, the *tathāgatagarbha* is said to be that within sentient beings which enables them to attain Buddhahood. ...Thus when we say that all sentient beings have within them the Buddha-essence or the Buddha-nature we mean that all sentient beings have minds which can change and become Buddha’s mind.”

The Geluk model of Buddha Nature, drawing from Candrakīrti, might be called ‘weak’ or ‘developmental,’ in as far as the qualities of Buddhahood, on such a view, are not intrinsic to beings, but must be assiduously cultivated over numerous lifetimes—a cultivation that rests upon a Madhyamaka account of *śūnyatā*, because only what is

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312 Debates between *Prāṣangika* and *Śvātantrika* understandings of Madhyamaka are not covered here in detail. However, note simply that the Geluk view, following Buddhapālita and Candrakīrti, is that of *Prāṣangika* Madhyamaka (a retrospective label for prior thinkers, applied in later Tibetan debates), which suggests that Buddhist logic should deconstruct opponents’ arguments based on the unintended reifying consequences (Skt.: *prasanga*) that follow from those arguments. From the *Prāṣangika* perspective, *Śvātantrika* thinkers such as Bhāvaviveka and Śāntarakṣita, by using autonomous syllogisms in order to advance their positive positions about the meaning of emptiness, risk producing unhelpful reifications of emptiness. This debate about the correct role of reasoning is in part a precursor to debates about *rangtong* and *shentong* views of emptiness, which are more central to our exposition of the doctrinal background to lojong below. (See, for example, Buswell and Lopez, 664.)

313 Williams, 113.

314 Buswell and Lopez, 898.
empty of intrinsic existence can be so profoundly transformed. However, Buddhahood
in Geluk thought therefore remains distant from and other than the mind as it is—
reproducing the sort of duality between self and ultimate awakening that the
Prajñāpāramitā had originally sought to criticize. A developmental model of Buddha
Nature as mere mutability may also compromise our capacity to perceive the current
actuality of awakened nature in others; if we take on identities as persons on the true
path of cultivation toward supreme awakening, it may be quite easy to perceive others,
who are not obviously on that path, as inferior.315

The contemporary scholarly notion that the teaching of Buddha Nature may
have been simply an attempt to recruit non-Buddhists, and was therefore primarily
economic or competitive in its purpose,316 ignores the genuine doctrinal and practical
tensions that tathāgatagarbha thought sought to resolve in the burgeoning Mahāyāna.
The Mahāparinirvānasūtra’s confrontational use of ātman to describe the
tathāgatagarbha, for instance, upholds a genuine basis for the path in a primordially

315 Thomas Kuhn, in The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (1962), noted that paradigms create new
problems at the moment when they solve others. This is certainly true of the Prajñāpāramitā. It is
unfortunate that contemporary scholars often view tathāgatagarbha thought as showing “little interest
in... doctrinal philosophical precision” (Williams, 315), when in fact tathāgatagarbha literatures often seek
to resolve problems that such ‘precision’ may actually create.
316 “Stressing the presence of a fully-enlightened Buddha in each and every sentient being may... have
been intended to encourage support for the Mahāyāna, including material support from the wider lay
community” (Williams, p. 315, note 10, following the work of Michael Zimmerman). As in my comments
about Gregory Schopen’s writing on the ‘cult of the book,’ it seems to me that the widespread Religious
Studies hermeneutic of economic suspiciousness must ignore, or is unable to see, the ways in which
doctrinal development usually articulates a logic of thought and practice that responds directly to
doctrinal tensions present in prior aspects of the tradition. The lack of a ‘theological’ imagination seems
to render such historical judgment very limited, so that we are only able to see our own economic
suspicion in others. Ironically, the problem of perceiving others more generously is arguably a
foundational or even central issue in the tathāgatagarbha sutras and the Ratnagotravibhāga.
existent reality—an implicit response to the risk of hopelessness or ‘pathlessness’ in the Prajñāpāramitā-Madhyamaka presentation of śūnyatā as a totalizing deconstruction. And unlike the Geluk view of Buddha Nature, which identifies the tathāgatagarbha directly with a Madhyamaka account of śūnyatā, Nyingma and Kagyü understandings uphold a stronger model of Buddha Nature as a set of intrinsic awakened qualities that are already present in the mind and as the mind, and are therefore available to the bodhisattva through practice, or realized as the actual power of practice.

Tathāgatagarbha teaching reconfigures the meanings of ignorance. If ignorance, for tathāgatagarbha texts, has to do with a failure to perceive the immense potentiality-presence of pure awareness in ourselves and others, this ignorance is precisely what prevents the bodhisattva from accessing the primordial emptiness that

317 Buswell and Lopez, 504. The use of language intended to shock its audience is a standard use of ‘skillful means’ in Mahāyāna sutras. ‘Atman,’ here, refers to not a conventional self, but points instead to an empty awareness that is nonetheless endowed with certain capacities, including nirvanic perception. Mahāyāna sutras consistently use key terms in new ways, in part to disrupt reified, static understandings within Buddhist traditions themselves.

318 Just as the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras responded to problems of reification in early Buddhist abhidhamma traditions, problems that may have led to a dualistic intellectualization of practice (see above), the totalizing deconstruction of the Prajñāpāramitā may have tempted its own followers in turn to simply assert deconstruction as the ‘correct’ content of ultimate truth, without pursuing deconstruction as a necessarily process to be undergone through or within the conventional, ‘relative’ aspect of reality. This is one reason why it may be helpful to view Nāgārjuna’s Mūlamadhyamakakārikā primarily as an argument for the deep importance of engaging conventional truth as not-other-than the ultimate. This is likely also the reason why Nāgārjuna so vigorously insisted that anyone who simply ‘believes’ in emptiness is completely lost; emptiness, for Nāgārjuna, connotes a process to be undergone rather than a position for mere assertion and defense.


320 Here the tathāgatagarbha and Yogācāra traditions draw in part from the Prajñāpāramitā in Eight Thousand Lines, which, as we have seen, briefly describes awareness as “transparently luminous.” Cittam prakṛtiprabhāsvaram, “luminous purity of mind,” is a doctrine that becomes far more prominent in Yogācāra texts, where “the mind of each sentient being is essentially pure, luminous awareness, while the affective and cognitive impurities that cover the mind, being adventitious to it, are not part of its very nature” (Makransky, 90).
he or she claims to seek. When we speak in the next section about *Drive all blames into one* as a practice not of aversion but of refuge, we will draw directly from *tathāgatagarbha* understandings of mind as possessed of an unchanging, unobstructed compassionate wisdom. If the *tathāgatagarbha* is purified through a process of recognizing the very qualities of luminous awareness that we so regularly misperceive due to the adventitious negativities which arise in ignorance, then ignorance is dissolved through our ongoing relationship to the nature of awakened awareness itself, accessed through refuge practices of *guru yoga*—devotion to the power of Buddhahood in one’s own teachers—as well as mandala offerings, the seven-limbed *puja*, and vajrasattva confession or purification practice. Refuge, purification, and insight are, in *tathāgatagarbha* thought, not different from one another.

Nascent *tathāgatagarbha* perspectives are most visible in an important series of five texts, the ‘Maitreya Treatises,’ attributed simultaneously to the fourth-century CE

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321 Similar questions about the anthropological basis for ongoing sanctification are crucial in Christian thought. There is a significant practical difference, for instance, between Aquinas, for whom *operative grace* informs each human being and for whom *cooperative grace* enables the person to decisively move through the process of sanctification—and Calvin, for whom there is no human basis at all for either salvation or sanctification, and for whom only some persons are actually empowered through grace toward any salvation at all (*Institutes* 2.1.7).

322 Five texts are attributed to Maitreyanātha, of which we will briefly discuss several:

A. *Abhasamayālamkāra: Ornament for the Realizations*—mentioned above as a *Prajñāpāramitā* outline, but which contains significant Yogācāra influences as well (see Makransky, Chapters 6 and 7)

B. *Mahāyānasutrālamkāra: Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras*—important not only for Nyingma thinkers, but also for Atiśa, the Kadampa teacher who introduced *lojong* into Tibet in the eleventh century (Ringu Tulku, 162)

C. *Madhyāntavibhāga: The Discrimination of the Middle from the Extremes*

D. *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga: The Discrimination of Dharmas and their True Nature [dharmatā]*

E. *Ratnagotravibhāga: Lineage Analysis of the Three Jewels or Uttaratantra: Sublime Continuum Śastra.*
scholar-practitioner Asanga and to the transcendent bodhisattva, Maitreyanātha.\textsuperscript{323}

Among these treatises, the ca. fourth-century CE Mahāyāna-Uttaratantraśāstra, ‘Sublime Continuum of the Mahāyāna Treatise,’ is particularly foundational for later Kagyū and Nyingma reflections on Buddha Nature and nature of mind.\textsuperscript{324} The Uttaratantra, like the Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa, Tathāgatagarbha, Śrīmālādeviśimhanāda, and Avatamsaka sūtras, outlines specific qualities of Buddhahood and fully awakened awareness that the bodhisattva may rely upon as a basis or ground for his or her path:

\begin{quote}
Without middle or end—exceedingly vast, 
Buddhahood is all-pervading, just like space. 
Perfectly seeing that this treasure of unsullied qualities 
Is in every being, without the slightest distinction, 
[Buddhas] dispel clouds of defilement and knowledge 
With the wind of their perfect compassion.
\end{quote}

(Uttaratantra 4.2; Thrangu Rinpoche, 172)\textsuperscript{325}

The Uttaratantra is also clear that these qualities are not merely a possibility of future ‘achievement,’ and thus avoids a dualism between current state and future state; primordially awakened awareness is completely intrinsic to beings.

\begin{quote}
The nature of mind is like the element of space; 
it has neither causes, nor conditions, nor these in combination, 
 nor any arising, destruction, or abiding

This true nature of mind—clarity—is like space,
\end{quote}

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\textsuperscript{324} Thrangu Rinpoche, 7. The works of Dölpopa, which were a focus of much Geluk opposition, proved foundational for later Nyingma and Kagyü reflections on mind. Dölpopa quotes over 200 lines of the Uttaratantra in a major work on shentong: \textit{Mountain Doctrine: Ocean of Definitive Meaning}, trans. Jeffrey Hopkins (Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications 2006), p. 41.

unchanging, not defiled...

(Uttaratantra 1.62-63; Thrangu Rinpoche, 67)

This nature of mind is accessed and activated precisely through beholding (and, ultimately, being beheld within) the awakened awareness of Buddhahood:326

There is nothing whatever to remove from this, nor the slightest thing thereon to add. truly beholding the true nature—when truly seen—complete liberation

(Uttaratantra 1.154; Thrangu Rinpoche, 95)

The Uttaratantra, like the sutras that expound the tathāgatagarbha, directly confronts distortions of thought and practice that may result from the teaching of radical emptiness (śūnyavāda). The virtually endless accumulation of causes for enlightenment entailed by the bodhisattva path, as it is outlined by the Prajñāpāramitā and its Madhyamaka interpreters, can become overwhelming and seemingly impossible for a bodhisattva who does not realize his or her close connection to enlightenment.

The five Maitreya-Asanga texts appear more attuned to the potential problem of spiritual despair, and the implications of such despair for our active love of others, than prior Mahāyāna sūtras and treatises. Maitreya’s Mahāyānasutrālamkāra, or Ornament for the Mahāyāna Sutras, notes that, apart from confidence in Buddha Nature, “beings

326 The process of recognizing one’s own tathāgatagarbha is structurally similar to the overturning of the ‘basis’ in Yogācāra thought and practice. For the Yogācāra, “The final attainment comes suddenly... [in an] event known as the ‘reversal of the basis’ [or ‘fundamental transformation’] (āśraya-parāvrtti). It is where the usual flow of the worldly mind suddenly stops, so that the six sensory consciousness [including mind] no longer present information. Having stopped discriminating ‘objects’ in the flow of the six consciousnesses, manas [mind] ‘turns round’ from these and attains direct, intuitive, noble knowledge (ārya-jñāna) of ālaya as its basis” (Harvey, 137). The lojong directive, “Rest in the nature of the ālaya” induces the lojong practitioner into the practice-goals of both Yogācāra and tathāgatagarbha teaching. Lojong can thus be flexibly interpreted across multiple Mahāyāna sub-traditions. Without an intrinsic capacity for rest in the nature of mind, Drive all blames into one may become much more likely to advance a reifying self-critique. Lojong advances precisely the sort of “interplay between ultimate and relative awareness” that Makransky outlines as a fundamental aspect of Mahāyāna sūtra literature (see Makransky, Ch. 13).
do not feel a love even for themselves, not to speak of [love] for beloved others’ lives, [not] anything like the love the compassionate (bodhisattva) feels for other beings” (8.15). All beings may contain deep capacities for love and connection, but the bodhisattva is one who actually has a greater trust in those very capacities. Maitreya’s Madhyāntavibhāga, or Distinguishing the Middle, repeatedly names, as an ‘extreme’ to be avoided, the deprecation of self and other (e.g., 3.4-3.5; 5.23; etc.), and calls attention to the ‘feeling of inadequacy’ as a basic obscuration that prevents full access to awakening (2.7). The Uttaratantra notes:

There are five mistakes: faintheartedness, Contempt for those of lesser ability, to believe in the false, To speak about the true nature badly, And to cherish oneself above all else.

(Uttaratantra 1.157; Thrangu Rinpoche, 97)

However, the Uttaratantra continues, the śūnyavāda teaching that experience can be likened to a dream or a conjuration may not heal the five mistakes at all:

Not learning in this fashion [i.e., through the śūnyavāda] Some people are disheartened through mistaken self-contempt and bodhicitta will not develop in them.

(Uttaratantra 1.161; Thrangu Rinpoche, 99)

The Uttaratantra is specifically concerned to provide an antidote for the disheartened who suspect that the bodhisattva path is not, finally, navigable to its ultimate end; tathāgatagarbha teaching implicitly critiques the śūnyavāda for re-introducing the very dualism between what is (samsara) and what should be (full supreme awakening; 327 Maitreyanātha-Āryāsanga, The Universal Vehicle Discourse Literature: Mahāyānasūtrālāmākāra, ed. Robert Thurman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 67. 328 Middle Beyond Extremes: Maitreya’s Madhyāntavibhāga with Commentaries by Khenpo Shenga and Ju Mipham, trans. Dharmachakra Translation Committee (Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications, 2006).
anuttara samyak sambodhi) that the śūnyavāda itself had initially sought to deconstruct. The tathāgatagarbha teachings re-negotiate the very paradox of intention that the Prajñāpāramitā, too, had been concerned to emphasize.

It is worth noting, as a way to further foreshadow our commentary on Drive all blames into one, that among the ‘five mistakes’ named in Uttaratantra 1.157 (see above), we find both ‘self-contempt’ and contempt for others of supposedly ‘lesser’ capacity. This problem of the bodhisattva’s potential deprecation of others—not only self-centered arhats or pratyekabuddhas, but any supposed non-bodhisattva—can be read as simply an intertextual Mahāyāna disagreement about proper hermeneutics in the interpretation of diverse Buddhist traditions. However, the logic of tathāgatagarbha thought and practice cannot actually abide the ultimate disparagement of anyone,\(^\text{329}\) in as far as such contempt prevents the practitioner from recognizing Buddha Nature in others, which is precisely the process of his or her own full awakening.

The reification of a contemptible otherness is necessarily the disruption of unimpeded compassion at the heart of the non-dual tathāgatagarbha.\(^\text{330}\) If the awakening of mind’s self-recognition of its own true nature depends upon recognizing that nature in Buddhas, and being thus recognized by Buddhas, the vision of all others as

\(^{329}\) E.g., Uttaratantra 1.162.

\(^{330}\) In the early, shorter version of the Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvānasūtra, the text speaks of the icchantika, one who is ‘incorrigible,’ or intrinsically unable to proceed upon the path to Buddhahood. The later and longer version of the Mahāparinirvānasūtra, however, suggests that even the icchantika has an intrinsic capacity for supreme awakening (Buswell and Lopez, 504). This development occurs almost certainly as a result of the text’s own core epistemic commitment to the tathāgatagarbha, which purifies the text itself of its own initially dualistic perspective toward supposedly different kinds of beings. The text, in this case, models the progress it seeks to induce in its readers.
Buddhas fosters a devotional epistemology, a shift that is directed toward everyone—this is precisely the kind of loving perception that may allow ‘others,’ in turn, to begin to access their own transcendent capacities for compassion. Thus, through practices of devotion to Buddhas, love and compassion for beings becomes more and more non-dual; one does not merely direct compassion toward ‘self,’ or toward ‘other,’ but one is increasingly able to abide in the active power of the compassionate nature of mind beyond dualistic distinctions.\(^{331}\) ‘Self-compassion,’ while certainly far more skillful than self-aversion, may nonetheless quietly reinforce those distinctions. For Jamgön Kongtrül, only the \textit{bodhisattva’s} trust in his or her own true nature allows the \textit{bodhisattva} to “attain the great love that sees oneself and all sentient beings as having the same nature, as being equally the absolute buddha.”\(^{332}\) To \textit{Drive all blames into one} is to protect one’s foundational commitment to an increasingly nondual epistemology of devotion and compassion; \textit{lojong} drives an increasingly expansive refuge.\(^{333}\)


\(^{332}\) Kongtrül, 2000, p. 179.

\(^{333}\) The epistemological commitment to cognizing others in their deep capacity of awakening is so important that multiple \textit{lojong} directives seek to protect our capacity to recognize and confirm others in their fundamental awakened nature, chiefly through a refusal to reify others in competitive vision: \textit{Don’t ponder others; Don’t try to be the fastest; Don’t be jealous; Don’t seek others’ pain as the limbs of your own happiness}; etc. \textit{Lojong} also speaks of ‘\textit{sūnyatā} protection’—a directive that draws in part from Shantideva’s \textit{Bodhicharyāvatāra}, where the principles of emptiness, non-duality, and compassionate power find simultaneous expression in the following lines:

Whoever wishes to quickly protect
Himself and all others,
Should engage in the sacred secret
Called ‘exchanging oneself for others.’ (8.120)
It is also important that, among the five mistakes, we find self-contempt and self-cherishing together. While this may appear at first as a contradiction, self-cherishing is fundamentally an expression of despair; we will see in a moment that *Drive all blames into one* explicitly confronts self-cherishing as ‘the one’ that creates the conditions for suffering in the first place. Self-cherishing will be spoken of as a ‘demon.’ This is not accidental: to habitually place our hope for freedom and happiness in ongoing reifications of selfhood is to commit ourselves to endless cycles of advancing and defending that selfhood through misguided desire and anger—which harm us deeply even as they give us the illusory feeling of being real (one aspect of emotional capitalism; see Chapter 1 above). That exhausting, damaging commitment to the reified self is necessarily a denial that we are capable of accessing something more.

The problem of ‘self-contempt’ in the *Uttaratantra* is not identical with the therapeutic discourse of shame as a form of self-hatred in modern cultures of performative personality. The *Uttaratantra* overtly insists that ātmāvajñāna, spiritual self-denigration, can only be understood in relation to an ultimate telos of the human being—that of supreme awakening. This is not a context or possibility that contemporary psychology takes seriously, which is one reason why therapeutic Buddhism has sought to conflate the rhetorics of soteriology and adjustment.\(^{334}\) We saw in Chapter 1 that Eva Illouz speaks of the exchange of “recognition” as a primary foundation for emotional-therapeutic capitalism; but this is recognition primarily at the

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\(^{334}\) Kierkegaard speaks of ‘levelling,’ a term also applicable to therapeutic Buddhism.
level of the performative self. Mahāyāna resources of devotion and *guru yoga* activate a different form of “recognition”: that which actively perceives and confirms others in their deepest capacities of compassion and freedom. This essence of the *tathāgata within the sentient being* is characterized in the *Uttaratantra* as

like the element of space;  
it has neither causes, nor conditions, nor these in combination,  
nor any arising, destruction, or abiding.

(*Uttaratantra* 1.62; Thrangu Rinpoche, 67)

There is nothing whatever to remove from this,  
nor the slightest thing thereon to add.  
truly beholding the true nature—when truly seen—that is complete liberation.

(*Uttaratantra* 1.154; Thrangu Rinpoche, 95)

The nature of mind is both spontaneous and compassionate. Gampopa, an early twelfth-century commentator on Madhyamaka and Mahamudra themes, described the nature of mind as “self-authenticating, spontaneous and unchanging.”335 The twentieth-century Dzogchen master Nyoshul Khenpo writes: “When one realizes the natural state, the true nature of all beings, there is naturally a welling up of inconceivable spontaneous compassion, loving-kindness, consideration, and empathy, because one realizes there is no self separate from others. One then treats others just like oneself.”336 Longchenpa, a central fourteenth-century Nyingma scholar, noted that

Out of this open range [i.e., the nature of mind] an impartial compassion arises,  
And the person is urged onto and engages in what is wholesome  
both for himself and others.337
Longchenpa’s close contemporary, the Jonang scholar Dölpopa Sherab Gyaltsen (1292-1361), interpreted the *Uttaratantra* and the Maitreya texts, and especially the Mahāyāna *tathāgatagarbha* sutras, as foundational teachings about what Dölpopa, for the first time, called shentong, or ‘other-emptiness.’ Dölpopa, for the first time, called shentong, or ‘other-emptiness.’ Shentong, a unity of basic space and luminous awareness containing the timelessly liberated and compassionate capacities of the Buddha, is also ultimately empty and intrinsically purified of anything that is not that luminous awareness:

...that which is primordial awareness of the basic space of phenomena is a permanent, unconditioned primordial awareness... of natural great bliss.

What pedagogical purposes did Dölpopa have in mind? He is most fundamentally a teacher and defender of refuge. For Dölpopa, there are potential problems in the standard Madhymaka presentation of *śunyatā* as ‘emptiness of self’ (*rangtong*): “through merely knowing that things are self-empty,” writes Dölpopa, “one is not released,” at least not in any sense that gives access to the truly liberating qualities of Buddhahood. The doctrine of ‘other-emptiness,’ on the other hand, offers a focus for

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338 Carefully distinguishing empty of self-nature and empty of other, what is relative is all taught to be empty of self-nature, and what is absolute is taught to be precisely empty of other. —Dölpopa, Fourth Council


340 Hopkins, 2006, p. 394. Douglas Duckworth writes that for Dölpopa, “self-emptiness alone leaves one with ‘the extreme of non-existence,’ which is simply the lack of true identity held as a mere absence. This
precisely the fundamental qualities of belief and faith through which “many obstructions [to unconditioned awakened awareness] are purified.” Dölpopa directs the reader toward the primordially other-empty ground of awareness as itself the liberated and liberating essence of Buddhahood:

Precisely that ground of emptiness
is the sugata essence... natural luminosity,
natural purity, primordially pristine...

It is the Tathāgata free
from the very beginning,
initially liberated enlightened mind
with the nature of space
Buddha even before all the Buddhas.

For Dölpopa, the teaching of dependent co-origination or ‘self-emptiness’ cannot finally explain the possibility of a supreme awakening, and may detract from the depth and quality of Buddhist refuge that does support that awakening—a key issue in our examination of the meanings of Drive all blames into one. In Dölpopa’s view, if dependent co-origination, or self-emptiness, were in fact the final truth of things, then “even final true cessations [of self-centered awareness] would not be beyond dependent-arisings ... [and also] would not be beyond compounded phenomena, in

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341 “The exact meaning and significance of faith (Skt. sraddha) in Buddhism must be approached with caution. ...[T]rue faith is the faculty of trust that allows one to let go into one’s experience. Hence it leads to the signless liberation in which there is nothing to hold on to. In Shentong terms, complete signlessness means ‘Buddhajnana’ [the wisdom or nondual perception of the Buddha]. Therefore, a clear connection between faith and Jnana [awakened perception] is indicated here” (Hookham, 57).


343 Stearns, 169.
which case they would most absurdly have the attributes of impermanence, falsity, and deceptiveness and would not be final sources of refuge.”

That is, whatever is only dependently and ephemerally arisen cannot be a stable basis for either a sustained full awakening or a sustainable refuge. Only a refuge in what is finally absolute can allow for the ongoing origination of Buddhas through the spontaneous manifestation of an unconditioned, primordial awareness—and this is why the teaching of the primordially creative power of other-emptiness, or Buddha Nature, as a focus of refuge, is so important. For instance: will our recognition of fault turn us only toward the basic emptiness of that fault as an action that is dependently co-originated? Or can the recognition of fault also turn us, simultaneously, toward refuge in the nature of mind itself, so that we are aware not only of the contingent, dependently arisen nature of defilements or faults, but are also empowered to rely upon an unconditioned source or ground of primordial wisdom and compassion?

This is one among many practical questions at stake in Dölpopa’s thought. He distinguishes between two different forms of origination—the dependent origination of the Madhyamaka ‘self-empty’ position, and the spontaneous origination of unconditioned primordial awareness of the ‘other-empty’ position, without dismissing either. This is the integrative position that Dölpopa calls Great Madhyamaka—a

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345 “[I]t is now clear that Dölpopa was not simply setting up the viewpoints of an emptiness of self-nature and an emptiness of other as opposed theories located on the same level. He obviously viewed the pair as complementary, while making the careful distinction that the view of an ‘emptiness of other’ applied only to the absolute and an ‘emptiness of self-nature’ only to the relative” (Stearns, 3). The notion that Dölpopa was an opponent of Madhyamaka understanding is an anachronistic projection of Tsong Kha Pa’s
‘middle way’ between the possible extremes of rejecting either shentong or rangtong.\textsuperscript{346} Dölpopa’s shentong position was roundly rejected by Je Tsong Kha Pa (1347-1419), founder of the Geluk order, who gave rangtong Madhyamaka texts pride of place in the powerful Geluk monastic curriculum.\textsuperscript{347} But Tsong Kha Pa’s rejection of Jonang shentong views\textsuperscript{348} does not mean that we should anachronistically interpret Jonang scholars and practitioners as opponents of ‘self-emptiness.’ The point, instead, is that if we fail to differentiate the conditioned (rangtong) processes of consciousness from pervasive unconditioned reality (shentong), we will fail to rely upon that unconditioned awakened wisdom as it genuinely exists in and through beings.\textsuperscript{349}

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Dölpopa writes, for instance, that he “cannot yield to those [Madhyamaka figures] who accept, ‘All is groundless’” when they fail to locate or trust in the true ground. See Stearns, 189. Dölpopa advised the physician Tsultrim Ö, to seek out practical instructions “which separate natural luminosity and the
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Dölpopa’s *shentong* view was further refined and critiqued by the key nineteenth-century Nyingma and Ri-mé teacher Ju Mipam (1846-1912), for whom *rangtong* and *shentong* teachings are less radically separated than they had been for either Dölpopa or his Geluk critics. Douglas Duckworth writes that “Rather than a *dichotomous* relationship between a separate ground of the ultimate and relative [as found in Dölpopa’s teaching], we can say that Mipam maintains a *dialectical* relationship between the two truths, a dialectical unity.”  

Mipam questions whether the metaphysical realism of Dölpopa’s ‘other-emptiness’ can adequately represent a reality that is ultimately “beyond cognitive representations and linguistic constructs.” Rather than become caught between Geluk denials and Jonang affirmations of any metaphysical construct, Mipam proposes, instead, a unity or ‘dynamic presence’ that is itself, writes Duckworth, “buddha-nature, a truth [Mipam] consistently emphasizes cannot be objectified, for it is a unity of emptiness and appearance that constitutes a lived and living cognitive presence.” To objectify that unity, or to deny it altogether, is to purge buddha-nature of “its *mystery* or dynamic dimension, its creative potential as a transformative ultimate reality that is alive not (pre)determined.”

On this account, importantly, buddha-nature “as a *groundless ground* challenges the mind’s tendency to pin it down. ...What [Mipam] presents here as a dialectical unity

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352 Ibid, 12.
353 Ibid, 12.
of emptiness and appearance poses a challenge to the stultifying tendencies of monological determinism in a metaphysics that either collapses buddha-nature into a stagnant absence or presumes an inert, transcendent presence.” 354 Duckworth proposes, as a shorthand way to describe Mipam’s view, “the buddha-nature of buddha-nature”—questioning both the Jonang romanticism of other-emptiness and potential Geluk ossifications of self-emptiness. It is clear, however, that Mipam’s position is a dynamic vivification of Buddha Nature doctrine, which, in my view, renders Mipam closer to Dölpopa in his pedagogical and philosophical intent than he is to Tsong Kha Pa.

For our purposes, what is important is the fact that Dölpopa, as well as later Kagyü and Nyingma lojong commentators, all trust that we are able to access the omnipresent, awake, primordially pure, unconditioned and actively compassionate awareness of the Tathāgata with radical directness. It is this robust, ‘discovery model’ of Buddha Nature as a true reality intrinsic to all beings, which serves as a focus for ongoing reliance and empowerment in the pages below. 356 Without that radical directness of access to awakened power, Drive all blames into one becomes a teaching that is only about self-critique—rather than a teaching that directs us simultaneously toward a direct critique of the self-reifying tendencies that obscure the ground of

355 “The ultimate conduct that serves as a method for achieving enlightenment is a great compassion intent on liberating all sentient beings from suffering and its causes. And this ultimate compassion has a quintessence of nonconceptual primordial awareness...” (Stearns, 382n.444).
356 Duckworth traces Nyingma other-empty teachings at least as far back as the Nyingma scholar Lochen Dharmāśri (1654-1717), who in turn appeals to Longchenpa (1308-1364), a contemporary of Dölpopa. See Duckworth, 2008, Chap. 3.
refuge, and then also toward refuge itself in the dynamic ground of compassionate clarity. Unless we drive all blames into one, we cannot rely on that which is blameless.

*Drive all blames into one* serves an important clarifying purpose. It involves, first, a recognition of the process of self-grasping as ‘the one’—that which creates divisions between the reified, supposedly defendable self, and the reified, supposedly blameworthy other. This is as far as Gelukpa commentators tend to go in their understanding of *Drive all blames into one*; there is nothing to do beyond recognizing one’s own self-clinging as the primary source of suffering. From a Nyingma or Kagyü perspective, however, *Drive all blames into one* is both a critical engagement with the processes of suffering, while also functioning as an expression of the very compassionate awareness that allows us to perceive suffering in the first place. Nyingma-Kagyū styles of interpretation, more than Geluk, will understand *Drive all blames into one* not only as a recognition of the pain-producing mistake of reifying the faultless self and the contemptible other (even self-hatred is structurally the hatred of another), but also as a reliance on primordial awakened awareness itself.

In a situation of lovelessness or despair, which is the situation of personality culture, it is tempting to attempt to feel more real through depression or rage, aversion toward either self or other. Is there, finally, anything more real? To *Drive all blames into one* is in some way to be turned back toward the ground and source of awareness itself; it is an act of compassion and refuge in sources of perception beyond aversion.
3.6 **DRIVE ALL BLAMES INTO ONE**

*Lojong* instructions are rooted in the oral pith teachings of the early Kadampas—eleventh-century teachers who reintroduced Indian Buddhist teaching into Tibet following a period of significant decline in patronage and practice. The origins of *lojong* teaching are particularly associated with the first of the Kadam masters, Atiśa Dīpamkara of Vikramaśīla Monastery in Northern India.\(^{357}\) Atiśa, yielding finally to several requests from the King of Western Tibet, Yeshe Od, crossed the border from Nepal into Tibet in 1042, at the age of 60. He would teach for another 13 years, passing on oral *lojong* teachings to several disciples, including Dromtönpa, a figure we will meet again in the pages below.\(^{358}\) Thupten Jinpa writes,

> It does appear that Atiśa never actually explicitly authored a mind training [*lojong*] text in the sense of a coherently organized work. These lines are most probably based on spontaneous instructions that Atiśa gave to different individuals on numerous occasions and that were later compiled by various teachers into oral transmissions so that they would not be lost. Their origin in oral transmissions is evident from their brevity and vernacular style. It is perhaps also due to this oral origin that so many redactions of the root lines came about, some of which do not demonstrate any familiarity with the others.\(^{359}\)


\(^{358}\) For a particularly good summary of the initial Kadampa transmission of *lojong* teaching in Tibet, see Glenn Mullin’s introduction to the *lojong* commentary authored by Gyalwa Gendun Druppa, the first Dalai Lama, in the 15th century: *Training the Mind in the Great Way* (Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications, 1993), pages 17-38.

\(^{359}\) Jinpa, 2006, p. 11.
upon oneself; give all victory to others’—a line found in the early 8-stanza versification of *lojong* composed by Langri Thangpa (1054-1123). And while Chekawa’s later systematization of fifty-nine *lojong* directives under seven thematic headings, or ‘points’ has remained a particularly prominent organization of *lojong* teaching, *lojong* is more accurately a broader collection of attitudes, motivations, and directives that have been presented in various forms, but are always intended to support the basic altruistic heart of awakening: *bodhicitta*.\(^{361}\)

In order to reveal basic relationships between *lojong* teachings themselves, on the one hand, and fundamental Mahāyāna teachings on compassion and wisdom, on the other hand, *lojong* commentaries have sometimes functioned as highly curated anthologies of related Buddhist literatures. It is possible to see this anthological practice from the first *lojong* commentaries, including that of Sé Chilbu Chökyi Gyaltsen, one of Chekawa’s students, who draws from Shantideva in particular, but also prior *lojong* teachers and treatises.\(^{362}\) Chökyi Dragpa (d. 1908), a student of the Ri-mé Nyingmapa Patrul Rinpoche (1820-1892), exemplifies this anthological practice in his commentary on the *Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva*, a classic *lojong* text composed by Gyalse

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\(^{360}\) Langri Thangpa shorter verse recension of *lojong* is a more succinct, easily memorized summary of the fundamental perspectives of *lojong*. This verse prayer, however, is not so susceptible to extended commentary as is Geshe Chekawa’s seven-point organization of *lojong* teaching, and has less often been a focus of scholastic attention. Langthangpa’s nickname, ‘ever-weeping,’ may suggest a point of similarity between the effects of *lojong* practice and the effects of *penthos* among the Desert Fathers, discussed in the next chapter. Thupten Jinpa writes of *lojong* as “a kind of metanoesia”; metanoia is a basic focus of these pages as well (see Jinpa, 2006, p. 2).

\(^{361}\) Jinpa, 2006, p. 7. Also Mullin, 1993, pp. 17-38. Jinpa writes, “Almost all Tibetan sources agree that Langri Thangpa, and later Chekawa, were responsible for bringing the ‘secret’ mind trainings teaching into the wider public domain” (Jinpa, 2006, p. 11).

Togme (1295-1369). Zhechen Gyaltsab (1871-1926), a student of both Jamgön Kongtrul and Ju Mipam, reproduces extensive passages from Shantideva, Asanga-Maitreya, Atiśa and other Indian Mahāyāna figures in his early-twentieth century work on lojong. The lojong commentarial process often involves a careful synthesis of fundamental Mahāyāna texts.

Lojong teachings demand and presume a context of interpretation. The teachings themselves, although offering a “highly practical approach” to the cultivation of compassionate awakening from one perspective, actually combine directness with a certain invitational abstraction (see the story of Chekawa’s encounter with ‘Take all defeat upon oneself,’ above). Lojong asks the student to recall this doctrinal background in order to inform a process of developing counterintuitive skills of practical wisdom. In this sense, lojong may function in part as a mnemonic for an entire lineage of teachings. For instance, the lojong directive “Be grateful to everyone” takes on a range of meanings for teachers who accept tathagatāgarbha texts as ultimate or definitive. In those communities, all persons are potentially objects of devotion in their deepest human nature, or Buddha Nature—a devotion that is one potential meaning of “Be grateful to everyone.” The same teaching may appear to another person as an impossible and even dangerous naïveté.

We are told to offer gratitude to those who seem at first to cause pain, but who may perfectly illumine our own self-concern. The instruction to “Always meditate on whatever provokes resentment” similarly reverses the natural habit of avoiding the unpleasant, in order to help us identify those situations in which we most regularly seek our own self-protection. These teachings, including *Drive all blames into one*, dare and require us to ask: *why do this strange thing, and on what authority?* *Lojong* instructions do not simply or unambiguously stand on their own; they tend to induce inquiry.

Once memorized and internalized within a particular lineage of understanding, *lojong* directives emerge in unexpected ways across a range of life-situations, and this mysterious active quality of the *lojong* phrases themselves is also worth brief mention here. The directives seem to arise from a way of perceiving that is beyond normal discursive habits, and though rooted in a total philosophical vision, *lojong* teachings may be thought of as a set of attitudinal guideposts marking a path out of habitual self-concern. In some sense, however, they are guideposts that come looking for you, rather than the other way around.

*Lojong* directives might be initially illuminated in part through brief comparison to the koans of Rinzai Zen.366 One of the better-known koans directs the Zen

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366 Norman Fischer makes the same general point very briefly at the outset of *Training in Compassion: Zen Teachings on the Practice of Lojong* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2012). Fischer writes that “Although the Indo-Tibetan practice of slogans is perhaps more psychological and intentional than [Koan practice], it is in its essentials quite similar” (Introduction, p. xviii). I disagree that *lojong* is more ‘psychological’; the *lojong* slogans point immediately beyond the instrumental psychological reason that is arguably the default epistemological perspective for most human beings. Koans disrupt our normal habits of instrumental reason, so that a new form of openness, awakening, or *kensho* may arise. *Lojong*, alternatively, *begins* from an experience of basic openness, and seeks to actively cultivate compassion.
practitioner to seek his ‘original face,’ prior to all births. One of the first lojong teachings in both the early annotated version of the Root Lines and in Chekawa’s seven-point architecture likewise asks us to ‘examine the nature of unborn awareness.’

Lojong and Rinzai koans both seek to invoke a new access to awakened perception prior to all conceptualization. Candrakīrti writes: “Suchness is unborn, and mind itself is also free from birth; and when the mind is tuned to this, it is as though it knows the ultimate reality.”

Lojong begins with precisely the wisdom of suchness that is also its intended end or fruit; it is easy to see, therefore, why questions about the ‘basis’ for practice, whether emptiness of intrinsic identity, or pristine nature of mind, will matter a great deal to different lojong interpreters. One stream of early lojong interpretation, the ‘northern lineage’ of Radrengpa (fourteenth-fifteenth c.), understood the lojong instruction “Place your mind on the basis of all, which is the actual path” as an instruction about emptiness of intrinsic identity, while Gyalse Togme (see above; a near-exact contemporary of Dölpopa) and the ‘southern lineage’ of lojong teaching understood the same line to refer to “uncontrived natural mind.” Despite such differences and their implications for refuge and practice, it should be clear that lojong, from either basic perspective, is something more than a psychological intervention.

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367 The annotated Root Lines, unlike Chekawa, ask us to ‘experience’ unborn awareness (Jinpa, 2006, p. 75).

368 Chandrakīrti, Madhyamakavātāra 11.13, p. 106.

369 Jinpa, 2006, p. 12. Interestingly, the line itself does not appear in the Root Lines on lojong attributed to Atiśa.
While most previous lojong commentaries have offered relatively short discussions of each lojong ‘slogan’ in a defined sequence, this commentarial practice has certain weaknesses, if it leads to a limited engagement with each slogan, rather than a depth of overall investigation (some lojong commentators have adopted an anthological method in order to address the same issue). This commentary focuses in a sustained way on a single lojong teaching—Drive all blames into one—but shows how that particular teaching is deeply interwoven with a range of other lojong teachings. Focusing more intensively on a single lojong directive in this way may in fact offer an unexpected opportunity to articulate the deepest intentionality of the lojong teachings as a whole.

While drive all blames into one may initially appear to some readers to foster precisely the sort of damaging self-aversion already discussed in previous chapters, drive all blames is in fact a fundamental reversal of aversion—perhaps a more direct reversal than autonomous self-compassion can be. In fact, the emphasis on ‘self-acceptance’ may impede the possibility of any fuller liberation, in as far as self-acceptance subtly

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370 This is not, in my view, the word that best describes how lojong teachings are used—or how we become capable of being formed by the teachings themselves.
371 It is possible to imagine a series of extended lojong commentaries that begin from a single teaching, and then weave the other directives into that foundational teaching as the main ‘body’ of the work. This may create a richer commentarial approach than much briefer explications of one teaching at a time, and would more creatively acknowledge the intertextual richness within lojong. Lojong teachings may more thoroughly interpret one another than most commentators have so far suggested.
372 This will be particularly true wherever self-compassion is used to combat the ‘problem’ of aversion, so that self-compassion itself becomes a subtle expression of dualistic intentionality. An important question, clearly, is how Drive all blames into one can be anything but a similarly dualistic expression of aversion to aversion. The irony embedded in Drive all blames into one (an irony at the heart of lojong’s invitational strategy) is that the ‘one’ does not ultimately exist, whereas the compassionate ‘driver’ does. For teachers of self-compassion, the self does appear to exist in a fundamental way, and there is no access to compassion from beyond that limited existence.
confirms the perspective of autonomy itself. Self-acceptance is in some sense a return to the style of achievement that successive Mahāyāna teachings, particularly the prajñāpāramitā and tathāgatagarbha texts, vigorously critique. Religious forms of metanoia or self-evaluation, on the other hand, integrate us into a reality that is more real—to invoke a shentong sensibility—than the realities we create for (and as) ourselves. This transcendent integration diverges from modernist emphases on the autonomous achievement of self-acceptance: religious self-critique is chiefly a form of receptivity to, and then rest within, that which transcends our more limited conditioning.

In Chekawa’s seven-heading systematization of lojong, the very first teaching is:  

First train in the preliminaries.  And while this simple directive encompasses the full range of ngöndro foundational practices,373 the central Ri-mé figure Jamgön Kongtrul

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373 The ngöndro is composed of six aspects: “the four thoughts which turn the mind from samsara; taking refuge; the generation of bodhicitta; the purification through Vajrasattva; offering of the mandala; and finally, Guru Yoga.” See Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, Guru Yoga According to the Preliminary Practice of Longchen Nyingtik (Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications, 1999), p. 30. The four thoughts which turn the mind from samsara are: the nearness and certainty of our own impermanence; the preciousness of human birth; the faults of cyclic existence, including greed, hatred, confusion, and the ubiquity of suffering; and the teaching of karma, or the relationship between cause and effect in practice. Refuge involves “Going for refuge to the Three Jewels—Buddha, his Doctrine [Dharma] and the Spiritual Community [Sangha]…. The door of refuge is opened by faith” (Khetsun Sangpo Rinbochay, Tantric Practice in Nying-Ma, trans. and ed. by Jeffrey Hopkins, co-ed. Anne Klein [Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications, 1982], p. 113). Generating bodhicitta has three elements: “training in the attitudes of the four immeasurables, generating an altruistic aspiration to highest enlightenment and the precepts for so doing” (ibid., 125). Vajrasattva purification involves a confessional practice which, in order to be effective, “must possess four powers. The first is that of the object or base, which is the being to whom you confess—in this case Vajrasattva. The second power is a strong sense of contrition and dissatisfaction with whatever misdeeds you have done in the past. The third is an aspiration towards restraint, a strong intention to avoid repeating the deeds in the future. The fourth is to apply an antidote to what you have misdone” (ibid., 142). The offering of mandala is a ritual process of generosity toward infinite Buddhas and bodhisattvas, using both imagination as well as physical representations of the mandala for the making of offerings to those awakened and empowering beings (ibid., 155). One can quickly see even from this brief overview that the ngöndro already express the themes of both critical self-evaluation and deep refuge. Finally it should be noted that Guru Yoga itself encompasses the other ngöndro, and functions as both a source of empowerment and as a foundation for self-critical purification (Dilgo Khytense Rinpoche, p. 48). In a sense, therefore, Drive all blames into one is a practice driven by the
gives particular importance to \textit{guru yoga} as a primary groundwork for all further \textit{lojong} practice. “It is important,” writes Kongtrul, “to begin every period of meditation this way”—that is, by imagining the \textit{guru} above one’s head, and then descending into a pavilion of light within one’s own heart.\textsuperscript{374}

Our own sharp cultural turn away from attitudes of submission, surrender, and profound reverence likely inhibit even a basic devotion to a guru as one who embodies a profoundly awakened power. But such devotion, perhaps counterintuitively, turns out to be the indispensable ground of any creative self-evaluation. “Of all practices,” writes Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, the great twentieth-century Nyingmapa teacher, “the one which, through its blessings, will fulfil our aims and aspirations most rapidly is \textit{guru yoga}. \textit{Guru yoga} literally means ‘union with the nature of the guru’ and it is both the quintessence and the ground of all the preliminary and main practices [of the \textit{bodhisattva} path].”\textsuperscript{375}

\textit{Guru}, a Sanskrit term meaning, simply, ‘teacher,’ takes on a range of further meanings in its Tibetan context, and in the Tibetan term, \textit{lama}, which most directly translates \textit{guru}. “The \textit{lama} is indeed a teacher,” writes Geoffrey Samuel, but is “also a human representative of Buddhahood, and a focus of devotion for his students and disciples, who will visualize him in the form of a Tantric deity.”\textsuperscript{376} This visualization allows the student access to the actualized Buddha Nature, or nature of mind, operative

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Kongtrul, p. 8.
\item Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, p. 29.
\item Samuel, 13.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
in the guru—which in turn confirms the student in his or her own active potentiality of Buddhahood, such that the ultimate guru comes to be recognized as the nature of mind itself.

_Guru yoga_, then, is a repeated orientation toward a power of liberation from beyond the limits of one’s own karmic patterning. This is in part why it is so necessary that the guru be recognized as a fully awakened Buddha; it is not a conditioned kindness that we require, but complete liberation _(_guru yoga_ when framed by other ngöndro emphasizing the four thoughts which turn the mind away from samsara, is an expression of what we most need to turn toward). _Guru yoga_, like refuge more broadly, offers us the possibility of a deep alteration of our most tangled karmic compulsions. Kongtrul’s insistence on the importance of _guru yoga_ as a basic frame for _lojong_ itself, given to a nineteenth-century Tibetan audience, is not pro forma. The early-twentieth-century Nyingma master and _lojong_ commentator Zhechen Gyaltsab provides this anecdote from the medieval Kadampa era:

At one time Tonpa [Dromtönpa, Atiśa’s foremost disciple] asked Lord Atiśa: “There are many practitioners of meditation in Tibet. How is that none of them have gained any truly special qualities?” Atisa replied: “All the qualities of the Great vehicle, both great and small, are produced by depending on the [guru]. You Tibetans, who see [gurus] as just ordinary beings, do not gain these benefits.”

In a series of talks given to European audiences in 1985, Gomo Tulku noted: “I have met many people over the years who have told me that, in spite of their having practiced

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377 Zhechen Gyaltsab, p. 51.
Dharma for quite some time, they still had not gained any realizations; from my side, I think the reason is a lack of guru devotion.”

The lack of guru yoga means, for these pages, a lack of sustained orientation precisely toward the unconditioned and compassionate awareness of Buddhahood itself—understood as the true essence or nature of mind, imbued with those qualities of pervasive openness, compassion, wisdom, and clarity discussed above. The failure of guru yoga implies the prior failure of ngöndro preliminary practices that ground guru yoga itself; the ngöndro are precisely the structured consideration of our own samsaric condition as a situation of necessary reliance on a basic empowerment from beyond that limited conditioning. The ngöndro generate a renunciation of autonomy, but this is a renunciation that takes place necessarily within a context of refuge in the guru as both the embodiment and the empowerment of the student’s own compassionate nature of mind.

Drive all blames into one is a primary expression of that refuge. It need not be laden with seriousness or aversion; to put blame on one point, namely that of false self-

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379 As a personal aside in the midst of a larger argument, my own perspective is that traditions which privilege practices of devotion seem to invite persons into a kind of normalized brightness that I do not often find elsewhere.

380 Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche says: “The main point is to practice the ngöndro preliminary practice in a genuine way. It is the prerequisite for having a sound foundation for the main practice. Without the ngöndro, the main practice will not resist deluded thoughts, it will be carried away by circumstances, it will be unstable, and it will not reach its ultimate goal. It will be like building a beautiful mansion on a frozen lake” (74).

cherishing, is potentially to recognize the pain but also the humor of our ignorance. To *Drive all blames into one* does not involve any perfectionism meant to earn a love or compassion that cannot be earned in the first place.\(^{382}\) *Drive all blames into one* expresses a desire to more clearly recognize the compassion that already exists and empowers us; it is not an activity of an autonomous mind *prior* to all divine compassion, addressing past transgression in order to enable or force a future connectivity to love.\(^{383}\) The seeking after favor through anticipatory self-criticism is the compulsive logic of personality culture, wherein we reform ourselves constantly in order to become what we feel we are not: interesting, acceptable, lovable.\(^{384}\)

A particular temptation in the recent interpretation of *drive all blames into one* has been to understand the teaching in narrowly psychological or therapeutic terms—as

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\(^{382}\) Any Christian understanding of penance that views it as a stringent self-preparation for future grace will also fall well outside of the mainstream of classical Christian thought and practice, as we will see in the following chapter.

\(^{383}\) Mahayana practitioners have often been encouraged to confront both past and future transgressions as a form of refuge in the basic compassionate nature of reality. In the sixth section of the *Platform Sutra*, Huineng describes a ritual specifically for “repentance” (*chanhui*). This section of the *Platform Sutra* begins with a note on the nature of mind as an expression of *tathagatāgarbha* teaching: “[S]ee your own *dharma-mahāyāna*, see the Buddha within your own mind”—and goes on to suggest repentance (*chan*) for past harmful action and “remorse” (*hui*) for future harmful action. This future-orientation may appear strange or even dangerously antinomian at first: is repentance for future misdeeds an attempt to invoke impunity? Instead, the focus on future action is instead a heightened moral commitment. “Ordinary people are stupid and only know they should repent for their past licentiousness—they do not know they should feel remorse for future errors. Because they do not have such remorse, their previous licentiousness is not extinguished and future errors continue to be generated.” See John H. McRae, *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* (Berkeley, California: Numata Center for Publication and Research, 2000), pp. 46-48. Jamgon Kongtrul writes: “Right now, take on mentally all the suffering that will ripen for you in the future. When that has been cleared away, take up all the sufferings of others” (17). Isaac the Syrian writes: “The meaning of the word repentance, as we have learned from the true quality of things… [includes] also concern about protecting the future.” See *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart*, trans. E. Kadloubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), p. 247-48.

\(^{384}\) When the Christ makes his characteristic announcement that sins are forgiven, he does *not* contradict what he and John the Baptist have already instructed: *repent, for the community of heaven has come near*. Repentance itself expresses a proximity to love. It might have been said: *repent, for your sins have been forgiven*. 

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a form of autonomous action. Norman Fischer, a Zen teacher, sees lojong as a “more psychological” practice than Zen, and writes that “What [drive all blames into one] is saying is: whatever happens, don’t ever blame anyone or anything else, always blame only yourself.”385 Judy Lief concurs: “This slogan is quite radical. Instead of blaming others, you blame yourself. Even if it is not your fault, you take the blame.”386 Chögyam Trungpa, Lief’s root teacher, instructed: “All the blame always starts with ourselves... [I]t is we who are not letting go, not developing enough warmth and sympathy—which makes us problematic. ...The intention of driving all blames into one is that otherwise you will not enter the bodhisattva path.”387

To redirect externalized blame, or even to be grateful particularly to those who provoke our aversion or resentment, is not only to recognize that we are the true owners of our aversive patterning, but also to genuinely value the disclosure of our fundamental obscurations. Sé Chilbu, Chekawa’s student, writes that situations or persons who invoke our frustration “become allies in your battle against self-grasping. Since they are a powerful army on your side, it is inappropriate to generate anger toward these agents of harm; look on them instead with joy.”388 The path of the bodhisattva is impossible without such revealers of our habitual negativity.

385 Fischer, p. xviii; p. 50.
However, to say simply that *drive all blames into one* is about blaming “the” self, while challenging and blunt in tone, is also imprecise in a way that risks basic misinterpretations. *Drive all blames into one* is not a mode of autonomous self-critique, as some contemporary teachers have suggested.\(^{389}\) The *one* into whom all blames are driven is not a generalized self, but has been understood, from the earliest *lojong* annotations and commentaries, as the very particular and inveterate habit of self-reifying ignorance.\(^{390}\)

This particularity of critical focus on ‘the one’—the actual process of generating reified selfhood—has not been strongly emphasized in modern *lojong* commentaries.\(^{391}\) And that lack of precision may prevent a full creative engagement with the *lojong* instruction to *Drive all blames into one*, obscuring the way that the very recognition of self-grasping is in fact driven by *refuge in the power and clarity of compassion itself*.

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\(^{389}\) Some Western *lojong* commentators, such as those discussed in this section, have not significantly emphasized refuge or *guru yoga* as a framing context for *lojong* practice, perhaps because refuge is not always easily accessible affectively or attitudinally for Western teachers and practitioners. It is also true that some Tibetan teachers, for instance Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, within his own *lojong* commentary, have also de-emphasized refuge as a foundational framing context for *lojong*, perhaps in order to render *lojong* teaching more accessible to a Western audience. Trungpa Rinpoche’s instructions on ngöndro are, for instance, primarily intellectual and reflective, seemingly intended to appeal to a psychologically and existentially oriented Western audience—precisely at the moment where psychological assumptions might have been usefully challenged. The problem with such decisions, ultimately, is that the full range of *lojong*’s meanings almost certainly depend upon practices and commitments of deep refuge in the nature of mind, if the awareness (*lo*) to be trained (*jong*) is to be accessed in its deepest ground.

\(^{390}\) The “Annotated Root Lines” notes: “Whatever undesirable events befall, banish all the blames to the single source, which is not others but rather self-grasping” (Jinpa, 2006, p. 76).

\(^{391}\) I do wish to mention Alan Wallace’s work as an exception. Wallace writes: “Keep in mind,” when considering *drive all blames into one*, “that we are not speaking to ourselves. Self-centeredness is not the self but rather an obscuration, or affliction, of the mind.” This is a very different way of speaking than we hear in other contemporary commentarial investigations of *Drive all blames into one*. See B. Alan Wallace, *A Passage from Solitude: Training the Mind in a Life Embracing the World* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1992), p. 70.
To Drive all blames into one involves, simultaneously, a recognition of fault, particularly that of externalized aversion, but also a deepening reliance on the nature of mind as the creative power of compassionate evaluation in the first place. This is the richness of the teaching that goes missing when we fail to develop precision first about ‘the one’ and then also about the context of refuge within which Drive all blames into one makes its fullest sense.

Lief does briefly note that “It is important to distinguish this practice from neurotic self-blaming or the regretful fixation on your own mistakes and how much you are at fault.” However, this does not result in a clear differentiation between neurotic self-blame, on the one hand, and a creative recognition of fault grounded in an awareness endowed with compassion, on the other hand. “Instead, as you go about your life, you simply notice the urge to blame others and you reverse it.” I am skeptical that many students will understand how this is supposed to work, without simply activating patterns of destructive aversion toward self. Fischer psychologizes the instruction:

Drive all blames into one is tricky because blaming ourselves, which seems to be what the slogan is recommending, is not exactly blaming ourselves in the ordinary sense. We know perfectly well how to blame ourselves. We’ve been doing this all of our lives, it is commonplace; we are constantly feeling guilty about everything, and if we are not guilty, we are ashamed... Drive all blames into one means that you take the full appreciation and full responsibility for everything that arises in your life, no matter whose fault it is. This is very bad, this is not what I wanted, this brings many attendant problems. But what are you going to do with

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392 Lief, “The 59 Lojong Slogans.”
it? What can you learn from it? How can you make use of it for the path?”393

Asking what we might do with our own suffering and habitual externalizing is far more skillful than indulging in mere reactivity. But this is also where much contemporary commentary on drive all blames ends. When Drive all blames into one is discussed in isolation from its context of refuge in the nature of mind, it becomes too easy to view the teaching only in terms of its critique of externalizing aversion, without understanding its much more important purpose—that of re-orienting the mind to a fundamental refuge in its own nature, instead of the false shelter of externalizing aversion.

This is in part why the seemingly abstruse debates mentioned above about what it means to examine the nature of unborn awareness, or what it means to “Place your mind on the basis of all, which is the actual path,” end up mattering a great deal.394 Without examining the nature of unborn awareness as the compassionate driver of blame, as the true agent and path of lojong, lojong teachings themselves may in fact become somewhat flat or merely psychological. The contemporary Kagyû scholar Traleg Kyabgon articulates this connection well: “[T]he lojong teachings condemn only our egoistic, deluded mind, not the totality of our being. Blaming the ego is not the same as blaming the whole self. If that were all we were, then once that mind was transcended, we wouldn’t be able to function. But we are also in possession of unborn awareness, or

393 Fischer, 51-2.
394 See Jinpa, 2006, p. 11. See also Traleg Kyabgon, The Practice of Lojong (Boston, Massachusetts: Shambhala Publications, 2007), p.56: “There have been ongoing discussions about whether the phrase ‘rest in the basis of all’ means to rest in the basic consciousness [alaya-vijñāna] or to rest in the wisdom consciousness [alaya-jñāna], which is the same as absolute bodhicitta or unborn awareness.”
Buddha-nature, and we don’t annihilate ourselves when we turn away from self-regarding attitudes.”

Where Drive all blames into one is disconnected from the nature of mind, the teaching is emptied of power and clarity. Such disconnected commentarial engagements tend to work from the perspective of instrumental and therapeutic reason: What can be useful to me?

The driver of blame is not, in fact, the psychological self. The question of lojong is instead: How can transcendent compassion—i.e., Buddhahood—make use of our minds and bodies? To drive all blames into one is somehow to be driven by compassion itself. It is not a self-reformation. To see this more clearly, we should also become clearer in our response to another question: what is the one into which all aversion must be driven?

The most direct answer to this question lies at the heart of the medieval anthology of Kadampa teachings called The Book of Kadam, which recounts a number of dialogues between Atiśa and his closest Tibetan disciple, Dromtönpa. The sixth of these exchanges, entitled ‘How all blame lies at a single point,’ begins, perhaps unexpectedly, when Dromtönpa expresses a desire to better understand the twelve links in the chain of interdependent origination, or the mutual proliferation of reified vision and suffering, pratītyasamutpāda (the basic content of nirvanic insight, for both Pali and Mahāyāna traditions; see above). When Dromtönpa suggests that his own

395 Traleg Kyabgon, 91.
future trainees might be helped by further explanation of the difficult concept of dependent co-origination, Atiśa gently and ironically reduces him again to the status of student:

‘I shall explain [dependent co-origination] later when we have to lift our robes because of muddy water.’
‘In that case, what is the root of bondage?’ asked Drom.
Atiśa: ‘It is the grasping at self.’
‘What is the grasping at self?’ enquired Drom.
‘This is something that wants all positive qualities for oneself alone and wants others alone to take on all misfortunes.’
‘Then please explain this in such a manner so you can say “This is self-grasping,”’ asked Drom.
Atiśa replied: ‘Where would we find something of which it could be said that “This is the reified self-grasping?”
‘In that case, please explain to me how it is that [this self-grasping] wants everything and transfers [all] blames onto others.’
Atiśa replied, ‘Upāsaka, why even ask me? This is pervasive in sentient beings...’
‘Atiśa, there are people who possess such forms of grasping?’
‘Where do they exist?’ responded Atiśa.
‘They are [within] our own mental continuum,’ replied Drom.
‘Upāsaka, what is one’s own mental continuum?’
‘It is that which wants everything and grasps [at it all],’ replied Drom.
‘It is devoid of parts, and I have never seen it myself. There is nothing that abides where there is nowhere to abide. I do not know the colors and shapes of something with no reality...’

Several important issues are raised here. First, when asked for the most fundamental diagnosis of the origin of suffering, Atiśa gestures directly toward self-grasping ignorance (Skt.: ātmagrha; Tib.: dak dzin\(^{398}\)), but then also unexpectedly points

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Dromtönpa into the ungraspable quality of his own mind. Here again, a critical engagement with self-grasping is contextualized, crucially, with a complementary teaching about the mind’s true nature. Any portrait of Drive all blames into one depends on recognizing both its explicit critique of self-grasping as well as its implicit affirmation of qualities of empty, unobstructed awareness.

When we come to focus our critical attention, not on the global and indeterminate ‘self,’ but instead on the fearsomely destructive belief in the autonomous and defendable self, the recognition of the ‘one’ must take place within a broader vision—or it cannot take place at all. To drive all blames into one is an integrating act of divine compassion itself—this is the ‘driver’ of recognition. To drive all blames into one is to recognize again the conditions of suffering from the nascent perspective of unconditioned emptiness. Self-grasping does not recognize itself. It is recognized by compassionate wisdom.

When we understand drive all blames only in the indeterminate psychological vernacular of self-blame, we avoid any direct encounter with our hidden but absolute faith in autonomous selfhood. In the discussion between Dromtönpa and Atiśa above, the root of all suffering depends upon an implicit belief in something that does not even exist.399 The autonomous self is as much the product of assertive faith as any religiosity.

399 Chekawa: “When examined, the selfhood of persons is as nonexistent as the horn of a rabbit; [nevertheless] it has made us suffer since beginningless time.” See “A Commentary on the ‘Seven-Point Mind Training’” in Thupten Jinpa, 2012, p. 115.
It only seems to require no rituals of commitment because this faith cannot usually recognize itself as faith. In fact, though, this self is deeply and compulsively embedded in ritualistic repetitions of other-blame and self-concern.

Autonomous self-compassion may, at times, provide us with the sense of safety necessary for an engagement with the most basic and painful processes of self-grasping and self-cherishing. But such a critical confrontation with self-grasping is not in fact the stated purpose of self-compassion, as presented in a burgeoning contemporary literature.

Self-compassion is explicitly presented, instead, as a counter-conditioning, a response to the traumas of family and culture to which we are all exposed. Self-compassion is offered as the necessary and conditioned antidote to the conditioning of self-aversion. It is also offered as an ancient soteriological path, but we have seen that this is an unjustified reading of early canonical and commentarial texts on metta.

For modernist accounts of self-compassion, the entire world must be ever a set of competing conditions. And when we focus on autonomous self-compassion at the expense of self-evaluation, we are likely to participate in the consumption of a personal relief, rather than clearly facing the obscurations of self-centered aversion and self-centered desire that prevent us from embodying the basic compassion, and accessing the nature of mind, that is far more real than any particular selfhood. Access to a compassion beyond that of the ‘self’ requires, however, precisely the sort of fundamental refuge that autonomous self-compassion avoids. To Drive all blames into one is to take refuge in the nature of awakened awareness: “To ‘see the face of the
sugatagarbha [Buddha Nature],’ the ultimate reality, and to rest in it is to take unsurpassable refuge.”

It is only in a context of refuge or ultimate reliance that ‘self-blame’ can be understood not as a commitment to self-aversion, but as a recognition that the ultimately self-empty process of grasping takes place within an other-emptiness that is itself a pervasive wisdom of emptiness and compassion. From the perspective of that other-empty compassionate wisdom comes a profound recognition of the ways in which self-aversion functions as a strategy of false self-definition and false security.

I have suggested above that the initial sense of discomfort among some who practice self-compassion may be rooted, not so much in a fear of loss and re-traumatization, as Paul Gilbert has argued, but rather in a quiet perception that karmic self-conditioning alone cannot give us full access to any unconditioned source of compassion. All there is, in that therapeutic world, is an endless counter-conditioning.

However, from an ontological perspective that explicitly privileges the open unconditioned nature of mind, modernist resistance to Guru Yoga and other forms of refuge is just one expression of a habitual misperception not of the Guru alone, but of mind itself. A greater refuge would necessarily disrupt any familiar self-identity—including, potentially, a traumatized identity. And even if a traumatized identity is painful, that suffering may be strangely comfortable and familiar. Without confidence

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401 Joe Loizzo writes, “Since much if not most of our inner lives have been spent in the myopic mode of self-indulgence, identified with our traumatized childhood self, completing the shift to a synoptic self and mature way of life requires a decisive change in our sense of identity.” (Loizzo, p. 175.)
that another reality exists, we are tempted to aggressively generate the feeling of being real through depression and anger.

In a personality culture, self-evaluation helps us to continually construct ourselves in ways that are intended to invite the recognition, curiosity, approbation, and acceptance of others. These are actually the only sources of acceptance in a psychologized ontology. Where no unconditioned love is acknowledged or trusted, we must constantly condition the sources of care that do appear to exist. That world must always contain an implicit threat of isolation. One understandable result is the rise of perfectionist and anxious styles of self-management. Self-criticism and judgment are driven by a need to prevent disconnection, because no fundamental connection to a compassionate reality seems to exist.

We are left intolerably alone. What is more, modern practices of self-acceptance and self-compassion often seek only a more tolerable isolation. Paul Gilbert writes, “You probably want to feel loved, wanted and that you belong—all basic human wants. However, now perhaps we can recognize that compassion begins at home...” 402 Self-compassion is self-sufficiency.

To Drive all blames into one is, ironically, to participate in the direct unraveling of the very assumptions of autonomy that allow for the proliferation of self-aversive forms of blame. This irony in response to the illusion of autonomy is an important part of the total meaning of lojong.

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It is also true that *Drive all blames into one*, as far as it involves a confrontation with the self-concerned genesis of suffering, is actually a primary complement to the practice of *tonglen*—the exchange of self and other that reverses self-concern by making offerings of all one’s resources and happiness to others,403 taking on others’ suffering in turn. *Tonglen* thereby unravels precisely the autonomous self that is also to be ‘blamed’ for the proliferation of suffering.404

Here we come to something curious. In the *Root Lines* attributed to Atiśa, the *lojong* practitioner is advised to “Commence the sequence of taking from your own self.”405 This instruction, which initially resembles a limited self-compassion (though already implicitly directed toward compassion for others), disappears from the *Annotated Root Lines*, and is also absent from the seven-point systematization of Chekawa. For Chekawa, *tonglen* is instead enjoined without any reference to which self should be taken as a primary object: “Train in the two—giving and taking—alternately.”406

How, then, are we to explain this apparent movement away from anything resembling autonomous self-compassion, in these earliest recensions of *lojong*? One

403 Again, such that others are viewed and confirmed in their fundamental awakened identity, and so that the life of the *bodhisattva* becomes one of devotion.

404 Unskillful and externalized blame of ‘others’ can also become, increasingly, a recognition of the ways in which they, too, are caught in patterns of fear and self-grasping, just as we are. The ‘one’ need not be understood only as *our* self-grasping, but as self-grasping in a wider, more troubling, and more accurately shared sense. Here again, such a recognition of the true scope of the problem of self-grasping will result in refuge, and refuge allows for further recognition of self-grasping, in a dialectical process of development.

405 “Root Lines of Mahayana Mind Training,” in Jinpa 2006, p. 70. Here, as in Buddhaghosa, self-compassion is part of a sequence that guides the practitioner toward compassionate awareness for *others*.

406 “Seven-Point Mind Training” in Jinpa 2006, p. 83.
answer may be that, for Chekawa and other early lojong commentators, their increasingly explicit instructions on the nature of mind or ultimate bodhicitta, guiding practitioners toward rest in the natural state of compassion itself, rendered an initial foundation of self-oriented tonglen less necessary as a primary point of entry into compassion. In fact, these early commentators may have intensified ultimate bodhicitta as a framework for tonglen in part so that the individual self would not become the core focus of practice.407

The instructions that point the practitioner into ultimate bodhicitta—examine the nature of unborn awareness; place your mind in the basis of all, the actual path—do not, importantly, contravene the self-compassion of relative bodhicitta. Nobody is saying that compassion for self is somehow against the rules. But it is clear that these framing instructions do not privilege autonomous self-compassion as a primary foundation for the training of the bodhisattva. Lojong teachings are dedicated, instead, to a compassion that is given far more to an increasingly nondual recognition of emptiness, so that no limited self or other can be upheld as more worthy than another.408 Tonglen, a definitive practice of relative bodhicitta, is nonetheless grounded in, and moves back toward, ultimate bodhicitta as the source of the worthiness of all beings.

407 To focus too consistently on one’s own self as somehow in ‘need’ of compassion, as if we will be okay only after receiving enough, may express a subtle lack of trust or refuge in the nature of mind, or Buddhahood.
408 And if there is no subject suffering,
    Mine and other’s pain—how are they different?
    Simply, then, since pain is pain, I will dispel it.
    What grounds have you for all your strong distinctions?

    (Bodhisattvacharyāvatāra 8.102) Shantideva, p. 124.
It is certainly not the case, then, that the self’s place in a field of compassion has been in question in the pages above. My concern has been, instead, to question whether the subtle self-reification of therapeutic self-compassion may actually obscure access to the much greater compassion found in the nature of mind, in the presence of the guru, and in a generous devotion toward all beings in their own ground as Buddha Nature. Along such a path, we are integrated into an encompassing compassion, becoming increasingly grateful to all beings. The importance of *Drive all blames into one* lies in its confrontation with our unwillingness to surrender ourselves to that gratitude.

All beings are precious. All aversion—toward self, toward others—is a mistake.
4.1 CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

It sometimes seems that Christian penitence can now only be the distant concern of the spiritual archivist. Old languages of Christian self-evaluation fade almost entirely from view; they appear only occasionally as objects of cultured embarrassment.

We have already seen that, for Nietzsche, the Christian ascetic is a figure of destructive judgment, converting our real human strengths into ressentiment against what we most truly are: instinct, desire, joy in our own cruelties. Nietzsche inspires a thrilled honesty about shadows.

In the twentieth century, the Christian theologian begins most often from a Nietzschean maxim: all religious self-critique is an inhumane harm. And such habits of criticism must be met today with new capacities for affirmation, the courage to be:

“Our self-acceptance is the basis of the Christian creed.”

Self-acceptance and repentance may be far more similar than is usually recognized. But the theological centrality of repentance has been almost fully displaced as an explicit aspect of unfolding Christian maturity.

Christian thinkers recognized, in the latter half of the twentieth century, that self-aversive shame had become a prominent focus of concern across the spectrum of therapeutic culture. They sought to address themselves and their traditions to self-

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aversion. But in doing so, they understandably discarded and ignored the rich reflections on ‘self-blame’ that can be found in earlier Christian tradition.

Nietzsche, it seemed, had been right about the deep negativity of the ancient Christian. In order to be salvaged at all, Christian traditions would have to undergo therapeutic reformation in order, finally, to foster self-affirmation—to have any hope of competing with the therapeutics.

For Luther, a primary purpose of reformation had been precisely to purify and intensify repentance. The first of the ninety-five theses is: “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent’ (Matt. 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.”410

The fourth thesis is this: “The penalty of sin remains as long as the hatred of self [odium sui], that is, true inner repentance, until our entrance into the kingdom of heaven.”411 That is, sin so intrinsically disorders our attitudes and conduct that even an abundant grace, even true inner repentance, cannot fully reorient us to ourselves in this life. The Kingdom of Heaven is elsewhere; here we cannot expect to avoid the necessity of repentance. Odium sui is the indispensable practice of deep truth.

In a culture of personality, however, we can only overhear this as dead language: Luther, gruff northern barbarian, speaking aggressive but failed oracles. The open emphasis on “self-hatred” as a definitional virtue of the Christian life is exactly what

410 Lull, p. 41.
411 Ibid.
sometimes seems to empty Christian thought and practice of any humane prospect. These are the attitudes, it would appear, that render Nietzsche’s particular reading of Christian history far more than plausible.\footnote{The fact that Luther complains about a general Christian failure to take “self-hatred” seriously \textit{enough} is itself a challenge to Nietzsche’s own historical portrait of Christian ascetic masochism. If Nietzsche’s historical vision had been correct, Luther would have been unnecessary.}

An insistence on human dignity, however, has rarely been far from Christian self-understanding. Take, for example, the fundamental Christological disagreements taken up at Nicea in 325. In considering the apparently abstract difference between Christ’s likeness with God or Christ’s sameness with God, we actually confront the question of our own status in Christ. \textit{Have we, or have we not, been taken into the life of shared love that defines the Trinity, if Christ’s place in the timeless and unconditioned love of the Trinity is itself questionable?}

The answers given to such questions will profoundly guide the nature of our devotion, and shape the nature of Christian self-perception. \textit{(Devotion and self-perception are strangely interwoven.)} To say, or to implicitly believe, that Jesus is merely ‘like’ God, is in some way to sever our own basic relationship to divinity.

How, then, can the ultimate and intrinsic dignity of the human be reconciled with penitence? How could it possibly be the case that a human being is unlikely to increase in love—which is to say, in dignity, his true nature—apart from repentance?

Christianity’s dual emphases on deep dignity and significant self-critique are inextricable from its power. It is impossible to separate the sense of being an object of God’s compassionate goodness from a fundamental commitment to repentance,
without damaging both compassion and repentance. This is the richer anthropological vision that goes missing in many current discussions of self-compassion and self-acceptance. It is far too easy to assume that the highest purpose of a Christian life is to accept oneself.

To understand how Christian repentance came to be viewed, not as a path of deepened human dignity, but as a superfluous and self-denigrating mode of spirituality, it would be necessary to construct a modern history of repentance as it became distorted in at least two ways. First, following the Reformation, repentance seems to have become less a form of spirituality, as Luther had clearly intended, and more a necessary profession of denominational belonging, as the proliferation of Christian sub-traditions increasingly required evidence of true commitment as a guarantor of that belonging.

Second, demands for repentance in both Protestant and Catholic communities, especially during catechetical training, was one way to satisfy ecclesial anxiety about the dangers of secular forms of understanding and participation, starting in the nineteenth century and continuing through the first half of the twentieth. Repentance thereby became, in many places, a virulent and potentially destructive form of self-justification—an extraordinary irony in the history of Christian spirituality, but one that influenced many of the thinkers discussed in this work, from Friedrich Nietzsche and James Joyce to June Price Tangney and Paul F. Knitter.

In Christian communities, the price of belonging became severe self-critique, as a sign of obedience and faith—increasingly the primary Christian virtue, no longer
subordinate to *caritas*. These distortions of repentance understandably drove many Christians from the churches. The present work cannot offer anything like a full history of the modern distortion of repentance, but I wager that something like this narrative has occurred, to great theological and human loss.

Repentance, until the rise of the therapeutic, has been precisely the category of insight used by Christians to confront sins of self-involvement. Christian ‘self-blame,’ which is clarity regarding human imperfection *within* divine connection, is the opposite of a total self-denigration. The inextricable connection between ‘self-blame’ and Christian dignity may seem to involve a monstrous and unresolvable contradiction—one mostly ignored by those who seek to retain Christianity’s modern moral relevance by emphasizing self-acceptance as a Christian virtue.

Christianity divested of a robust vision of repentance is a Christianity without any vital desire for greater integration into a Trinitarian life of agape. Penitential self-blame is not a destructive hatred, but an intensive form of hope, trust, and love.

In our attempt to glimpse more connected and creative forms self-criticism, we will look to a relatively distant Christian past. In the final section of the essay, we will

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413 See Brad Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), pp. 208-209. “The most important social virtue among early modern Lutherans and Reformed Protestants, at every social level from disciplined individuals through patriarchal households to well-ordered regimes as a whole, was... not *caritas* but obedience—newly important given the sobering truth about human nature and the reality of a divided Christendom.”

414 Just as, in the previous chapter, we saw that some Buddhist forms of self-evaluation focus more on the future than on regret—so, too, should Christian repentance be understood. Mark the Hermit, a fifth century monastic theologian, writes that “the person who knows reality does not repent for things done or wrongs remembered; rather he confesses to God about *things to come*.” Quoted in John Chryssavgis, “Life in Abundance: Eastern Orthodox Perspectives on Repentance and Confession,” in Mark J. Boda and Gordon T. Smith, eds. *Repentance in Christian Theology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2006), p. 213.
turn to several collections of teachings attributed to the desert Fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries, and especially to the sayings of Abba Poemen, master instructor of creative self-critique, in order to understand the second of the beatitudes: *Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted* (Mt. 5:4).

The sayings of the desert tradition, like the *lojong* directions examined in the previous chapter, are offered primarily in the form of short pith instructions. The desert sayings are at times enigmatic and difficult. But these teachings focus intensively on penitential disposition, and particularly emphasize the practice of *penthos*—mourning for our all too human turn away from God’s offer of love and ultimate salvation.

The Desert Fathers are far more interested in the deepening cultivation of love than they are in any destructive self-contempt. And like the masters of *lojong*, the Fathers cannot see self-blame apart from great gratitude.

**4.2 TRUE AND FALSE SELVES: RECENT THEOLOGIES OF SHAME**

Contemporary pastoral theologies often assume and project an ecclesiology in which religious professionals, or well-informed laypeople, are in the useful business of healing both themselves and others with psychological expertise, religiously informed. Religious traditions are most relevant to the degree that they can symbolically support and discipline therapeutic insight—but here it is insight, and not ritual or theological constructions, which ultimately heals the human person.415

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415 “Lacking any external referents, any anchors in the world outside the self, such an inward search for sincerity is truly never-ending. It is sincerity all the way down, which means, ironically, the never-ending search, all the way down, for the sincere. Civilizations or movements with a diminished concern for ritual have an overwhelming concern for sincerity... [because] sincerity works as the social equivalent of the subjunctive [the as if imagined world]. If there is no ritual, there is no shared convention that indexes a
Catholic and especially Eastern Orthodox theologies have more often emphasized the pastoral person as an imperfect conduit of sacramental encounter. Liturgy and ritual, in these traditions, is far more important than any professionalized psychological insight, in as far as liturgy and ritual actually allow us to participate in a shared love.

It should also be said, however, that much pastoral theology is rooted in a very real emphasis on the encounter with suffering: “Shame is a cause of great suffering in human life,” writes Episcopalian priest and scholar Jill McNish. “The idea that suffering has creative potential is hopeful and optimistic. It is therapeutic for pastoral caregivers to set this reality before those to whom they minister….”416 However, the Christian choice to suffer with and on behalf of others is here quietly conflated with a far more individualized and psychic form of suffering.

The Reformed theologian Lewis Smedes sees shame as “a very heavy feeling. It is a feeling that we do not measure up and maybe never will measure up to the sorts of persons we are meant to be. The feeling, when we are conscious of it, gives us a vague disgust with ourselves, which in turn feels like a hunk of lead on our hearts.”417

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417 Lewis Smedes, *Shame and Grace* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993), p. 5. There are similarities between this view of shame as a kind of heaviness, on the one hand, and the pre-modern theological understanding of acedia as sin, on the other.
This self-disgust is an undeniably significant suffering, and pastoral writers like McNish and Smedes, among others, understand the good news of the gospel as a direct response to precisely that form of pain. They have a clear vision of what is good in the good news: shame can be healed, either through an encounter with overwhelming grace, or by adopting a life that conforms to “a paradigmatic model of shame transformed and resurrected.”

This model is archetypally expressed in the life of Jesus—the one who successfully disengaged himself from the shaming norms of an ancient honor culture, and who confronted the damning power of shame through a courageous ‘descent’ and then an affective ‘resurrection.’ The legitimacy of pastoral theology, its disciplinary distinction from therapeutic psychology proper, is reinforced in part by its use of historical-critical scholarship into the social origins of the New Testament, as well as anthropological studies of myth and archetype. Pastoral theologies rely far less, in general, on explorations of sacrament and ritual as important sources of transformation.

McNish and Smedes, as well as the challenging figure of Stephen Pattison and the sensitive presence of Donald Capps, all express a humane therapeutic vision. But I find much contemporary pastoral-theological reflection on shame and grace to be strangely arid. I will try briefly to say why.

Pastoral theologians appear to address themselves primarily to institutional religious leaders who no longer fully trust their own teachings, apart from psychologized

418 McNish, 204.
and anthropological interpretative strategies—but who nonetheless feel obliged to teach something relevant. I will admit that this may at first seem unnecessarily harsh. But pastoral theology does often proceed by imposing psychological definitions on a vaguely religious terminology, simultaneously appealing to the prestige of tradition while suggesting that tradition itself is a now superseded source of relevant wisdom: “If we stand honestly in the godless vortex of shame [crucifixion], with as little resort as possible to the shame defenses, we can emerge as more authentic, more creative, more compassionate, more mature, and better integrated. This is the growth that comes from grace.”\(^{419}\)

Soteriology is regularly reduced to psychological categories, with a touch of transcendent rhetoric. Grace is also easily understood as the affective relief that is supposed to come at the end of the process of transformation, rather than the foundation of the entire process.

It hardly occurs to us at first to object that grace has little to do with the betterment of selves. Classically understood, grace is the shared life of the Trinity as it is given out in agapic love to creation itself—which may seem tiresomely formal and abstract to some. The point of participating in such love is not, primarily, to feel a certain way, or to be ‘more’ of anything, but to give ourselves away—to expend our energy, care, and time on behalf of others.

Where grace is conceived as an expression of psychological health, a normative pattern of self-affirmation is quietly held up as the authoritative standard of real

\(^{419}\) McNish, 41.
religious experience. A common and encompassing grace gives way to private and very limited achievement.

One particularly significant temptation of pastoral theology is to ‘prescribe’ a powerful experience, a melodramatic grace, as a conversion to self-acceptance. An abundant grace, however, is not simply or immediately accessible; we are too thoroughly conditioned by sin, and therefore highly practiced at overlooking the abundance of love that is offered.

The figure of Jesus is quickly subsumed as an illustration of psychodynamic theory. Jesus is most useful as a template for achieving health: “In the full acceptance of who he was, Jesus is the archetype of personality integration.” Pastoral theologians regularly turn to Carl Jung, for whom the figure of Jesus “became a sacred symbol because it is the psychological prototype of the only meaningful life, that is, of a life that strives for the individual realization—absolute and unconditional—of its own law.” This is Jesus as the original representative of absolute and literal autonomia.

Such archetypes are ciphers. They are easily collapsed into modernist visions of personality development, and are sometimes aggressively ignorant of the most basic Christian vision of Christ as the one in whom God’s self-emptying and agapic kenosis

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420 See, in particular, Smedes, Chapter 13, in which a prisoner’s extraordinary deliverance from the suffering of solitary confinement is set forth as a paradigm of grace. The thirst for what is extraordinary should be suspect, however, wherever self-aversion is concerned.


becomes fully visible and trustworthy.⁴²³ (We will have more to say about kenosis and willfulness below.) The therapeutic archetype of Jesus is infused with romantic individualism.

“For me to be a saint means to be myself,” writes Thomas Merton. “Therefore the problem of sanctity and salvation is in fact the problem of finding out who I am and of discovering my true self.”⁴²⁴ Richard Rohr, perhaps Merton’s most direct and self-consciously rhetorical heir,⁴²⁵ writes that “Your True Self is what makes you, you.”⁴²⁶

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⁴²³ Philippians 2. Paul’s kenotic reflection quotes a hymn, which is to say, a core communal celebration of kenosis. Kenosis is not a Pauline rhetorical convention or invention, but fundamental theology in the earliest ecclesial communities.

⁴²⁴ Thomas Merton, New Seeds of Contemplation (New York: New Directions Books, 2007 [1962]), p. 31. In the first, 1949 version of the book, Merton was already using the categories of the true and false self (see p. 28 of Seeds of Contemplation). In 1960, the psychoanalytic theorist D.W. Winnicott reflected at length on the increasing clinical use of the categories of ‘true’ and ‘false’ selves, whose origins he located in the early work of Freud. See D.W. Winnicott, “Ego distortion in terms of true and false self” (1960), in The Maturational Process and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development (New York: International UP Inc., 1965), pp. 140-152. It is unclear to me how the therapeutic vocabulary of ‘true’ and ‘false’ selves came to be used almost simultaneously by both Merton and Winnicott. It is also important to note that Winnicott’s work often constitutes a fierce defense of the autonomous self—the notion of the ‘false’ self is already a direct attack on socialized and supposedly ‘compliant’ personality. The philosopher Martha Nussbaum has written that, “All his life Winnicott was obsessed with the freedom of the individual self to exist defiantly, resisting parental and cultural demands, to be there without saying a word if silence was its choice.” (See Martha C. Nussbaum, “Dr. True Self: Review of Winnicott: Life and Work by F. Robert Rodman,” The New Republic, Oct. 27, 2003.) Walter Susman’s “Character Culture” can only appear, from the perspective of the therapeutic, as a conspiracy of ‘false’ compliance.

⁴²⁵ Merton, more than Rohr, usefully complicates the language of ‘true’ self: “Love is my true identity. Selflessness is my true self” (New Seeds, 60). Still, the metaphor of ‘self’ is imprecise in the extreme when considered as ‘true,’ and easily comes to imply an individualism that earlier Christian tradition cannot support (please see footnote immediately following).

⁴²⁶ Richard Rohr, Immortal Diamond (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2013), p. 17. In more than one book, Rohr uses these lines from Gerald Manley Hopkins’s “As Kingfishers Catch Fire”—lines which are beautiful but which demand a more robustly theological reading than they are usually given:

Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves—goes itself; myself it speaks and spells.
Crying: “What I do is me: for that I came.”
For Donald Capps, the most direct liberating word that Jesus offers to the shamed is, “Have faith in yourself.”

The now widespread rhetoric of ‘true’ and ‘false’ selves is both understandably attractive and insidiously dubious. In some of the most theologically central sections of the New Testament, Paul speaks not of ‘true’ and ‘false’ selfhood, but of a necessary Christian passage from an old to a new self: “You used to walk in these ways [of negativity], in the life you once lived. But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all” (Col. 3:7-11).

Rohr approvingly notes that Hopkins’s vision of individualized affirmation is inspired in part by the medieval Franciscan scholar, John Duns Scotus, for whom, as Rohr writes, “each soul has a unique ‘thisness’ (haecceity)” (Rohr, 18). It is very possible, however, to see the thought of Duns Scotus as something less wholesome. Hans Boersma writes, “With Scotus, we might say, it became possible to deny the sacramentality of the relationship between earthly objects and the Logos... No longer did earthly objects (as sacramentum) receive the reality (res) of their being from God’s own being. Rather, earthly objects possessed their own being.” See Hans Boersma, Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2011), p. 75.

427 Capps, 161, 163. In The Depleted Self, Capps, like Rohr, launches a bold therapeutic defense of ontological individualism. Capps appeals in particular to the most eloquent modern spokesman of haecceity, Ralph Waldo Emerson. For Emerson, writes Capps, “Hope comes from knowing that we are free to be original, that we need follow no model or form, but may be the self that we uniquely and truly are. …We have been bequeathed a soul that is not of our own making, but is the very spirit of God within us. If we are unaccustomed to viewing ourselves as having divinity in us, this is because we have denied common humanity while ascribing divinity to Jesus. …Emerson is arguing, therefore, that expressive individualists like himself did not declare war on the churches—the communities of memory—but rather found that the churches were inhospitable to those whose most urgent and pressing spiritual need was to regain selfhood, to discover or rediscover grounds for self-trust” (114). Emerson was perhaps Nietzsche’s most central inspiration, and the Duns Scotus−Emerson−Nietzsche intellectual trajectory of romantic individualism is profoundly anti-institutional. The sacrament of individuality has been delivered to us each; why come together to receive anything more?
Note, however, that individual identities are not at all confirmed here. Paul’s words actually better resemble the Heart Sutra’s relentless apophasis of identity. In fact, Paul proposes an epistemology in which we see, not ourselves, but others, from within a new access to love. The metaphor of the ‘new self’ points us not toward self-acceptance, but toward repentance, and this is very explicit: we can only come to more fully participate in kenotic love by giving up the cold comforts of malice and rage.

Paul offers no therapeutic exhortations. To suggest that he points us toward a ‘true’ self, whose salvation is to therapeutically recognize its own particular identity as beloved, is to confound any reasonable reading of Paul, for whom the sense of a separate identity is given up in Christ—the body that is present only when shared.

Much of the rhetoric of the ‘true’ self advances a subtle reification of selfhood, claiming the True as a thing, and as a thing that is completely our own.428 This is explicitly a strategy of reversing self-aversive shame: “Once you know [divine intimacy with the True Self], the problem of inferiority, unworthiness, or low self-esteem is resolved from the beginning and at the core.”429 If only you would just see yourself differently, you could see yourself differently.

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428 Rohr speaks of a divinely given “brilliance that is now uniquely ours [ital. original]” (26). And he consistently but very mistakenly recruits Buddhist categories to support ‘True Self’ theory: “Master teachers like the Buddha see the False Self courageously; they forthrightly call it ‘emptiness’ and the True Self ‘enlightenment.’ Knowledge of your True Self gradually places your life in a big and ever bigger frame” (31-2). There are a number of very basic problems with such rhetoric. We will mention just two: first, ‘emptiness,’ in Buddhist thought, must apply to both the False and the True Selves; and second, the Buddha explicitly rejects the Brahmanic metaphor of atman (selfhood) as a synonym for ultimate reality precisely because metaphors of self so often lead to subtle but mistaken perceptions of identity.

429 Rohr, 15.
The self-reification at the heart of the therapeutic insight into the True Self simply flips the valence of self-reification from negative to positive, rather than unraveling the inherently unstable habit of self-reification altogether. Christ nowhere encounters persons as reified objects.

Even Winnicott suggests that the False Self is actually a series of attempts to render a world of personal affect safe enough for the emergence of a True Self. It might even be said that the False Self is the necessary seed of the True for most of us, and therefore intensely true and important itself. By recognizing our own natural strategies of self-protection, we slowly develop the resources of compassion necessary to care for all who live within those very same strategies. To understand these patterns in terms of ‘true’ and ‘false,’ however, risks the reification of a duality that doesn’t actually exist. We should be extremely concerned to meet any self-proclaimed True Selves.

Lewis Smedes has written that, “In a Christian experience of grace, a person even dares to own Christ as her true inner self. St. Paul did: ‘It is no longer I who live,’ said he, ‘but Christ who lives in me’ (Gal. 2:20). He traded the false self of religious conformity for the spiritual presence of the Christ within him and dared to claim that inner presence as his true self.”

But the whole point of Paul’s note is that it is not he who lives, when he lives in Christ; why, then, introduce the metaphor of the ‘true’ self at all? This is a theology of growing self-possession, rather than faithful and kenotic divestiture.

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430 Smedes, 155.
Jesus undergoes intense suffering as part of a process of trust, in which he refuses to simply save himself in any sense, either in the desert or on the cross (the notion that he did save himself is embedded in the gnostic teaching of docetism, later adapted by Islam in the Qur’anic portrayal of crucifixion-avoidant Jesus). Wherever we find ourselves truly capable of residing in the ‘godless vortex of shame’ without immediate recourse to self-defenses of reactive rage or avoidance, this is a gift that requires only our intentional and repeated receptivity. Resurrection is received more than it is accomplished. We do not roll away our own stone.

Jesus demonstrates a faithful turn, within awful pain, to a God that is not a template to be used, but a closeness to be trusted. One reason why some thinkers have resisted the use of concepts like archetype and symbol to help enable religious lives, is the fact we so often seek to use these categories for pragmatic self-creation, rather than allowing ourselves to be better used by agapic love itself.

The difference in vision is a profound one. The therapeutic archetype of Christic autonomy and self-affirmative power is not the same thing as a life-long integration into kenotic love.

Jesus resists therapeutic pragmatism, he offers no model for self-deliverance. To live a life ‘modeled’ on Jesus, to ‘follow’ Jesus, is not to live in Christ. Ancient Docetism,

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431 Wendell Berry’s fantastic poem, ‘Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front,’ ends with the line, “Practice resurrection,” but this is something of a contradiction. We can only be resurrected; what we can practice is trust.

432 One might appeal to the fact that central Catholic theological figures like Karl Rahner, for instance, use the word ‘symbol.’ But here a symbol is a union between a sign and the thing signed—a mystery of real presence, a sacrament. See C. Annice Callahan, “Karl Rahner’s Theology of Symbol: Basis for his Theology of the Church and the Sacraments,” in Irish Theological Quarterly, Vol. 49, No. 3 (1982), pp. 195-205.
too, sought to view Christ only as an external model. Reflecting on Docetic thought, Johannes Baptist Metz writes: “Satan wants the Incarnation to be an empty show, where God dresses up in human costume but doesn’t really commit totally to the role. The devil wants to make the Incarnation a piece of mythology, a divine puppet show.”

The therapeutic use of Jesus is so often a refusal to be disposed to the divine, apart from the benefits that might somehow accrue to ourselves. In the therapeutic situation, “We can come to apprehend God only in so far as we understand God for us. The seeming modesty of this claim disguises the new and absolute importance of the thinking subject. ...[T]he enhancement of the human person becomes the only reason ethically for introducing the existence of God; the only reason apologetically is that religion is necessary to open up the mysteries of humanity. In all of this, the human person, the thinking subject, has achieved an implicit but effective centrality; in one way or another, the divine existence is asserted and evaluated as a corollary of the human.”

The famous Tillichian equivalence of salvation with healing, based on an etymological appeal to salve, is perhaps the most visible example of the increasing centrality of the ‘subject’ in therapeutic theology. In one of Tillich’s most evocative sermons, we begin with God, but then come quickly to our true goal, the autonomous resolution of self-hatred:

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433 Metz, 11.
Where the New Reality appears, one feels united with God, the ground and meaning of one’s existence. One has what has been called the love of one’s destiny, and what, today, we might call the courage to take upon ourselves our own anxiety. Then one has the astonishing experience of feeling reunited with one’s self, not in pride and false self-satisfaction, but in a deep self-acceptance. One accepts one’s self as something which is eternally important, eternally loved, eternally accepted. The disgust at one’s self, the hatred of one’s self has disappeared. There is a center, a direction, a meaning for life. All healing—bodily and mental—creates this reunion of oneself with oneself.

Such overwhelming emphases on assurance are worth questioning at their core. One serious problem with Reformation doctrines of assurance is that integrative self-critique can only be done in direct competition with teachings of assurance, which convert the question, how can I participate more thoroughly in love, into the question, do I feel okay.

Pastoral theology, like therapeutic thought more broadly, is descended from this emphasis on the lived experience of assurance and certainty. Assurance pursues a certitudo salutis—a certainty most easily located in what Max Weber called a ‘witness of emotion.’ Penitential self-critique, unsurprisingly, has no place in this. Repentance, instead, is one aspect of a broader commitment to humble uncertainty about our final

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435 Cf., Nietzsche’s Eternal Return.
436 Note also the quiet implication that contemporary therapeutic thought and pre-modern theological commitments are self-evidently equivalent.
438 In The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, Max Weber emphasizes the historical reliance on emotion, in addition to material success, as a proof of salvific certitude. Both capitalism and the therapeutic may find a common root in Reformation doctrines of assurance (even apart from the capitalist reliance on therapeutic methods to relieve its high human and affective pressures). It is difficult to imagine the therapeutic apart from capitalism.
fate in the Kingdom. Augustine prays to God not to be “more certain about you, but to be more stable in you.”

The sayings of the desert fathers reveal a remarkable consistency of view regarding the necessity of rejecting mere assurance. Sisoes, as he lay dying, said “’Look, the angels are coming to fetch me, and I am begging them to let me do a little penance.’ The old man [the abba attending to Sisoes] said to him, ‘You have no need to do penance, Father.’ But [Sisoes] said to them, ‘Truly, I do not think I have even made a beginning yet’” (Sisoes, Apophthegm 14).

The therapeutic, on the other hand, is consistently a herald of gnostic certainty and prestige, reveling in his own difference from lesser persons, who adhere to mere tradition: “Can we deal with the transformations and resurrections of personality that can ultimately follow from lives lived authentically and creatively? Or would we rather stick with the pious old formulas and language of guilt, sin, and repentance?”

The dramatic rhetoric of therapeutic transformation is hugely attractive in a personality culture. An implicit but powerful promise is held out to us: you can be

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439 Paul: “If any man imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. But if one loves God, one is known by him” (1 Cor. 8:2). See Robert Wilken, The Spirit of Early Christian Thought (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), Ch. 12, “The Knowledge of Sensuous Intelligence.”

440 Twice in the Alphabetic Collection of the sayings of the Fathers, we overhear Anthony instructing: “The greatest thing a man can do is to throw his faults before the Lord and to expect temptation to his last breath” (Anthony, Apophthegm 4; Poemen, Apophthegm 125). Note: hereafter, known sayings of the Fathers are attributed directly to them as individuals; these may all be found in the same collection already cited in the previous chapter: The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection, trans. Benedicta Ward.

441 McNish, 196. The assumption of an opposition between repentance and creativity is a complete departure from tradition.
better, special, worthy. You and I are not, thank heaven, those witless and tradition-bound others.442

The therapeutic, committed to a separation from the damaging coercions of convention, lapses regularly into a conspiratorial tone toward the uninitiated (cf. Ch. 2, on conspiratorial rhetoric as initiation in Nietzsche). Writing about the sense of divine intimacy that comes from recognizing the True Self, Richard Rohr regrets that, “for some sad reason, it seems to be a well-kept secret... I hope you have been there, or there is something essential you do not know.”443 “When the True Self becomes clearer to you, and it will for most of you, you will have grounded your spirituality in its first and fundamental task, and you will have hired the best counseling service possible.”444

The gnostic language of the insider445 is easily transfigured into a patronizing superiority: “So what does this book say to you? Is it as life changing and death shattering as I hoped?”446

What is one supposed to say?

Therapeutic rhetorical strategies, dividing the world into true initiate of insight and the lesser other, are very difficult to oppose: any critic can be automatically dismissed as unintelligent or too ‘compliant.’ The loaded binary divisions between “creativity” and “repentance,” or “authenticity” and “sin,” allow the therapeutic to view his opponents more with pity than with curiosity or openness. (Rohr expresses a

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442 See also Luke 18: 9-14.
443 Rohr, 164, 170.
444 Rohr, 4-5.
445 Rohr, 168.
446 Rohr, 175.
consistent disdain toward regular clergy, the mere company men, who do not agree with his positions.) The therapeutic theologian presumes an enormous authority to impose expert interpretation on the lives of others, even though assuming such an interpretive authority for our own experiential lives is already questionable enough.

The therapeutic creates a strong incentive to adhere to his authority, if we wish to have any relationship to him at all; he appeals to the same desire to comply and belong which he so thoroughly criticizes elsewhere as ‘false.’

However, the ‘old formulas of repentance,’ if they are understood well, are more creative in directing our natural human capacities for self-critique into the equally natural human desire to love more completely.

When emotions or ‘passions’ are healed in pre-modern Christian theological tradition, this healing does not happen because we affirm ourselves, or because ‘God’ amplifies that self-affirmation. The greater salvation of Christian commitment is instead the unintended result of another project altogether—namely, the wholehearted love of God and of persons.

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447 Passion was the central term in the Christian-Stoic dialogue of late antiquity. And because the Stoic is the nearest ancient equivalent of the contemporary therapeutic, that dialogue may become an increasingly important Christian resource. Apatheia, the stilling of all passions, was the central concept of Stoic soteriology, as it was, in a modified sense, for Christian contemplative theologians. Christian theologians such as Maximus the Confessor understood a specifically Christian apatheia as one that allows for a newly clarified and undistracted love of God and other. Love, not relief, is the direction of that Christian apatheia. Apatheia in this sense suggests a clearing away of self-concerned affect, so that other-oriented care might more easily unfold itself.

448 Are we not commanded to love our neighbor as ourselves, so that ‘self-love’ might be seen as the truly foundational Christian practice? Søren Kierkegaard takes up this question at length in Works of Love, where he asks whether it is “possible for anyone to misunderstand this, as if it were the intention of Christianity to proclaim self-love as a prescriptive right? On the contrary, it is its purpose to wrest self-love away from us human beings. This implies loving one’s self [in a self-centered way]; but if one must love his neighbor as himself, then the command, like a pick, wrenches open the lock of self-love and...
We ultimately wish far more to participate in love than to be loved.\footnote{This anthropological assumption was an implicit point of disagreement in the Reformation. For the reformers, the locus of salvation was primarily individual, if faith was to be newly disciplined and vivified. In a more thoroughly sacramental vision of love, the locus of salvation cannot be limited to the self alone. (Whatever else may be said about the problem of indulgences, that practice implicitly views human beings as interconnected, and very much capable of mutual deliverance from harm: indulgences were most often sought on behalf of others.)} Some readers may wish, on behalf of an enormous range of human beings who have suffered intensely because of others, to insist that the sense of being loved by an ultimate reality is profoundly necessary. This is not at stake for me. I agree.

My claim, instead, is that many of us are so thoroughly embedded in the therapeutic that we easily forget that self-acceptance is not the end, but just one probable consequence, of a sustained commitment to love.\footnote{My colleague, Professor Karen Enriquez, reminds me that central theological teachings such as self-emptying love or repentance have often been used by and against women to justify a despairing self-abnegation in the face of social expectations that ask women, in particular, to sacrifice themselves for the utilitarian desires of others. I remain concerned, however, that when we critique such a damaging use of kenosis, we tend to ignore the important role of theological discernment in religious practice: if we have no vision of the integrity of kenosis, over against mere accession to power, we have no real vision of kenosis at all. Self-emptying is not at all opposed to a frank and fundamental challenge of the powerful; humility and confrontation are not completely different directions of interpersonal engagement. A powerful and developing love of God gives us the courage to inhabit a deeper and more challenging kenosis, which has little to do with \textit{either} self-abnegation or violent reaction against the violent. Participation in a transcendent love makes us less likely to accede to the abuses of power, perhaps at first for our own sake, but then also for the sake of the powerful themselves.}

We must lose our lives as our own, affirmed or not. Even when Jesus beholds a person who is not used to being seen in their essential capacity for agapic love—for instance, Zacchaeus the collector of taxes—Christ does not leave that person with some thereby wrests it away from a man.” See Works of Love, trans. Howard and Edna Hong (New York: Harper and Row, 1962 [1847]), p. 34. Compare to the discussion of \textit{dak dzin}, self-grasping, and its unraveling through \textit{tonglen}, in Chapter 3.
pure and uncomplicated affirmation. Only when Zacchaeus commits himself to actually
caring differently within the Kingdom of love does Christ speak of his salvation.451

The real question is not whether we can love ourselves, or even whether we can
sense ourselves as assuredly loved in some final way. The far more central question is
whether we can come to live through and out of God’s love, however inefficiently and
badly we may do so. There are two primary Christian truths: the ultimate truth that all
is grace, and the relative truth, the one that we are usually more accustomed or
habituated to recognize, which is the prominence of pain, the prevalence of self-
concern, and the existence of people who may not seem to deserve our supposedly
quite limited resources of care.

If we live only within this relative truth, we will attempt to ‘have’ grace within it,
in order to make that world bearable for ourselves. From a perspective that emphasizes
a more pervasive grace, there is no point in ‘having’ it.

Therapeutic Christian theologians often treat the love of God as a relief we may
experience, rather than an act that we might receive and express. Self-critical
repentance is the Christian path toward a more active allowing of that love.

451 I’m grateful to Professor John McDargh for several rich discussions of this passage. See Luke 19.
4.3 BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN

When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent,’ he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.

—Martin Luther

*Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God* (Mt. 5:8). ...[But] because now you are unable to see, let your task consist in desiring. The entire life of a good Christian is a holy desire.

—Augustine

That these two statements say something very similar might have required little explanation in some centuries. We are given now to understand repentance as a kind of calculated self-punishment. But repentance is the clearest path of holy desire available to us, the greatest antidote to modernist self-contempt.

In order to more clearly understand this, we turn our commentarial focus in particular to the second of the Matthean Beatitudes, *Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted* (Mt. 5:4)—a teaching about both repentance and desire.

The Beatitudes, like the terse sayings of Tibetan *lojong*, are closely interwoven, and grow increasingly intelligible when read as interpretations of one another. Beginning with the blessedness of the poor in spirit (Mt. 5:3), the Beatitudes develop an unrelenting portrait of the Christian life as one of kenotic self-emptying, and mourning—*penthos*—is a primary practice of that creative impoverishment that allows for receptivity. *Makárioi oi penthoúntes*: blessed are the mourners.

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453 Luke 6:21 has, instead, *Makárioi oi klaiontes*—blessed are those who lament—which has a more affectively intense tonality, and which may gesture more toward lamentation over violence or immediate loss than does the Matthean phraseology.
The Beatitudes are perhaps the most powerful invocations of desire in the New Testament, envisioning comfort, inheritance, fulfillment, mercy, God. The Kingdom itself is the explicit framing context of the Beatitudes as a whole: see Mt. 5:3 and 5:10.

The Beatitudes bring two things together: desire and self-emptying surrender. Augustine, reflecting on the cleaned-out (‘pure’) heart that allows for a vision of God (Mt. 5:8), tells those gathered to hear him that “by desiring you are made large enough, so that, when there comes what you should see, you may be filled. …This is how God stretches our desire through delay, stretches our soul through desire, and makes it large enough by stretching it.”454

We are more used to considering Augustine as the unyielding scourge of desire. This is to read him, primarily, through Freud (for whom desire is far more conflated with sexuality than it is for Augustine). Augustine sharply condemned concupiscence in particular as a sexualized and disordering desire in his early debates with Pelagian interlocutors455—but the problem with concupiscence is not that it is desire, but that it is so intensely and compulsively focused on the self alone.

Christian life is an ongoing series of decisions between kenotic and concupiscent forms of desire. The grace-empowered choice to love beyond the self, rather than the paltry freedom of deciding between material goods, is the real meaning of human freedom for Augustine. (The Stoic, seeking to end all desire, is oriented primarily toward

454 Ibid.
relief. Augustine is no Stoic, and neither, we will find, are the Fathers of the desert.456) The ferocity of the Augustinian attack on concupiscence is in many ways an impassioned plea for a deeper human nobility457—a nobility that can unfold only through a desire that is ordered toward God.

To repent is the discipline of beginning, again and again, to turn attention back (metanoia) toward the love that we also repeatedly refuse. Christian repentance is our consent to being perpetual beginners at love.

To repent is to commit to our own imperfection as the only possible vehicle for any integration into a larger context of care. The Desert Fathers often add a concluding emphasis to their reflections on repentance: Truly, there is no other way than this. There is no other way, because repentance is the only way forward from wherever it is that we actually are. We have no other place to start.

I focus here on mourning, or penthos, as a particularly central early monastic commitment within the broad categories of repentance and compunction. (Compunctio has to do etymologically with the sense of being punctured—in this case, primarily by love.) I acknowledge that penthos—“mourning for lost salvation, whether one’s own or

456 Alexis Torrance, in an excellent recent study of early monastic understandings of repentance, notes that for some desert teachers, “if the ascetic feels a certain peace which leads him to think that he no longer needs to call on the name of Christ, he must flee this ‘peace’ through more fervent and unceasing prayer: ‘we should not have such peace, if we consider ourselves sinners’ [Barsanuphius of Gaza].” See Repentance in Late Antiquity: Eastern Asceticism and the Framing of the Christian Life c.400-650 CE (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 149.

457 One curious aspect of Buddhist inculturation in the West is that the Second Noble Truth, which is so comparable to Augustine’s critique of concupiscence as ignorant and self-centered craving, should go unquestioned as a semi-psychological anthropological truth, while Augustine is consistently dismissed.
that of others”—can easily appear to the therapeutic as an overly precious spirituality of self-pity. The pre-therapeutic Christian, however, takes his or her own sin far more seriously as the primary obstacle to greater integration in the life of God. Mourning is far more understandable in such a situation.

It is crucial for our entire argument, therefore, that *penthos* should be understood as something quite different than despair, pity, or aversive self-contempt. “The direct opposite of *penthos,*” writes Irenee Hausherr, “is *acedia,* which dries up the source of tears and drives one to seek out distractions... *Penthos* and *lypi* [sorrow, a synonym of *acedia*] go in diametrically opposed directions: the first towards the summits of union with God, the second toward the abyss of despair.”

The superb patristic historian Alexis Torrance, reflects that for Barsanuphius of Gaza, humble self-blame was not intended “to promote despair, but to soften the heart hardened in a state of unsalutary self-justification, which admits no repentance.” Torrance offers us a sense of Barsanuphius’s own pastoral skill and balance:

Not all compunction, Barsanuphius warns one monk, is from God. If the memory of one’s sins is acted upon for the correction of our past, then “this is genuine compunction, through which sins are forgiven.” But if in remembering our sins we continue to fall into the same sins or worse,
then “this memory comes from the enemy, who suggests this memory to you only in order to condemn your soul.”

Donald Capps skillfully argues that narcissistic shame, or self-aversive despair, should be restored to the explicit status of sin, insofar as these habits of self-concern involve a very real self-estrangement from God. We have also seen, in the previous chapter, Joe Loizzo’s view of some forms of self-aversive shame as a form of ‘indulgence’ in habitual forms of reactivity. These thinkers all write implicitly against the normal therapeutic instinct to understand self-aversion as a form of conditioning perpetrated against the individual from the external sources of culture or family, as if shame might only be understood as a victimized innocence. “Abba Isaiah, when someone asked him what avarice was, replied, ‘Not to believe that God cares for you...’” (Isaiah, Apophthegm 9). Such a failure of trust, such an insistence on one’s own particular and specialized pain, marks self-interest more than victimhood. It is not worthwhile to view ourselves as innocents.

Christianity is a spirituality of imperfection, and *penthos* is presented by a number of desert and monastic theologians as the most central of all Christian practices—not a special spiritual gift for monks alone. It would be too convenient to

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461 Torrance, pp. 137, 143. Recall also the discussion of moral perfectionism in the *Sanka Sutta* (Conch Sutta) above, in Chapter 3.
462 Starting from the original list of eight deadly sins, melancholy (*tristitia*) was eventually subsumed into apathy (*acedia*) in the Western church. Donald Capps understands self-aversive shame as ‘melancholy,’ and suggests that it should be restored to the status of sin. This is an interesting suggestion (see Capps, 42-48). But we might also be careful to keep *acedia* and melancholic patterns closely aligned. For good reasons, *acedia* and melancholy are understood to imply the other. If we separate *acedia* and melancholy too thoroughly, we may justify the very recent notion that despair is just an innocent victimhood, rather than a species of spiritual languor and disconnection.
463 Mark 2:17: “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners [hamartoloi; flawed ones].”
assume that the penitential character of the Beatitudes is reserved for some subset of the Kingdom. To understand tears as a marginal Christian spirituality is to ignore such central figures as Augustine, weeping in his mother’s garden, or Ignatius, whose *Spiritual Diary* is chiefly a record of the gift of tears.\(^464\) John Climacus is direct:

> You there! We will not have to answer, at the moment of the soul’s departure, for not having been wonderworkers or theologians, nor for not having become contemplatives, but we must unavoidably render an account to God for not having practiced *penthos* without interruption.\(^465\)

*Penthos* is “not essentially mystical.”\(^466\) It is necessarily a merger of grace and human dedication, but it is nonetheless there for the asking, however long and difficult that asking may be.

Maggie Ross, a particularly articulate student of *penthos*, writes implicitly of *penthos* as something accessible even in a life of incomplete but ongoing renunciation.

> “Grief work,” she writes, contrasting therapeutic and theological modes of mourning, “always seems to seek mitigation of pain, seek comfort in establishing relationships that will enable new boundaries of self to be established so that the pain is ended. This is right and proper. The way of tears, while not seeking pain for its own sake, is a willingness to be continually confronted not only by painful truth about one’s self, but

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\(^{465}\) See the Ladder of Divine Ascent, 7.70. Quoted in Hausherr, p. 176.

\(^{466}\) Hausherr, 175. “The monk, at least the eastern monk, is not a special person” (24). “If I may add a thought for today’s Christians, I would recommend that they take careful note of this doctrine, and first thank the Lord all the more for the *sacrament* of penance, but then beware lest they think themselves dispensed from the *virtue* of repentance...” (177-78).
also seeks to know this truth on a universal level of human suffering.” 

Some resonances with Tibetan lojong will grow stronger now.

*Penthos* is an encounter with strong imperfection, an encounter that is only possible in connection with the basic goodness and mercy of God. It is not a practice of certainty or final self-judgment. Abba Poemen: “In all our afflictions let us weep in the presence of the goodness of God, until he shows mercy on us.”

*Penthos* returns repeatedly to the presence of extensive mercy. “*Penthos,*” writes John Chryssavgis, consists simultaneously “in mourning for the loss of God’s presence,” which is simultaneously a form of longing for that presence. Repentance focuses not on sins as intrinsic qualities of persons, but instead views sin as the performance of self-separation from love. The depressive sorrow of acedia is not an identity, but something done.

*Penthos* seeks no special therapeutic insight into the roots of our painful performativity, or into the familial and cultural origins of those performances. *Penthos* simply confronts acedia by turning it relentlessly toward mercy, until it has been purified of its destructiveness. If repentance is the entire life of a Christian, this is in part because that life is an endlessly imperfect turn toward love.

The Fathers of the desert, like the teachers of lojong, celebrate our sharpest moments of failure and difficulty, precisely because these moments can function, if we

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468 Poemen, Apophthegm 122.
let them, to re-direct our attention. Abba Anthony said, “Whoever has not experienced temptation cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.’ He even added, ‘Without temptations no-one can be saved.’”

Evagrius said, “Take away temptations and no-one will be saved.” Dorotheos of Gaza reads Paul’s famous exhortation to the Thessalonians, urging them to offer gratitude for all things (5:18), as a teaching about the immense value of failure.

Without coming up against our own most difficult and seemingly intractable imperfections—without an inveterate rage or beckoning acedia, without gluttony or porneia—we cannot be pushed to entrust ourselves further and further towards God’s encompassing care. Penthos is one form of trust in the face of necessary demons.

I myself inhabit a willfulness that is, on the face of it, completely necessary. It is there for me when I face the normal business of life: calling a phone company to clarify an unexpected charge, representing myself as more competent than I actually feel so that I might find opportunities to become more competent, trying to be polite to someone I do not fully trust. Living in the world seems to require, more than anything.

470 Anthony, Apophthegm 5.
471 Evagrius, Apophthegm 5. Among the anonymous apophthegmata, we also find this: “There was an old man who was constantly ill. Now it happened that he was without suffering for one year, and he was vexed and wept, saying, ‘God has forsaken me and has not visited me.’” See The Wisdom of the Desert Fathers: Systematic Sayings from the Anonymous Series, trans. Benedicta Ward (Oxford: SLG Press, 1986), Apophthegm 77. In the very next saying, a Father insists that his listener should “Understand that it is not good for someone to despair of himself because of his temptations; rather, temptations procure crowns for us if we use them well” (Apophthegm 78).
473 Gregory of Nyssa writes, “For the whole array of passions—wrath and fear, cowardice and impudence, depression as well as pleasure, hatred, strife and merciless cruelty, envy as well as flattery, brutality together with brooding over injuries—they all are so many despotic masters who make the soul a slave in their territory as if it was a prisoner of war.” See Gregory of Nyssa, The Lord’s Prayer and The Beatitudes, Ancient Christian Writers, Vol. 18, trans. Hilda Graef (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), p. 113-14.
else, a practiced self-assertion—forms of willfulness that are at least somewhat palatable to the assertiveness of others.

But it is hard to wear this well over time. The eye quite literally becomes darker. Engaged so thoroughly in our normal willfulness, we are likely to turn aggressively inward to force the changes we seek in ourselves, rather than giving ourselves over to a certain more humble powerlessness and transparency to love.

Only through some disciplined recognition of our real failures to turn ourselves toward love can we interrupt our otherwise endless self-involvement. Though some recent authors have expressed regret that Christianity does not have a moment-to-moment form of self-awareness like that offered by Buddhist practices, they have very much overlooked repentance as the most direct Christian analogy to ‘mindfulness.’

The concept of ‘return’ is embedded within the New Testament and Pauline meanings of metanoia: return to the nous, to the mind, of Christ.

With or without distinct tears, the mourning of penthos is far more like a truthful sobriety than it is a pitying or regretful emotionalism. We have already seen Maggie Ross distinguish between cathartic grief and penthos. Some of the most central thinkers of early Christian tradition, focusing on the purification of our desires through repentance, seek to draw very similar distinctions. Gregory of Nyssa, in an extended homily on the second Beatitude, notes that “the underlying sense [of penthos] seems to be that the soul should turn to the true good and not immerse itself in the deceits of

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this present life.”475 John Chrysostom, who was, along with Gregory, a late fourth-century contemporary of, and participant in, desert monasticism, reflected on *penthos* in one of his homilies:

> Wherefore, if you will be comforted, mourn: and think this not a dark saying. For when God does comfort, though sorrows come upon you by thousands like snow-flakes, you will be above them all. Since in truth, as the returns which God gives are always far greater than our labors; so He has wrought in this case, declaring them that mourn to be blessed, not after the value of what they do, but after His own love towards man. ...He bids us mourn, not only for our own, but also for other men’s misdoings.476

Both Gregory of Nyssa and John Chrysostom speak of *penthos* with a pastoral sensibility. We can sense in Chrysostom in particular the delivery of a prestigious monastic spirituality to the lay imagination—a situation not unlike that of the present moment. Alexis Torrance notes that Chrysostom, in the *Commentary on the Psalms*, “speaks repeatedly of the laity as having the same opportunities for glory as the monastics, and even suggests that they ought to weep more than the monks, they ‘being in more need of the remedy of repentance.’”477 Chrysostom also recognizes that his listeners might misunderstand mourning as a dark demand for an impossible penance, so he emphasizes God’s love, rather than any bitterness or gnashing.

In fact, *penthos* involves a consistently attested joy. This is not the same thing as assurance; *penthos* remains more completely attuned to mystery; it relinquishes

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475 Gregory of Nyssa, 114.
477 Torrance, p. 84.
certainty about the final fate of any person before God. There is already a deepening comfort, however, even in allowing ourselves to long for a more active participation in love, beyond the gravity of our own natural self-concern. Even though *penthos* is focused initially on a loss of God’s presence, that presence is sought again in longing; and, even more importantly, *the joy of this longing is itself sensed as a gift of pervasive holiness*.478 John Climacus writes, “As I ponder the true nature of compunction, I find myself amazed by the way in which inward joy and gladness mingle with what we call mourning and grief, like honey in a comb.”479 Hannah Hunt writes of “The joyinfused grief of *penthos* [that] brings the whole person... into the presence of God.”480

We sometimes hear the Beatitudes as prescriptive conditions: *if* we perform a certain set of perfections, *then* we will find joy. We might hear the Beatitudes, instead, as descriptive: blessedness is not what will happen, once conditions and requirements have been met; blessedness is what already enables love to be poured out at all.

We do not mourn our turning away from love, so that we may eventually become blessed. We find ourselves able to mourn because we live in the midst of common blessing. “Let us accept from God the repentance that heals us,” writes

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478 “The whole life of a man is but one single day for those who are working hard with longing” (Gregory the Theologian, Apophthegm 2); “If only a man desired it for a single day from morning till night, he would be able to come to the measure of God” (Alonius, Apophthegm 3). The last saying is implicitly a critique of our damaged capacity for holy desire, not a claim that we can actually justify ourselves through longing.

479 John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans. Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), p. 141. See also this saying from Abba Benjamin: “As he was dying, Abba Benjamin said to his sons, ‘If you observe the following, you can be saved, “Be joyful at all times, pray without ceasing and give thanks for all things”’” (Benjamin, Apophthegm 4).

Chrysostom, “For it is not we who offer it to Him, but He who bestows it upon us.”

_Penthos_ is receptivity.

The Desert Fathers sometimes disagree about the extent to which we must exert effort for the sake of explicit tears, but no authority suggests that mourning is something we achieve on our own. This is important. Whenever the connection between _penthos_ and receptivity is forgotten or denied, we become more likely to dismiss teachings on repentance, _penthos_, and ‘self-blame’ as expressions of small and bitter self-contemptuousness.

Criticism apart from love is rightly refused. The gift of discernment is necessary in any religious life that includes both love and loving critique; we are under no injunction to accept any and all criticism or blame (note the Tibetan insistence on carefully examining the trustworthiness of one’s teacher). In a situation without trust or love, criticism, from either self or other, often appears as an attack upon our personhood, rather than an attempt to help heal our distinctive departures from love.

To receive critique from a trusted source of care, is to receive care itself. Repentance, repeated over time, becomes a strengthened capacity of non-resistance to

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482 “The aim of repentance is not self-justification, but reentry into that consuming fire of love where all sin and imperfection and selfishness wither.” Ibid, 220.

483 See Augustine, *Enchiridion* §82. “As soon as they made the acquaintance of Saint Augustine, the Eastern ascetics preferred above all his ability to awaken the feeling of compunction” (Hausherr, 15).

484 A skillful theology of discernment should allow us to participate in an imperfect body of Christ, without rejecting that body. This is not at all to justify harmful acts—only to put ourselves in position to challenge them from a position of grace. “An old man was asked, ‘How can I find God?’ He said, ‘In fasting, in watching, in labours, in devotion, and above all, in discernment. I tell you, many have injured their bodies without discernment and have gone away from us having achieved nothing. Our mouths smell bad through fasting, we know the Scriptures by heart, we recite all the Psalms of David, but we have not that which God seeks: charity and humility’” (Anonymous Series, Apophthegm 90).
critical love. ‘Self-blame,’ in this context of love, is primarily a judgment that we receive from beyond ourselves, not something imposed as a form of internal willfulness. Abba Poemen said:

‘All the virtues come to this house except one and without that virtue it is hard for a man to stand.’ Then they asked him what virtue was, and he said, ‘For a man to blame himself.’

The therapeutic will tend to hear the language of ‘self-blame’ as a perverse diversion from therapeutic self-acceptance. We may have temporarily lost the ability to hear a quiet irony and precision in the core theological language of ‘self-blame.’ In this blame there is no global condemnation. In fact, from the perspective of the Desert Fathers, any full condemnation, directed against others or against ourselves, is already a breathtaking exercise in the sin of presumptio. Teachings on ‘self-blame’ have little to do with blame for any reified or global psychological ‘self.’ For the Fathers, self-blame is directed not toward the whole person, but toward the more insidious human tendencies of willfulness and self-centered desire.

Destructive forms of self-aversion claim inviolable authority to make final, total, and willful judgments about ourselves (and others). Gerald May speaks of willfulness as “the setting of oneself apart... in an attempt to master, direct, control, or otherwise manipulate existence.” That attempt at masterful autonomy, given reign, is the reversal of penthos. But such willful mastery is also damned hard and exhausting work. No one, it turns out, is an Übermensch. For Nietzsche, the will-to-power must be

485 Poemen, Apophthegm 134.
inverted toward the self, before it can be successfully imposed elsewhere. These are circles of viciousness.

Willfulness is the attempt to produce our own distinct and particular worthiness through work, effort, and, where necessary, force. Willfulness is always subtly tinged by an inflammation of violence toward ourselves and others. “Abba John said, ‘We have put the light burden on one side, that is to say, self-accusation, and we have loaded ourselves with a heavy one, that is to say, self-justification.’”^487

Why is self-blame the lighter burden? Because it is precisely the repeated divestment of the heaviest human weight of self-concern.

Self-blame and penthos are the practices of the cleaned-out heart: “eliminating self-blame,” writes Hausherr, “cuts off penthos at its root.”^488 Given to a lifelong process of self-emptying, we are slowly rendered more capable of desiring a will of love that is not fully our own. Autonomia is gradually replaced by a new willingness.^489

It is perhaps impossible to give up one habit of desire without turning to another. Control and mastery, which we quietly know are unachievable even as we avidly pursue them, give way to a longing to participate in a kenotic mastery that we cannot control. We seek to be held in love, that we might become more loving. “There are a lot of counterfeit changes of heart around,” writes Maggie Ross, “but the sort that is permanent has been longed for, wept over, and coming for a long time. Just wanting,

^487 John the Dwarf, Apophthegm 21.
^488 Hausherr, 90.
^489 It is no accident that the prayer at the center of Christian tradition simultaneously expresses both longing and repentance: Thy Kingdom come; forgive us our debts, as we forgive those of others.
not even willing, is a lot of it.”\textsuperscript{490} The whole of Christian life is a holy desire. Poemen said, “To throw yourself before God, not to measure your progress, to leave behind all self-will; these are the instruments for the work of the soul.”\textsuperscript{491}

‘Self-blame’ and \textit{penthos} ultimately connect us to all others. The Beatitudes, including the beatitude of \textit{penthos}, are imbued with a grammar of plurality: \textit{makárioi oi penthoúntes}. \textit{Penthos} mourns for our own lost sense of God’s presence—but also for the losses incurred by others.\textsuperscript{492} For Chrysostom, as we have already seen, Christ “bids us mourn, not only for our own, but also for other men’s misdoings.”\textsuperscript{493} For St. Mark the Monk in the sixth century, monks are “obliged to offer repentance for their neighbor”—not as a burdensome duty of the elite, but as ‘sponsors’ of the salvation of others.\textsuperscript{494}

Since, therefore, the merciful will be shown mercy, [it is] through repentance... [that] the whole world holds together, one finding mercy through another according to the divine will.\textsuperscript{495}

Where autonomous self-aversion is founded on separation, repentance actively repairs our capacities for connection and commonality. This penitential vision of

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{490} Ross, 139.
\textsuperscript{491} Poemen, Apophthegm 36.
\textsuperscript{492} Hausherr, 18.
\textsuperscript{493} John Chrysostom, “Homily XV on Matthew.” Compassion, however, has its own dangers, as both Nietzsche and lojong teaching will insist. In the desert, also, some beginning monks were urged to “avoid the false desire to be compassionate which [would be] simply a gratification of his own will and an illusion of the demons” (Torrance, 154). Although \textit{penthos} may be made for all, there remains the strong caveat that one should never consider one’s own sin fully mourned before God. “For the Desert Fathers and Mothers,” writes John Chryssavgis, “there is no stage [in this life] beyond this knowledge of imperfection. Perfection is for God, not for us; imperfection is ours to know and embrace, not to forego or forget.” See \textit{In the Heart of the Desert: The Spirituality of the Desert Fathers and Mothers} (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom Books, 2008), p. 50.
\textsuperscript{494} Mark the Monk, \textit{De Paenitentia}, Ch. 11. Quoted in Torrance, 110.
\textsuperscript{495} Ibid, p. 115. Consider also the Talmudic teaching that the entire world may be forgiven through the repentance of one person (Yoma 86b).
\end{footnotes}
interconnectedness within the love of Christ marks the deepened unraveling of self-concern. No severe or despairing self-aversion can make sense within the relentlessly relational epistemology of *penthos*.

In *tonglen* and in other-oriented *penthos*, there is no one person saving some other person. For the Christian, that purification of the world’s suffering is necessarily a penitential request, rather than a self-assertion: *Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done*. Repentance with and on behalf of others expresses a profoundly eschatological desire.

We only gain full access to mercy through giving it away, not through self-acceptance. Repentance is not primarily a desire to be accepted, but a deeper desire to participate, more and more completely, in transcendent love. Christian mourning unravels the despairing autonomy upon which self-aversion as a resistance to love must be founded.

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496 For the monastic (and for the non-therapeutic Christian more generally), it is far more important to be within Christ, than it is to be like an archetype.
CONCLUSION: AUTONOMY AND REFUGE

In 1982, Jonathan Z. Smith asked, quite reasonably, why similarity should ever be interesting as a focus for comparative religious inquiry.

Religious similarities, he wrote, are almost certain to arise in the process of research in multiple religious traditions. It is not clear, though, how a researcher is to discern the sort of similarity that could be relevant or helpful: “Often, at some point along the way, as if unbidden, as a sort of déjà vu, the scholar remembers that he has seen ‘it’ or ‘something like it’ before…. This experience, this unintended consequence of research, must then be accorded significance and provided with an explanation.”

What could ever be the value of sameness? Smith concluded his discussion with an insistence that “Comparison requires the postulation of difference as the grounds of its being interesting (rather than tautological) and [also requires] a methodical manipulation of difference... in the service of some useful end.” Religious inquiry is justifiably suspect wherever it fails to serve such an end, and Smith’s demand for greater self-awareness of purpose and method in religious scholarship is one of his lasting legacies. “No scholar of religion has done more than Professor Smith,” writes

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498 Ibid., p.40.
John Thatamanil, “to cultivate among religionists this deep habit of theoretical reflexivity.”

However, there is a large difference between the researcher who theorizes or ‘imagines’ religion, and one who seeks to enable the religious practice of a community—this figure usually called a theologian, Rabbi, or teacher. Much depends on the meaning of Smith’s phrase, “the service of some useful end.”

Thatamanil has sharply questioned the sorts of scholarship that Smith has so authoritatively advanced during the past half-century:

It is worth asking... the following critical question: just why it is that imagining religion has remained largely a Western project? Is imagining religion an inevitable part of the larger project of creating the secular as its paired and opposite other? Asking these kinds of questions moves inquiry well beyond the methodological reflexivity or self-consciousness that Smith calls for by turning the ethnographic gaze back onto theoreticians of religion themselves. ...In what way is the scholarly project of imagining religion as it takes place within the Western university part of the larger cultural labor of creating and extending the secular?

This essay works from a set of religious questions about the nature of self-examination, as that examination takes place—or fails to do so—within a field of compassion.

Those questions were first raised in conversation with Buddhist practitioners in institutional settings: first at the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies, a retreat and study center in rural Massachusetts, and then at the Won Institute for Graduate Studies in

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500 Ibid., p. 1179.
Philadelphia. The questions themselves have to do with the therapeutic commitments and views of self among contemporary Buddhists in capitalist cultures. This work, then, is in part about the inculturation of Buddhism in the North Atlantic world, where Buddhism is easily constructed as a therapeutic auxiliary.

It has been very easy, thus far, for North American Buddhists to overlook the great traditions of critical thought about human ethical harm, and about our intense need for refuge, in pre-therapeutic Buddhist communities. With Levinas, pre-modern Buddhists were concerned with the connections between ignorance and violence.

Insofar as Buddhists in the West sometimes see themselves in opposition to the Abrahamic traditions they have left, the similarities of ‘self-blame’ I have written about here implicitly challenge any convenient assumptions of total religious difference. For instance, Buddhists, because we supposedly have no doctrine of sin’s origination (an entirely questionable assumption), are also supposedly free of Abrahamic sources of negativity toward the self.

This hides far more than it reveals. Such interreligious dualisms help to hide the therapeutic secularizing context within which any religious commitment is now made.

In a community of committed religious imagination and practice, both differences and similarities may allow for unexpected creative insight. The work of the theologian or teacher is to discern which similarities and which differences are important for a given question of ethical, ritual, epistemological, contemplative, or institutional practice.
The similarity of apophatic emphases of some Buddhist and Christian medieval monastics, for instance, is an entirely reasonable focus for scholarship, if the Christian theologian is thereby driven, through an initial similarity, to recover and vivify practices of silence for his or her own Christian audience. The contemporary Buddhist, enamored with a romanticized apophatic, may find in the same comparison a helpful reminder of the cataphatic and ritual emphases of prior Buddhist thought and practice.

An emphasis on interreligious similarities of devotion, like those pursued in the work of Francis Clooney, may have far more value and purpose for vivifying both traditions’ access to such devotion, than any exploration of mere religious difference. Difference itself cannot be relevant so long as it simply delineates incommensurability. No one cares that turtles are not planets. Difference alone is no guarantee of relevance.

Similarities, then, particularly in a cultural situation where non-therapeutic religious lives are difficult to cultivate, may serve useful ends of greater refuge, faith, and trust.501 These are not the ‘useful ends’ that Jonathan Z. Smith was prepared to recognize. Smith’s disciplinary demands leave little room for the scholar who is faithful, seeking understanding—and they leave perhaps no room at all for the scholar who is faithful, seeking deepened faith.

Usefulness, in the social location of university religious studies, is often defined in terms of new knowledge that enriches or complicates theory itself. The theologian, on the other hand, is not interested in the new so much as he or she is interested in

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501 In such a case, the true test of the valuable comparison may be whether the comparison itself can be left behind, after it has done its corrective or revitalizing work.
what understandings can help give his or her community greater access to love or compassion. These understandings are often shared with the past. But they are not mere exercises in domesticated and secular ‘cultural memory’—they have specific audiences and purposes.

Theological inquiry seeks to render the human being’s greater dignity back to him or her, in an expanded context of love. Thatamanil and others are right that this is a far different project than the construction of theories of religion.

My questions have been about the sources of destructive self-aversion in my own time and place, but also about the strangely thin therapeutic rhetoric of autonomous ‘self-compassion.’ In a therapeutic context, practices of ‘self-blame’ have become increasingly invisible to us as forms of religious creativity and connection, precisely at the point where connection has become most needful.

Even the most cursory reader will recognize that the work above includes both significant similarities and sharp differences. The first chapter offers a typology of the divergent views of shame that operate in contemporary psychology and philosophy. That chapter focuses in particular on shame as it operates, for both psychologists and philosophers, within communal and social contexts. Shame is always a problem or a possibility of connection. Psychologists and philosophers, however, have usually valued connection very differently. (There are exceptions: Sartre, for instance, who is far more individualistic and therapeutic in tenor than Emmanuel Levinas, Bernard Williams, and John Braithwaite.) The social-historical understandings of capitalist emotion outlined by Illouz, Lasch, and Susman helped to provide a context to better understand how
historically conditioned recent psychological and philosophical discussions of shame have been: we live in an era of self-performativity and intensified self-evaluation.

The second chapter names the problem of shame as a central concern in Nietzsche’s mature thought. Affirmative autonomy functions as the heart of Nietzsche’s proposed response to self-aversive shame. But autonomy does not appear to offer genuine resources of joy and commitment; the human being is always and necessarily rooted in relationship, and the attempt to heal the damages of aversive shame by enhancing autonomy solves very little.

These first chapters were intended to offer some broader historical, sociological, and intellectual context for better understanding modernist antipathy or blindness toward religious practices of ‘self-blame.’ Those practices are discussed in Chapters Three and Four, on lojong and penthos, respectively.

Even so, these chapters on self-blame themselves contain internal differentiation. In Chapter 3, I discuss modernist Buddhist self-compassion, in order to create a framing contrast with pre-therapeutic Buddhist practices that take the human capacity for karmic harm far more seriously. I do something similar in Chapter Four, discussing the modernist Christian rhetoric of self-acceptance, in order to contrast that rhetoric with the penthos of the Desert Fathers, which is a path of greater love than self-acceptance can be.

To imagine ‘self-blame’ as an autonomous practice of ascetic self-perfection is to badly misunderstand such practice. Buddhist and Christian practices of ‘self-blame’ and
penthos work, instead, from relationship, and also toward renewed relationship to transcedent sources of compassion.

In a therapeutic cultural context, it is almost impossible to perceive religious possibilities beyond those available to the autonomous self.\textsuperscript{502} It is autonomy which I most thoroughly question and critique.

It is customary in this kind of writing to situate oneself, naming the particular and limited horizons that one’s questions and answers must necessarily inhabit. Such statements sometimes have an air of defensive self-exculpation, meant to forestall critique. In the humanities, authority is sometimes renounced altogether, simply because no authority can be final.

But the authority of any theological work depends upon the way in which a community of practice is able to hear and respond to that work. I myself have the limited but real authority of a co-questioner and participant within communities of Buddhist practice. Any work of mine will be justified, or not, by the richness of the conversations it enables me to pursue. This has to do not only with others’ learning from me, but with my ongoing learning from them.

I come, of course, from a very particular social, geographical, gendered, racial, emotional, and economic position. It would be difficult to imagine a more fortunate life, than to be born into the white middle-class in late twentieth-century America. I was

\footnote{\textsuperscript{502} The autonomous self may also be understood as a neoliberal self. I have chosen autonomy, however, as a primary descriptive language because it refers more broadly to habits of self-separation that are recognizable to pre-therapeutic and pre-capitalist religious thinkers in both Buddhism and Christianity.}
raised in the particularly individualistic cultural context of the inland Pacific Northwest. My hometown, which lies along the Columbia River in the desert of Southeastern Washington State, exists in large part due to the Manhattan Project. Four of my childhood friends have doctoral degrees in Physics.

In that scientistic atmosphere, my family in particular was intensively therapeutic and individualistic in its intellectual and moral assumptions. Throughout my early life, I had little exposure to any invested religious lives. I was in fine position to become a prophet of the therapeutic.

But I have also been a person particularly made for connection. I live within a certain kind of interpersonal watchfulness and care, and none of that is particularly my own doing. It has meant, however, that therapeutic autonomy increasingly makes little sense to me as a reasonable human telos that I myself might inhabit.

It no doubt requires a therapeutic to critique the therapeutic. It became clear to me, as a young adult, that I was given over, far more than necessary or wise, to habits of severe and painful self-critique, and that these habits had only further negative effects for me and others.

I also found myself seeking out places of refuge, perhaps in part refuge from this critical and untrusting aspect of mind: I travelled extensively as a young person, going into Syrian mosques and Ukrainian Orthodox churches, German cathedrals and Tibetan monasteries. I intuited in these places the possibility of a greater safety than I could find anywhere in my own history. But I had in my early life no disciplines through which I could consistently gain access to that safety.
I began studying religion as one in need himself of deepening trust. *Lojong* is the place or practice where I most belong precisely because it is so definitively a path of connection to compassion directly within the situation of daily difficulty. *Lojong* disciplines a life that continues to move, fitfully at best, in the direction of greater connection and compassion. However, I have had to slowly renounce any therapeutically adjusted normalcy in order to understand the purposes of *lojong* at all. The pages above are part of that renunciation.

So situated, I propose now to offer several conclusions, and several avenues of further inquiry, in response to ‘self-blame’ as a practice of transcendent integration in Tibetan *lojong* and Christian *penthos*.

The work above repeatedly emphasized the ways in which ‘self-blame’ will have to take place within a field of compassion, if it is to enable any increasing connection to compassion itself.

The therapeutic can only perceive self-blame as a practice of autonomy, and therefore quite understandably perceives self-blame only as a masochism. However, the ‘driver’ of blame is not, for the *lojong* practitioner, autonomous and conditioned reason at all; similarly, self-reproach, for the Desert Fathers, is received as a gift of integrating grace—it only takes place within that goodness. Self-blame is re-connection.

This process may be understood, of course, in entirely psychologized terms. Psychologists increasingly see religious commitment in the terms of attachment theory. Extending the theoretical work of developmental psychologist John Bowlby, scholars of
attachment suggest that it accomplishes ‘two important functions’: “(a) providing a safe haven in times of threat or stress and (b) serving as a secure base from which to explore the environment and develop new mental and physical skills.”

Buddhist teachers of refuge are unlikely to disagree with this general portrait, although ‘exploring the environment and developing new mental and physical skills,’ in the context of the path of the bodhisattva, is not at all reducible to any normalized development. The theorists of attachment tend to work in a reductionist key, highlighting “the propensity among human beings to develop attachment-like relationships to unobservable, imaginary others.” It is of course deeply unclear why imagined relationships should be ‘like’ attachment. Our encounter with others is always mediated by imagination; imagined connection is the only connection.

The real question is whether the connected imagination is developed with skill and focused intention. We might recall Jamgön Kongtrul’s insistence on visionary guru yoga as a frame for lojong as a whole: “It is important to begin every period of meditation this way.” We have also seen Gomo Tulku suggesting that those of his students who felt they had not progressed in compassion and wisdom were often too little invested in guru yoga.

Is guru yoga, then, simply a technology of normalized attachment? The psychologist of attachment reduces religious commitment to a typology of conditioning:

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505 Kongtrul, p. 8.
those who are insecurely attached, due to early experience with caregivers, are likely to use religious commitment episodically as a form of ‘distress-regulation’; avoidant attachment styles predict agnosticism or atheism; and secure attachment styles suggest a probability that the religious person will view God or ultimate reality as a source of security.506

The notion that different persons will commit themselves differently to ontologies and practices of ultimate compassion will hardly be surprising to any Buddhist teacher or Christian theologian. This is one reason for the fundamental Buddhist emphasis on renunciation: in traditional Buddhist communities, renunciation aligns individual styles of attachment along a path of common commitment. Regularized ritual and contemplative practice in the presence of an awakened teacher, particularly in the Mahāyāna and the Vajrayana, allows each practitioner to develop creative and sustainable styles of attachment.

Note, though, that this alignment of styles of attachment takes place in relationship to sources of awakening that will drive all of us well beyond any normalizing goal of health. Connection to the teacher is connection to the manifestation of Buddhahood itself. This involves a reformation of our attention and our trust in ways that other forms of ‘attachment’ cannot provide.

We otherwise pursue a version of Pascal’s wager: religious commitments may or may not place us in relationship to ultimate reality—but we pursue religious commitment primarily because it produces the likelihood of relief and well-being.

506 Granqvist, Mikulincer, and Shaver, p. 54.
Here there is no refuge in anything beyond the possibility of our own benefit. Devotion takes on the minimal meaning of therapeutic adjustment, with no vision of true access to any more boundless form of compassion. This is the despair of not knowing that one is in despair. It is ‘Buddhism’ as a fantasy of renunciation.

It turns out that practices of devotion like guru yoga do involve maturation and integration, but only because they do not see the individual person’s well-being as their final purpose. The process of devotion itself is the beginning of participation in precisely the same compassion that one seeks.

This is the therapeutic paradox: one’s own suffering is far more likely to be reduced when personal relief from suffering is not one’s highest purpose. Psychologists of self-compassion, including many Buddhist therapeutics, often conflate outcomes of personal relief with the rhetoric of a more total awakening—thereby reducing the likelihood of either.

Autonomous self-compassion may allow for a reduction of aversion toward our own experience. But the ‘self-blame’ of lojong seeks the integration of the person into a greater compassion, and a far more extensive fearlessness than we can merely muster.

To drive all blames into one is to allow compassion itself to use our daily moments of negativity to further our own more fluent participation in compassion. And to be so driven is to be turned, again and again, toward such participation. This involves no aversion to what is blamed, but rather a recognition that moments of blame are themselves important and necessary opportunities. To be grateful to everyone is to recognize the revelatory potential in all frustration. It is impossible to practice such

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gratitude apart from extraordinary trust in one’s own place in a broader field of compassion.

Eleonore Stump has written, from a Catholic philosophical perspective, that the sort of unified and strenuous love that we most fundamentally desire “requires internal integration on the part of the person.” Nietzsche will agree. But this ‘internal’ integration is always also an integration into and dependence upon the life of God. “[W]hat human beings are culpable for is not the weakness of their wills when it comes to willing the good, but rather something very different—namely, the failure to seek help.” Christian surrender, like Buddhist commitments to refuge, is the necessary foundation for any empowered capacities of love.

This essay has been a critique of autonomy as the basic refusal to even view help as a possibility. And so I wish to suggest that contemporary Buddhists may have something to learn from Christian considerations of evil. Buddhists usually emphasize skillful and unskillful modes of activity, rather than reifying persons themselves into ‘good’ and ‘bad’—reifications that introduce subtle but serious possibilities of revenge or violence. Some discussions like this can become a kind of Buddhist self-congratulation, or an expression of superiority.

In St. Thomas’s understanding, however, evil is not so much a reification, but rather the ongoing process of turning away from love—even though this is a love that infuses all lives, including those lives that turn away from love itself. “[Evil’s] being,”

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507 Ibid., 137.
508 Ibid., 159.
writes Michael Himes, “is self-contradictory”\textsuperscript{509}; it refuses the reality of its own lovedness. Eleonore Stump has spoke of the ‘willed loneliness’ of shame in quite similar terms of self-division. “Evil,” writes Himes, “is the refusal to be what in fact we are, the denial of our being good, the denial of our being loved, the refusal to love ourselves or others.”\textsuperscript{510}

Evil, then, is a quality of activity, and an expression of denial, much more than it is a status intrinsic or essential to any person. And so far as self-aversion is an active refusal to participate in compassion, aversive shame might be viewed chiefly as an expression of evil in Christian understanding.\textsuperscript{511}

In this sense, the notion that “Our self-acceptance is the basis of the Christian creed”\textsuperscript{512} is ultimately true—but only if considered as an acceptance of a broader love, and therefore as a rejection of mere autonomy, rather than a confirmation of it.

It turns out that the triumph of the therapeutic involves the triumph of a very truncated view of human dignity, one that denies our capacity for significant harm. Where the human being is merely incapacitated by pathology, the highest transformation he or she might achieve is the health of normalcy. But as Charles Taylor notes, “evil has the dignity of an option for an apparent good; sickness has not.”\textsuperscript{513}

We can see how fateful the issue is for a human life. To worry endlessly about the meaning of an unease whose whole basis is really organic [neurophysiological alone] is to have wasted time and effort, and to have incurred unnecessary suffering. But to have tried to get rid of an unease

\textsuperscript{509} Himes, 70.
\textsuperscript{510} Ibid, 72.
\textsuperscript{511} A point of agreement, if the psychologists can hear it, between themselves and the Christian.
\textsuperscript{512} Metz, 5.
that one really needed to understand is crippling; the more so in that within the culture of the therapeutic, the various languages, ethical and spiritual, in which this understanding can be couched become less and less familiar, less and less available to each new generation.514

This reminder of the dignity implied in the option to evil necessarily challenges the therapeutic levelling of desire, which encourages us to consider only one sort of human flourishing. But when persons are less and less able to perceive or articulate their most fundamental desire to participate in love itself, a deep anxiety intensifies.515

The therapeutic proposes a diminution of the most basic and ineradicable human desire, but the resulting irruption of anxiety is a primary tragedy of therapeutic modernity.

Buddhists in particular would do well to carefully revisit our resources for accessing such desire, so that we are not so easily tempted toward the sterility of a high-end samsara. Shantideva writes:

In this and all my other lifetimes,
Wandering in the round without beginning,
Blindly I have brought forth wickedness...516

This is not to be confused with any total self-aversion. Still less is it an attempt to earn some external forgiveness. It is instead a recognition of the real—the way in which the pre-conscious habit of self-grasping has been an unending source of pain, and therefore the correct object of any blame. Without an honest horror in response to our

514 Ibid, 622.
516 Shantideva, 2.28.
own ancient and violent ignorance, without a Levinasian shame, we must fail to respond to the aspiration for compassionate awakening that is already within us.

This is the aspiration which alone can actually perceive the true scope of suffering in the first place. It is the human aspiration that the therapeutic forecloses.
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