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Abelard's Affective Intentionalism

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Abelard's Affective Intentionalism

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Philosophy
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

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*“Only if you fall in love do you make a study of the beloved,
for passion lets us inquire into other people’s mysteries
with the vitality borne of conviction.”*

-Mary Karr, from How to Read “The Waste Land”

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York for a summer seminar on Aquinas. We have taken a handful of seminars together that resulted in more laughter than is professionally appropriate. Most importantly, they have never tired of listening to me talk about intention—or, so I think. In truth, the philosophy department at USF has made possible these most providential friendships.

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ABSTRACT

The work contained within this dissertation is a textual exegesis of Abelard's ethics. The goal is to elucidate Abelard's sort of intentionalism given his use of "intention" within his wider corpus, the grammatical and syntactical patterns in his prose, and Abelard's own interests, biography, and situation as a twelfth-century monastic figure. As a result, this project should be understood as a history of philosophy dissertation. I am not attempting to build upon Abelard's ideas but to clarify them. This is not to say that building upon Abelard's ideas is not a worthwhile project. It is merely to say that doing so is beyond the scope of *this* project.

I found it necessary to clarify Abelard's ideas about ethics because I found that many interpretations of his ethical work were either lacking or wildly incorrect. This has much to do, I think, with the history of Abelard's reception as a theologian. When Abelard's ethic was first received, it was understood to be dangerously subjectivist. In other words, he was understood to be advocating a sort of subjective relativism. In response to this gross misinterpretation of his work, contemporary readers resolved that Abelard maintained a rather explicit observance of objective moral truth.

Now, neither the subjectivist account nor the objectivist account gives the full story of what, exactly, Abelard is up to in his *Scito te Ipsum*. Though some have delivered fairly mitigated assessments of Abelard's ethic, there is a larger theological story that serves as the foundational lens through which his work must be understood—one that, I argue, has not been sufficiently considered. In this dissertation I contextualize Abelard's *Scito te Ipsum* within his theological commitments and arrive at a very nuanced account of his ethical contributions to the history of philosophy. In short, Abelard contends that *caritas* renders a subject morally praiseworthy. This is a claim that is rather orthodox within the scope of the Christian ethical tradition and the twelfth century more specifically.

A NOTE ON THE TEXTS

Here I have included the Latin critical edition followed by the most trusted (or only) English translation of the main primary texts I am using. If any amendments to the translations are made, I indicate as much in the footnotes.

Collationes, A critical edition of the Latin as well as an English translation is found in Marenbon, John & Orlandi, Giovanni. *Collationes*. (Clarendon Press, 2001).

Commentaria in Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos, ed. E.M. Buytaert, CCCM 11 (Turnhout, 1969)

Trans. Cartwright, Stephen. (Washington: Catholic University Press, 2012).

Confessions, ed. James J. O'Donnell, (Clarendon Press, 1992).

Trans. Thomas Williams (Hackett, 2019).

Historia Calamitatum et Epistolae 1-7

Epistola 01: Historia Calamitatum

ed. J. Monfrin, Abelard: Historia Calamitatum, J. Vrin: Paris 1978, 62-109.

Epistola 02: Heloise to Abelard

ed. J. T. Muckle, *Mediaeval Studies* 15 (1953), 68-73.

Epistola 03: Abelard to Heloise

ed. J. T. Muckle, *Mediaeval Studies* 15 (1953), 73-77.

Epistola 04: Heloise to Abelard

ed. J. T. Muckle, *Mediaeval Studies* 15 (1953), 77-82.

Epistola 05: Abelard to Heloise

ed. J. T. Muckle, *Mediaeval Studies* 15 (1953), 83-94.

Epistola 06: Heloise to Abelard, on religious life

ed. J. T. Muckle, *Mediaeval Studies* 17 (1955), 241-253.

Epistola 07: Abelard to Heloise, on religious life

ed. J. T. Muckle, *Mediaeval Studies* 17 (1955), 253-281.

Trans. William Levitan, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007)

Scito te Ipsum, A critical edition of the Latin as well as an English translation is found in Luscombe, David. *Peter Abelard's Ethics*. (Clarendon Press, 1971).

Sermones, Petrus Abaelardus opera, edd. Victor Cousin, adiuuante C. Jourdain et E. Despois. Tomus prior. (Paris, 1849), reprint (Georg Olms Verlag, 1970).

Sic et non, edd. B.B. Boyer and R. McKeon, *Peter Abailard, Sic et Non: A Critical Edition* (Chicago University Press, 1977).

Trans. Priscilla Throop. (Medieval MS, 2001).

A CHRONOLOGY OF ABELARD'S LIFE AND MAJOR WORKS

I have detailed a timeline of Abelard's life dates of composition for the major works I will be using as part of this project. The dating of the events and works is taken from Constant Mews and John Marenbon.

- 1079 Abelard is born in Le Pallet, Brittany
- c. 1100 Abelard goes to Paris to study with William of Champeaux (Mews, *Abelard and Heloise*, 28)
- c. 1102/3 Abelard establishes school at the royal palace at Melun with help of Stephen of Garlande's brothers (Mews, *Abelard and Heloise*, 30)
- 1105-1108 Abelard returns to Brittany (Tours or Lorie Valley) and studied dialectic apart from William of Champeaux (Mews, *Abelard and Heloise*, 30)
- 1108 Abelard returns to Paris (Mews, *Abelard and Heloise*, 30)
- c. 1108 Debate on universals with William of Champeaux; Abelard removed from position at Notre Dame cathedral school- formerly William's post before he resigned. Abelard returned to teaching at Melun, but soon moved his school to the Montagne. Ste.-Genevieve (Mews, *Abelard and Heloise*, 31)
- 1109 Abelard produces first glosses on dialectic Commentary on Porphyry's *Isagoge*, Aristotle's *Categories & Periermeneias* (Mews, Abelard and Heloise, 32)
- 1113 Abelard goes to Laon to listen to Anselm's lectures and returns to Paris shortly thereafter, unimpressed (Mews, *Abelard and Heloise*, 37). Abelard then receives teaching position at cathedral school of Notre Dame
- c. 1115 Abelard meets Heloise
- 1117-1121 Abelard teaches at St. Denis. During this time, he begins the *Logica "Ingredientibus,"* though we are not sure when he finished it (Mews, *Abelard and Heloise*, 82)
- c. 1117/8 Abelard drafts the *Dialectica* (Mews, Abelard and Heloise, 44)
- c. 1120s *Theologia Christiana* (early 1120s)

- 1120 Abelard writes letter to Bishop of Paris explaining he wants to refute Roselin's argument about the Trinity (which was accused of tritheism) which was more wide-ranging than St. Anselm's *De incarnatione Verbi*.
- 1121 Abelard accused of heresy at the Council of Soissons
- 1121 *Sic et Non*
- 1122-1127. Abelard builds oratory, the Holy Trinity, in the County of Champagne. It is later called "Paraclete." (Marenbon, *Phil. Of Peter Abelard*, 20)
- 1127 Peter Abelard gave up the school that he had established around the oratory of the Paraclete in order to take a position as abbot of St.-Gildas-de-Ruys, in Brittany (Mews, *Abelard & Heloise*, 145)
- 1131 Heloise takes over the oratory of the Paraclete (Mews, *Abelard and Heloise*, 148)
- 1128 *Tractatus de intellectibus*, written before this time
- c. 1132 *Historia calamitatum* (Mews, *Abelard and Heloise*, 8)
- Before c. 1134 *Commentary on Romans* (Marenbon, introduction to *Collationes*, xx)
- c. 1135 *Theologia Scholarium*
- 1136/7 Abelard's introductory lectures on dialectic (Mews, *Abelard and Heloise*, 12)
- c. 1138 *Scito te ipsum* (Marenbon, introduction to *Collationes*, xxi)
- c.1138-1140 *Commentary on the Hexaemeron*, history of female monasticism (**Ep. 7**), rule for the Paraclete (**Ep. 8**), and *Problemata*, answers to various questions raised by the Bible. (Marenbon, introduction to *Collationes*, xxi)
- c. 1140 Bernard circulates letter bashing Abelard (Mews, *Abelard and Heloise*, 10). Traditional date of composition for *Collationes*, but recently Marenbon Orlandi, and Buytaert all argue for a date between 1123 and 1135, most definitely before 1140 (Marendon, introduction to *Collationes*, xxxii). This, in my opinion seems correct. I would argue for an earlier date, closer to 1123, considering the lack of precision and utilization of various terms that are articulated more precisely in *Scito te ipsum*.
- May 25, 1141 Council of Sens (Mews, *Abelard and Heloise*, 11)
- July, 1141 Pope Innocent II condemns Abelard a heretic, condemned to silence (Mews, *Abelard and Heloise*, 11)
- c. 1141 *Rule* for the Paraclete & "Our Institutions" in a single manuscript (Mews, *Abelard and Heloise*, 13)

INTRODUCTION

I. Thesis

In the last few decades Abelard's ethics has generated substantial interest in secondary philosophical literature. Most seem to agree on two things: First, that Abelard's ethics is "intentionalist." Second, that Abelard's ethics is Kantian. The first of these claims—that Abelard's ethics is intentionalist—is well and good depending upon one's description of "intentionalist." Much of this dissertation will be aimed at spelling out, exactly, what one ought to mean by such an assertion. The second claim—that Abelard's ethics is Kantian—is not, in my view, defensible no matter how you define the Kantian descriptor. The aim in elucidating what sort of intentionalism Abelard defends in *Scito te Ipsum* will be to challenge the Kantian association. My central thesis, then, is that Abelard's ethics is not Kantian, in that it does not deny the importance of affect or inclinations in ascribing moral praise or merit.

My argument to demonstrate this thesis will proceed in four parts: First, I will examine the Augustinian roots underlying Abelard's understanding of intentionality and how this informs his reading of the Gospel. This is a noted gap in the literature, as indicated by Margaret Cameron: "Further research into Abelard's theory of intention ought to pursue the connection with Augustine's notion of intention found in many of

his writings.”¹ Second, I will show how these Augustinian roots and theological concerns ought to impact the way in which we understand Abelard’s use of intention in his ethics. Next, I will show that Abelard’s ethical project is *not* one of pure reason, that it does not deny the importance of the passions or the emotions in ascribing moral praise and, on this basis, it is not proto-Kantian. Lastly, I will show the unity of Abelard’s theological and ethical project by considering his atonement theory.

In order to accomplish this task, to demonstrate the veracity of my thesis, it will be especially important to strip the modern bias we bring to our assessment of Abelard’s prose. Because intention is the central theme of this dissertation, I believe it to be the most important word to consider. Intention has a plethora of meanings in ordinary language. I think the failure to understand and correctly outline Abelard’s ethics is largely indebted to this reality. Gone unchecked, or without careful evaluation, talking about “Abelard’s intentionalism” is a phrase devoid of meaning, much like the daunting echo of “Cartesian dualism” that reverberates in philosophy departments throughout the Anglo-Saxon world. So then, let us check and evaluate what we, as moderns, mean when we utilize this word. Elizabeth Anscombe’s *Intention* is a good place to begin because she posits no theory of intentionality *per se*, but merely an assessment of how this word is utilized in its ordinary, Western, and most importantly,

¹ Cameron, Margaret. “Abelard (and Heloise?) On Intention.” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, no. 2 (2007): 337.

modern, use. I continue to return to Anscombe's exposition of intention as an exegetical tool throughout my dissertation. So, it is important to begin considering it here; though I will revisit the following explanation when necessary.

Anscombe brings to light three intimately related descriptions of intention: *intentional action*, *intention for future*, and *intention-with-which*.² If I were to say, "I intentionally hit the ball," I would be describing an *intentional action*. Intention under this description corresponds to a meaning-to perform action x . In other words, it is a voluntary act. *Intention-for-future* implies a plan for a future action. For instance, if I were to say, "I intend to get a drink after work," the word "intention" implies that I am planning to have a drink once I am off work. Finally, an intention with which is an agent's reason or purpose with which they act. If I were to ask Peter, "Why did you buy Lucy flowers?" he may respond by providing the reason or purpose he did so—an *intention-with which*. Perhaps it was to let her know he was thinking about her or to congratulate her for a recent promotion. In any case, an *intention-with-which* answers the question "why?"

These are the presuppositions we, as moderns, bring to our assessment of a text which includes the word "intention." Often, we do so with little care to distinguish which of these three we presume. This seems to be the case with much of the secondary literature on Abelard. Though scholars widely agree that intention is the central theme

² See: Anscombe, G.E.M. *Intention*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957).

of the Abelardian ethic, there is little agreement on what constitutes his intentionalism. However, all descriptions are equally modern in that they appeal to or utilize one of these descriptions Anscombe outlines. Intentionality is a meaning -to, a plan-to, or a reason-for. We must remember though, despite eager historians who are dire to make Abelard the unsung hero of the Middle Ages: Abelard is not a modern.³ As such, Abelard's vocabulary is not our vocabulary. In order to understand Abelard, we must understand *his* vocabulary—that of a 12th century philosopher and devoted monk. This will require a brief exposition of who Abelard was as a philosopher and monastic figure. In the interest of space, I will keep these biographical details short, only considering those that will be particularly pertinent in coming to understand his ethical account.

II. Brief Biographical Notes

Historia Calamitatum, Abelard's own autobiography, has sustained the attention of scholars for centuries. Not only is it fascinating for being the only text of its kind during the twelfth century, but it is crucial to any serious study of Abelard's thought. Though many have argued over the historicity of various details contained within it,

³ In many anthologies of Christian thought Abelard is painted as a precursor of the modern period. This, I think, compounds the proto-Kantian reading of Abelard. For instance, take Chad Meister and J.B. Stumps reading of Abelard in *Christian Thought: A Historical Introduction*: "In fact, his methodology sounds more at home in the Modern period after Descartes than in medieval scholasticism." Because of one line in Abelard's Prologue to *Sic et Non*, Meister and Stump claim that Abelard has a "method of doubting" which clearly draws a connection to Descartes. It is quite the stretch.

Historia Calamitatum gives a clear picture of one thing: how Abelard perceives himself.⁴

Historical precision aside, this is perhaps the most helpful tool in understanding the philosophical thought of a given thinker. A few things about Abelard's self-perception become apparent in any exegesis of the text and continuously surface in the secondary literature. First, Abelard thinks rather highly of himself and his intellectual ability.⁵ "My reputation in dialectic began to spread until, slowly but surely, it eclipsed the fame of all my old schoolmates and even my master himself,"⁶ he says. Abelard sprinkles these revealing gems throughout *Historia Calamitatum*, always suggestive that his logical acumen far exceeds those within his midst.⁷

It also becomes clear that Abelard believes he was the victim of jealous rage. This goes hand in hand with his elevated sense of self. He recounts unfair trials, assassination attempts (by poisoning the Eucharist no less!), and unfounded (and

⁴ For instance, Bernard of Clairvaux tells Abelard's story quite differently.

⁵ See: Mews, Constant. *Abelard and Heloise*. (Oxford University Press, 2005) and Marenbon, John. *The Philosophy of Peter Abelard*. (Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁶ *Historia Calamitatum*, trans. William Levitan in *Abelard & Heloise: The Letters and Other Writings*. (Hackett, 2007), 3. All translations of *Historia Calamitatum* and the canonical letter exchange between Abelard and Heloise will follow this translation. Any modifications of Levitan's translation will be indicated in subsequent footnotes. When I included the Latin or modify the translations, I am using critical edition from J.T. Muckle, "The Personal Letters Between Abelard and Heloise," *Medieval Studies* 15 (1953), 47-94. This is also what Levitan utilized for his own translation.

⁷ Though Bernard of Clairvaux is not impressed with Abelard's intellect, he is in agreement that Abelard perceives himself to be wildly intelligent. He claims, "We have in France an old teacher turned into a new theologian, who in his early days amused himself with dialectics, and now gives utterance to wild imaginations upon the Holy Scriptures. He is endeavoring again to quicken false opinions, long ago condemned and put to rest, not only his own, but those of others; and is adding fresh ones as well," in Letter LX, "Against Certain Heads of Abelard's Heresies," in *The Complete Works of S. Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux*, trans. Joannes Mabillon, (John Hodges, 1904).

founded) rumors spread by those seeking nothing but his demise. On the surface, *Historia Calamitatum* looks like one, long explanation of the character assassination Abelard has suffered at the hands of envious peers, clergy, and teachers. Indeed, this seems to be the reasoning behind the title *Historia Calamitatum*: he believes the text to be a history of calamities that he has suffered as a result of his popularity and logical prowess. Both of these observations—that Abelard perceives himself both genius and martyr—are accurate. However, I think there is a telling story beneath these explicit professions of egotism and martyrdom that help us understand his emphasis and interest in intention.

The way in which Abelard tells the story of his own character assassination reveals his disgust with clerical hypocrisy.⁸ He calls this out again and again. He is genuinely repulsed by the corruption and debauchery within the abbey walls. While Abelard was abbot at The abbey of Saint Gildas of Rhuys, he insists that the monks were “notoriously corrupt beyond control.”⁹ He even claims that he was unable to hold them accountable, for if he did he feared his own life: “If I tried to force them to the life of rule they professed, I was sure I would be murdered.”¹⁰ He says something similar about the monks at St. Denis: “Nearly every monk who had been there before me

⁸ In “Life, milieu, and intellectual contexts” in the *Cambridge Companion to Abelard*, (Cambridge University Press, 2004), John Marenbon notes that Abelard was keen on reforming the monastic order to its former glory: “Abelard became a fervent exponent of monastic reform” (25). I think this is important in establishing his preoccupation with hypocrisy, at least the perceived hypocrisy of his fellow clerics.

⁹ *Historia Calamitatum*, 36.

¹⁰ *Historia Calamitatum*, 36.

detested me; their vile way of life and shameless practices made them hate a man whose censure they could not endure.”¹¹ Abelard does not seem to be troubled by the mere fact that they are corrupt, but because they claim to be religious, pious, and are shamelessly devoid of virtue. He says, “I fell into hands far more savage than pagans’, and this among Christians and monks.”¹² Abelard even seems to think that while most of their actions were masked in piety, they were really part of a grandiose political agenda, one that would secure their own power and dominance in the clerical hierarchy. Furthermore, Abelard perceives this kind of corruption to be widespread and prevalent among clerics; the corruption he witnesses is not a rare instance but a disease in the ranks of the church. He resolves that very few of his Christian brothers live genuine Christian lives.¹³ They are driven more by their own desires than by a love for God and his will.

However, the monks of Gildas and Denis are not the only ones who struggle with pride. There are two stories about impurity of heart in *Historia Calamitatum*—one of noticing it in others and noticing it in himself. Abelard sees the calamities that befell

¹¹ *Historia Calamitatum*, 28.

¹² *Historia Calamitatum*, 36.

¹³ Though Abelard is quick to condemn his fellow monks, he has much more reverence for the nuns of the Paraclete, Heloise in particular. He says, “And on her, my sister, who had direction of the nuns, God bestowed upon favor in men’s sight that the bishops loved her as a daughter, abbots as a sister, the people as a mother, and all liked marveled at her wisdom and dedication, her unmatched gentleness and patience in all things,” *Historia Calamitatum*, 39. I suspect Abelard was *intentional* in his use of “gentleness” and “patience,” as these are traditionally considered fruits of the Holy Spirit.

him as opportunities for humility—means necessary to create a wedge between himself and those things that kept him from seeking God.

As I was weighed down by my lechery (*luxuria*) and pride (*superbia*), the grace of God brought me relief from both, though not in the ways I would have it: first from my lechery, by cutting me from the means I used to practice it, and then from the pride born of my learning—"Knowledge puffeth up," the apostle Paul says—by humbling me with the burning of the book of which I was most proud.¹⁴

Abelard could not be any more explicit here. He understands both his lust for knowledge and for Heloise as impediments to God. Moreover, he interprets his castration and the condemnation of his theological work as graces, gifts—ones that would help him let go of these other loves. Yes, the calamities Abelard suffered were, apparently, because of corrupt, jealous clerics and angry men seeking vengeance. However, he suffered these miseries because he held on tightly to illicit loves, seeking his own vain glory.¹⁵ This leaves him to caution his reader by saying, "Let the force of my example curb the ambition of those who seek their own will."¹⁶ Finally he resolves,

¹⁴ *Historia Calamitatum*, 10. The Latin is "Cum igitur totus in superbia atque luxuria laborarem, utriusque morbi remedium diuina mihi gratia licet nolenti contulit. Ac primo luxuriae, deinde superbiae; luxuriae quidem his me priuando quibus hanc exercebam; superbiae uero quae mihi ex litterarum maxime scientia nascebatur, iuxta illud Apostoli: Scientia inflat. Illius libri quo maxime gloriabar combustionem me humiliando."

¹⁵ Abelard continuously refers to his courtship of Heloise as a game. He claims, "I concluded that she was the best one to bring to my bed. I was sure it would be easy. I was famous myself at the time, young, and exceptionally good-looking, and could not imagine that any woman I thought worthy of my love would turn me down," (*Historia Calamitatum*, 11).

¹⁶ *Historia Calamitatum*, 45. The Latin is "Quod nunc quoque ipse de paupere monacho in abbatem promotus incessanter experior, tanto scilicet miserior quanto ditior effectus; ut nostro etiam exemplo eorum qui id sponte appetunt ambitio refrenetur." Levitan separates the thought with a period, while the Latin critical edition uses a semicolon. As a result the excerpt from the Latin I have included here also contains the information prior to the semicolon (or before Levitan's full stop).

in the final sentence of *Historia Calamitatum*, "All who are angered, then, by some physical distress, though they know it was done by God's plan, leave the path of justice to be led, not by the will of God, but by their own, and when they set their own will before God's they are struggling in their hearts against the words, 'Thy will be done.'"¹⁷

I am pointing out these themes of hypocrisy and impurity of heart in *Historia Calamitatum* because they inform the trajectory of Abelard's academic pursuits. As we will come to see, intention is a means of addressing and condemning Christian hypocrisy and the root of a theory that elevates the inner workings of the heart above exterior, visible action. Knowing that Abelard views his own story through this lens will help lend veracity to the way I outline his affective understanding of intentionality.

III. Defining Terms: Philosophical, Religion, Spiritual, Theological

Throughout this dissertation I will be employing several terms that have dynamic historical meanings and varied colloquial uses, supplied from academic circles and popular culture. In order to avoid the misunderstanding of the argument I plan to defend, I want to provide clear indications of how I intend to these words. I am not suggesting that the following definitions are conceptually correct, objectively accurate, or even how they ought to be understood. Rather, I am clearly outlining how I will be

¹⁷ *Historia Calamitatum*, 46. The Latin is: "Ex quo manifeste a iustitia eos recedere demonstrat quicumque pro aliquo sui graumine his irascuntur quae erga se diuina dispensatione geri non dubitant, et se proprie uoluntati magis quam diuinae subiciunt, et ei quod in uerbis sonat: "Fiat uoluntas tua" desideriiis occultis repugnant, diuinae uoluntati propriam anteponeutes."

using them. As I have noticed throughout this project, failure to define things explicitly results in some odd interpretations of your work.

An essential aspect of my argument is distancing Abelard's ethics from the Kantian interpretation expressed by Peter King. In doing so, I utilize the word "philosophical" on a repeated basis. Of course, there are over two millennia of debates surrounding the proper understanding, application, and definition of philosophy. In the context of this dissertation, I do not wish to enter any of those debates directly. Instead, when I suggest that Abelard's *Scito te Ipsum* is read in strictly philosophical terms, which has led to a skewed interpretation of the text, I mean the following: a method of pure reason, which does not rely on scriptural authority, divine revelation, or tradition. Thus, when it suggested that Abelard does not have purely philosophical interests or methodology, I am suggesting that it is informed by revelation, scriptural authority, and tradition. Moreover, I suggest that he is interested in more than making logical claims; he is putting forth arguments that have spiritual or religious consequences—they say something about the Christian life, one's relation to God, and are couched within a larger redemption narrative. Lastly, evaluating his ethics using a purely philosophical method—that is, without reference to the religious tradition which informs it—will lead to bad interpretations of the text. This religious tradition is not only to be understood by Abelard's own monastic life, dogmatic commitments, and devotion, but also the religious training he received, the questions he seeks to answer,

and the Patristic influences on his thought. So in many ways my utilization of the word “philosophical” is the modern, colloquial application. Though I do not wish to perpetuate such a narrow use of the term, it is the most immediately recognizable without treading into undesirable territory.

In the definition of philosophical I provided above, the words religious and spiritual were used as well. I do not wish to clearly distinguish these two words in my own argument. During Abelard’s time to suggest that someone was religious did not mean that they went to church on Sundays or believed in a deity. Instead, it meant they took vows to live out a life devoted first and foremost to the Christian God. Typically, this took the form of vowing poverty, obedience, and chastity and was governed by a Rule particular to the order of their choosing. Of course, to use the term in this way is foreign to the modern ear and would confuse the thesis I am trying to defend. Instead, when I claim Abelard has religious ends, aims, context, method, I claim it is of, or pertaining to, one’s relation with the divine, a usage akin to the word’s own Latin roots, *religio*. This use, of course, includes a large amount of content—praxis, devotions, prayer, ritual, texts, beliefs, etc.

Now, the word “spiritual” is typically contrasted from religion in modern popular culture, usually as a pejorative condemnation of the institutional elements of religious praxis. I do not recognize this pejorative distinction, nor do I employ that distinction in my own argument. However, insofar as spiritual can be contrasted from

religion it would be in the sense that the spiritual conveys the inner life of a given individual in relation to the divine. This would include spiritual emotions or desires — those pertaining to divine objects or deities. It is easy to see, according to these definitions I have briefly sketched, how the spiritual and religious need no sharp distinction in the context of my argument. For, spiritual exercises — those which prompt or cultivate spiritual desires or strengthen one's relation to God — need not be necessarily individualistic but can, and are supposed to, occur in the context of a religious community — a community devoted to God. As a result, I will often suggest that something is "spiritual or religious" so as to not suggest a sharp distinction. At times I may use only one of these words, but it should not be understood as intentionally excluding the other.

Theology is, as far as I'm concerned, one of the most difficult terms to define here. Today, it is often in ordinary language used to relay any study pertaining to the divine or the study of religion more broadly. As such, sometimes it includes a curious array of methodologies, or a clear lack of any methodology. However, one can certainly talk about religion or God without doing theology, so it must be distinguished from something like the history of religion or sociology of religion. In the Christian tradition, it would have been described as an inquiry into the divine and man's relation to it. It would be described as using scripture, patristic sources (or tradition) and reason as authorities in answering questions such inquires. Of course, some strands of

Christianity may deny the authority or legitimate use of philosophical methods in religious questions. Others may deny the legitimate use of philosophical methods and tradition, claiming scripture alone is sufficient in answering any questions about God or the Christian life. Certainly, if scholars had such convictions and only studied the divine through utilization of scripture, they would be doing theology. However, I will not be adopting that sentiment in my use of the word.

Furthermore, it seems theology proper requires some dogmatic convictions—a belief in the authority of scripture would presuppose the use of scripture as an authority, for instance. Consequently, though history of religion could be done by someone lacking some religious or spiritual conviction, it does not seem as though theology could. So then, I plan to use theology in a way that relays the study of the divine and man's relation to it, employing the following authorities: scripture, tradition, and reason. Though a theological enquiry may not consider all three authorities within the context of an argument, it will not entirely exclude the legitimate use of all three. In other words, I do not consider theology to be strictly the study of scripture, or merely the history of dogmatic or canonical assertions. This is important only because I want to be clear that when I use "theology" in argumentation it should not be viewed as something in contrast to reason, as it would potentially include the use of philosophical methods. This is especially the case for Abelard. So, if it is suggested that Abelard has theological concerns or that his methodology is theological, it means he is interested in

answering questions about the divine—the Triune God specifically and man’s relation to that—utilizing some combination of these authorities: scripture, tradition, reason. For Abelard, the proper study of theology includes all three in equal measure.

CHAPTER ONE: ABELARD'S GOSPEL OF INTENTION

In *Scito te Ipsum*, Abelard repeatedly returns to the word “intention,” citing it as the source of moral praiseworthiness: “It is indeed obvious that works which it is not at all fitting to do may be performed as much by good as by bad men who are separated by their intention alone” (*Sc.* 26:35-27:2). Deciphering the meaning of his suggestion here may appear to require a simple and straightforward philosophical analysis. We should consider the manner of speech and the grammatical structure of the sentence. We should look for patterns in usage and hypothesize possible implications. However, historians of philosophy know it is much more complicated than that. We know that Abelard’s vocabulary is centuries apart from our own. This is especially the case for the word “intention,” which lies at the core of unpacking Abelard’s ethical account. The way Abelard uses the word is far different than we, as moderns, use it today. Consequently, the goal of this chapter and the next is to demonstrate that, for Abelard, *intentio* is a deeply spiritual and religious term. We cannot grasp Abelard’s ethics, and the word *intentio* specifically, without properly situating the text in that religious context.

I am so adamant about this contextualization because I fear the recent work on Abelard's ethics does not consider the religious context and has mischaracterized the work as a result. For example, Constant Mews considers Abelard's interests in the *Scito te ipsum* to be somewhat divorced from their theological context, explicitly stating, "His interest is that of the moral philosopher, not of a spiritual teacher."¹⁸ I will defend something rather different, namely that Abelard's ethical concerns are clearly intertwined with his spiritual ones. Abelard would not appreciate a forced demarcation between the theological and the philosophical. In fact, it is one he desperately tried to refuse, even when threatened with excommunication and condemnation. As Abelard contends, philosophical methodology can be applied to theological questions, which led to the synthesis of philosophy and theology born among the schoolmen: scholasticism.

My argument to demonstrate this, that *intentio* carries a slew of spiritual connotations, will proceed in two steps. First, I will call to mind the Augustinian tradition that influenced Abelard's work by considering what William Babcock calls "Augustine's spirituality of desire." This will aid in demonstrating the use of intention in Augustine's spirituality. This Augustinian tradition and use of *intentio* will help us understand what Abelard has in mind as he uses the word. Second, I will point to Abelard's *Romans Commentary*. Here it will be argued that intention is central in

¹⁸ Mews, Constant J. "Bernard of Clairvaux, Peter Abelard and Heloise on the Definition of Love." *Revista Portuguesa De Filosofia* 60, no. 3 (2004): 650.

distinguishing the Old Covenant from the New. I will divide this explanation into a series of dichotomies that Abelard posits: The Old and New Covenant, works and intention, fear and love, and slavery and friendship. Through considering these various dichotomies I will show how, for Abelard, the New Covenant in Christ enables the Christian to live out the law with a good intention, that is, out of love for God and not fear of him. Abelard explains this relationship as a friendship, where the Christian does not subject himself to God's command like a slave, but subjects himself to God's command as a friend, who graciously sacrifices his own will for the sake of the one he loves. Thus, Abelard continues utilizing *intentio* as a theological word—that is, to say something about the Christian spiritual life. Ultimately, this analysis lays the foundation for rejecting the Kantian reading of *Scito te Ipsum* that I challenge in Chapter 3.

I. Augustine's Influence

To begin, let us examine the tradition of intentionality preceding Abelard. In other words, we turn to Augustine. Thankfully, due to the rigorous detail of *Sic et Non*, it is relatively easy to establish that Abelard knew his Augustine quite well. Abelard's collection of sentences is impressively vast, including hundreds of lengthy quotations from over two dozen of Augustine's works. However, Abelard was not merely well read. Augustine was, perhaps, the biggest influence on his thought. Understanding the importance of traditional authority, Abelard grounds most of his innovative projects in

the Augustinian tradition, from his work on the Trinity to his ethics.¹⁹ All of this is to say that it can be safely assumed that Abelard is working with a view of intention that is embedded in the Augustinian corpus. It will become clear in the second half of this chapter that Abelard utilizes this view of intention and gives it a special role in his reading of the Gospel.²⁰ So then, in what follows I will briefly outline intentionality *per* Augustine, focusing specifically on the *Confessions* in which the concept of intentionality is most prominent. In doing so three things about intention will be demonstrated: 1) intention connotes a focus or orientation of the will; 2) this orientation of the will is inclined by one's strongest or weightiest love; 3) one cannot choose what one's intentions are. As Abelard utilizes the word *intentio* in his own theology, the term maintains these key features.

Due to the fact that Augustine's corpus refuses any systematic treatment it is surely difficult to ascribe any doctrine of intentionality to him. Despite this fact, Andrea Nightingale, drawing on the work of Caston and O'Daly, has pieced together a

¹⁹ Stephen Cartwright acknowledges this in his introduction to Abelard's Commentary on Romans (The Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 26: "Augustine thus holds a certain weight with Abelard." There are many other acknowledgements of this fact as well.

²⁰ Constant Mews argues in "Bernard of Clairvaux, Peter Abelard and Heloise on the Definition of Love" 649, that "Quite unprecedented in patristic tradition is his claim that *caritas* is *amor honestus*, pure love, directed toward its legitimate end, namely God. Everything we do, whether eating, sleeping or taking a wife, has to be done for his sake; otherwise we live like animals. This definition of *caritas* as pure love is without precedent in patristic tradition. Abelard replaces Augustine's theological definition of *caritas* as a movement of the spirit to enjoyment God for his own sake, with one that emphasizes the purity of intention of true love, which seeks no reward such as the enjoyment of eternal life." In contrast to Mews, I am arguing that this view of intentionality is only different semantically than Augustine's account of charity. Thus, it definitely has precedent in the Patristic literature: Augustine's *ordo amorum*.

surprisingly coherent account of intention's role in the Augustinian spirituality.²¹

Nightingale describes *intentio* as a "specific activity of the will," which "connects the soul to specific objects and keeps it focused on one thing or another."²² In other words the intention of the will brings various objects or ends into focus in action or thought, either consciously or unconsciously. John Rist is in agreement, noting that Augustine's favorite word to indicate direction or concentration of the will is *intentio*.²³ Nightingale continues to explain that this focus, directionality, or attention given to various objects correlates with and is informed by those objects which are deemed valuable.

Furthermore, as far as Augustine is concerned, we are more attentive to those things we value more and we naturally work towards ends we desire. Thus, intention can be described as the orienting of our will towards our greatest love, an attentiveness or focus on that which is desired most.

So one's greatest love or strongest desire will serve as the orienting force of the will and one's purpose for acting, doing, etc. We see this sentiment playing out in *Conf.*

11.29.39:

Yet because your mercy is better than lives, (Ps. 62:4) behold, my life is a distention, and your right hand has lifted me up in my Lord, the Son of Man, the Mediator (1 Tim. 2:5) between you, who are one, and us, who are

²¹ Nightingale, Andrea. "Augustine on Extending Oneself to God through Intention." *Augustinian Studies* no. 2 (2015): 185-209. See also: G. O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) and V. Caston, "Connecting Traditions: Augustine and the Greeks on Intentionality," in *Ancient and Medieval Theories of Intentionality*, ed. D. Perler (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2001).

²² Nightingale, "Extending oneself to God through intention," 187-88.

²³ Rist, John. *Augustine, Ancient Thought Baptized*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 108.

many — with many distractions about many things — so that through him I might grasp the one who also has me in his grasp, and from the fragments of days past be gathered up to follow the One, forgetting those things that are past, and not stretched out through distention but straining forward in intention to the things that lie ahead (not to future things that are but fleeting), I press on toward the prize of the upward call, (Phil. 3:12–14) where I will hear the voice of praise (Ps. 25:7) and gaze upon your delight, (Ps. 26:4) which neither comes to be nor passes away.

Here, the intentionality of the search rests in its looking or stretching forward to what lies ahead—a very particular desired end: union with God. This is contrasted specifically with distraction or distention, a multiplicity of loves (often associated with inordinate desires) that lead one down rogue paths—a scattering of sorts that results in a restless, unsettled heart. So we can gather from this example that intentionality directly correlates with the strength and unity of the heart’s desire and keeps an agent focused on a particular end by virtue of this strength and unity of desire. In order for this to be accomplished, one must “forget that which is behind” or surrender her other loves. Hannah Arendt describes this mode as being “‘extended’ (*extentus*) toward what lies ahead (*ante*) and is ‘not yet’ (*nondum*).”²⁴ She further claims that in such a mode, “man forgets and disdains his own worldly past along with the world’s multiplicity from which he recollected himself.”²⁵ Thus, Arendt re-emphasizes this sentiment: that one

²⁴ Arendt, *Love and Augustine*, eds. Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott & Judith Chelius Stark, (University of Chicago Press, 1998), 29.

²⁵ *Ibid*

acts intently by having a focused desire, which requires a forgetting or a letting go of other objects of desire.

Though Augustine is not consistent in his terminology, he does use two metaphors in particular to describe this phenomenon in *Confessions*: weight and glue.

One example of this glue metaphor is found in 4.10.15:

For all these things let my soul praise you, O God (Ps. 145:2), Creator of all things,⁶³ but let it not be fixed upon them by the glue of love through the senses of the body. For they go where they will go, so that they exist no more, and they tear the soul apart through its unhealthy desires; for the soul wants to exist, and it loves to rest in the things it loves. But there is no place to rest in them, for they do not stay put: and who can chase after them through the sense of the body?

Our love is like glue, keeping us fixated upon those things we desire the most. Created things are by no means bad in themselves; however, they are bad insofar as they become sought and desired for the sake of themselves, as if they never will cease to be. Desiring or loving them as such glues us to them indefinitely though they pass away definitively. The gaze of the mind's eye does not extend beyond the temporal object of desire. And so, one is stuck, fixed on something subordinate to God and thus loving inordinately. This imagery of glue does an excellent job in demonstrating what this fixation or focus on temporal objects prevents one from doing: making the upward ascent towards God, completely, finally, and totally. Augustine continues to explain

that these loves must pass away, must move out of focus “so that others might take their place” (*Conf.* 4.11.16).²⁶

The metaphor of weight, though brought up on multiple occasions, most famously appears in Book 13.8.9: “My weight is my love. Wherever I am carried, my love is carrying me.” The heaviest weight--the strongest love--orients and directs the will. It will determine where one is carried, the path one journeys. Although one may desire union with God most, in this earthly life the soul struggles against itself, unable to completely rid itself of temporal desires competing for God’s affection.

Coincidentally, shortly after this, Augustine remarks that when, finally, we arrive at the house of the Lord, “there we will be brought to our place by a good will, so that we want nothing but to stay there forever” (*Conf.* 13.8.9). Notice that, again, one can ascend up to God only through a pure or simple intention, wanting and desiring only to be in God’s presence. In such a state one forgets all else that he wants and sees only what lies ahead, for we cannot focus on more than one thing at a time. The gaze is fixed in its proper place and the heart can finally rest. It is no surprise that Augustine uses fire to describe this ascent as the desire for God is so abundant and all-consuming that nothing else remains. This, of course, is ideal. However, it should be re-emphasized that it is not

²⁶Augustine returns to the metaphor again in Book 10, commiserating his former sins which remain fixed within the depths of his memory and continue to manifest in his dreams. He says, “Lord, you will increase your gifts in me more and more, rescuing my soul from the honey-trap of concupiscence so that it will follow me to you...” (*Conf.* 10.30.42).

possible to maintain such a unity of desire during one's earthly life. We are very easily distracted. Empty stomachs, pretty people, and lizards scurrying across the floor during prayer are real worries. We can surely be more or less focused, though.

William Babcock describes what I have just outlined above as Augustine's "spirituality of desire."²⁷ In elucidating Augustine's concept of the divided will, Babcock rightly stresses the importance of delight:

When Augustine speaks of denying consent to the desires of the flesh, his language should not evoke dark images of the grim heroism of a self, refusing all delight or resisting all desire. Rather Augustine means us to recognize that the religious life and the struggle it entails, is rooted in a prior and more dominant desire for and delight in God. Not an absence of delight but the presence of a stronger delight it what motivates the will to refuse consent to the desires of the flesh and to hold out against their allure.²⁸

Babcock's point is especially astute. He demonstrates that this notion of a divided will illuminates what, exactly, a love for God is able to do. It does not simply negate all pre-existing desires. It does not completely extinguish the concupiscence of the flesh. However, if God is one's greatest love then that love will serve as the orienting force of the will. It will, as Augustine contends, move you. Without a doubt, this is why Augustine places so much emphasis on the *ordo amorum*. If God is desired above all else, then your actions will correspond to this desire. This is perhaps why it is so difficult to

²⁷ Babcock, William. "Augustine and the Spirituality of Desire." *Augustinian Studies* no. 25 (1995): 179-199.

²⁸ Ibid

distinguish between “will” and “love” in the Augustinian corpus. They are virtually the same because love guides the will with very a forceful hand.²⁹

I think it necessary to further reflect on this notion of a “stronger delight” in order to understand its power. The most immediate and common example is a romantic relationship—one that is particularly fresh and new. A romantic interest, particularly if it is a strong interest, grabs our attention in a remarkable way. If this person bids to spend time with us, almost everything else becomes peripheral. Is there a paper that needs writing? Is there laundry that needs to be done? It can wait. There is something more pressing and important: your beloved. Everything else in view becomes secondary while under the sway of love’s myopic vision. It is not that you no longer care about your academic work. It is not that you no longer have a desire for clean clothes. It is just that the stronger desire beats all these others out; it changes your priorities. As a result, one will most likely take actions to ensure that one’s primary or strongest desire is fulfilled. As Babcock rightly points out, Augustine’s continence is not born of duty, of knowledge of what is good, of a desire to want to be good even. Instead, it is made possible through love for God, a present desire for Him. This is precisely why continence comes so late:

Late have I loved you, beauty so ancient and so new! Late have I loved you!
And behold, you were within, but I was outside and looked for you there,

²⁹ Sara Byers has an excellent article on this titled, “The Meaning of *Voluntas* in Augustine,” *Augustinian Studies* 37.2 (2006), 171-189.

and in my ugliness I seized upon these beautiful things that you have made. You were with me, but I was not with you. Those things held me far away from you— things that would not even exist if they were not in you. You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness; you flashed, you shone, and you dispersed my blindness; you breathed perfume, and I drew in my breath and pant for you; I tasted, (Ps. 33:9, 1 Pet. 2:3) and I hunger and thirst; (Mt. 5:6, 1 Cor. 4:11) you touched me, and I was set on fire for your peace. (Ps. 4:9) (*Conf.* 10.27.38)

This is what put off Augustine's own conversion for so long—he loved God but he really loved sex too, maybe just as much. As a result there was no dominant desire in his heart; Augustine was struggling for continence within a state of true ambivalence.

Harry Frankfurt explains the nature of ambivalence quite well and the effect it has on the will, even tying it back to Augustine's *Confessions* specifically. He notes, "To the extent that a person is ambivalent, he does not really know what he wants. [...] He is volitionally inchoate and indeterminate."³⁰ As a result, Frankfurt stresses that identifying any particular affective or motivational identity of such an ambivalent agent is moot. Thus, when a dominant desire does emerge, when ambivalence is shattered, an affective or motivational identity can be identified in the agent. This grants focus to the will and an intention is born.

So far, the first two points I planned on demonstrating have been proven. First, it is clear from what I have shown that for Augustine, intention is a focus or orientation of the will. Moreover, this focus or orientation is inclined by love or desire. In other words,

³⁰ Frankfurt, Harry. "The Faintest Passion" in *Necessity, Volition, and Love*. (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 99.

one's weightiest love motivates and influences the will's focus. Therefore, Augustine is not simply being cheeky in his sermon on 1 John 4:4-12, where he says, "Love and do what you will."³¹ He absolutely means it. Now, before turning to Abelard's reading of Romans and his understanding of the Gospel, let us briefly turn to my third and final point on Augustine: desires, and so intention, cannot be chosen.

As we see playing out through Augustine's journey towards conversion, no specific bit of theological information affords him the ability to make the decisive turn towards Christ. Knowledge of Christian doctrine does not make one a Christian. I suspect there would be more Christians in Religious Studies departments if this were the case. Moreover, Augustine is unable to simply decide to convert. This is unquestionably why Augustine gives grace such a large, and annoyingly operative, role in the Christian life. Our affections seem largely out of our control. Again, Frankfurt is helpful in understanding this point:

Since ambivalence is not a cognitive deficiency, it cannot be overcome merely by acquiring additional information. It also cannot be overcome voluntaristically. A person cannot make himself volitionally determinate and thereby create a truth where there was none before, merely by an "act of will." In other words, he cannot make himself wholehearted just by a physical movement that is fully under his immediate voluntary control.³²

³¹ Augustine, *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, trans. Boniface Ramsey, (New City Press, 2008), Sermon 7.8: "This is what I insist upon: human actions can only be understood by their root in love. All kinds of actions might appear good without proceeding from the root of love. Remember, thorns also have flowers: some actions seem truly savage, but are done for the sake of discipline motivated by love. Once and for all, I give you this one short command: love, and do what you will."

³² Frankfurt, "The Faintest Passion," 100.

Frankfurt explains the problem of ambivalence quite well. For our purposes, the relevant aspect of his point is that we cannot choose what we *really* want. We cannot decide our motivational identity. And while Frankfurt doesn't speak here in terms of intention specifically, G.E.M. Anscombe does, claiming, "The idea that one can determine one's intentions by making a speech to oneself is obvious bosh."³³ Frankfurt and Anscombe both seem to be pointing towards the same fundamental assumption: we cannot, by sheer volitional force, decide what we want. We can form and shape desires, but this takes a bit of practice. Eventually a second-order desire (wanting to want), might emerge as a dominant desire and orient the will if we make efforts to shape it. However, there is no guarantee.³⁴ Yet Augustine maintains this crucial point: what we love determines everything.³⁵

To complete this examination of Augustine's "spirituality of desire" it is important to recall, again, that he has no doctrine of intentionality. There is no systematic Augustinian treatment of intentionality in the Augustinian corpus. When the word *intentio* appears, it corresponds to notions of focus, orientation of the will, and desire. As such, I suggest we can conclude the following about Augustine's treatment of intentionality: 1) intention connotes a focus or orientation of the will; 2) this orientation

³³ Anscombe, G.E.M, *Intention*, 2nd ed. (Harvard University Press, 2000), 42, §25.

³⁴ For more on Frankfurt and the notion of second order desires see: Frankfurt, Harry G. "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person." *The Journal of Philosophy* 68, no. 1 (1971): 5-20.

³⁵ I realized this wording "love determines everything" was something I first encountered in a prayer written by Fr. Pedro Arrupe, S.J. I wanted to make sure I gave him credit. It can be found in, *Finding God in All Things: A Marquette Prayer Book*. (Marquette University Press, 2009).

of the will is inclined by one's strongest, or weightiest love; 3) one cannot choose one's intentions. This notion of intention, and all the Augustinian implications it bears, becomes the lens through which Abelard reads and understands the Gospel. It is to this that we now turn.

II. Old Covenant versus the New: Works versus Intention

In this section I will be focusing on Abelard's Commentary on St. Paul's letter to the Romans; some general context of that letter is in order. The obvious theme in Romans is justification—what makes one right with God. The Gentile Christians in Rome are living among many Jewish Christians, who are insisting that all “followers of the Way” must keep the Mosaic Law. Part of keeping this law, and perhaps the most fundamental aspect of it, is the mark of circumcision—this is what separates God's chosen people from the Gentiles. As a result, a theological controversy erupts among the Christians in Rome, between the Gentiles and the Jews, about what puts one in right relation with God. Is it the Mosaic Law? If so, is circumcision necessary for the Gentile Christians? Paul's letter to the Romans was written to specifically address this question. In it, Paul attempts to demonstrate the significance of the New Covenant in Christ. Here, we will get Abelard's interpretation of Paul's explanation. He delivers an answer that will not be immediately familiar to most Christians: intention.

Throughout Abelard's exegesis of Romans four main dichotomies occur repeatedly: The Old Covenant versus the New, works versus intention, fear versus love,

and slavery versus friendship. As you might notice, each of these dichotomies are familiar and appear explicitly in Scripture, with one exception: works versus intention. A version of this becomes focal in most Reformed theologies: works versus faith. The emphasis in such theologies is belief; one must explicitly accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior in order to be saved. As a result, these traditions place emphasis on the acceptance of certain doctrinal propositions that are taken to be fundamental. The emphasis for Abelard is on something quite different. Obviously, it is intention. The intention Abelard is preoccupied is one's intention in acting. Thus, propositional belief is not primary, but the affection or love that serves as the motivational force of a particular actions. Ultimately, love of God is synonymous with a good intention. This love is sufficient for salvation.

This centrality of intention in the Gospel message is immediately clear from the very outset of Abelard's exegesis of Romans. It makes its first appearance in the exegesis of 1:16:

THE GOSPEL, that is, the good news, is called the New Testament on account of its excellence, not only, as we explained above, because it teaches that what was promised in the Old Testament was fulfilled, but also because its teaching of righteousness is entirely and truly sufficient and perfect, since the old law, as the Apostle himself says, brought nothing to perfection, correcting works rather than intention (*Comm Rom I.1.16, 111*).³⁶

³⁶ All translations from Abelard's *Romans Commentary* are from Stephen Cartwright, (The Catholic University of America Press, 2012). When necessary, I will supply the Latin from E.M. Buytaert, CCCM 11(Turnout, 1969). In addition, it is important to note that Abelard's commentary consists of various quotes from Scripture and a subsequent explanation. He takes each passage phrase by phrase. I will indicate which parts of the passage are quotations from the Vulgate by putting them in bold and capitalizing them. This is my emphasis and not Cartwright's.

In this passage it is easy to tell that the distinguishing feature of the New Covenant is its emphasis on intention. This is what separates it from the Old Covenant, which by Abelard's lights had a scrupulous preoccupation with works or deeds. The implication is simple: The Mosaic Law was concerned primarily with works—*that* certain works were carried out and *that* certain laws were kept. The New Covenant is still concerned with this. It did not simply forgo an interest in human action. Rather, it brings this concern to perfection, by focusing on *how* these actions are performed. In order to discern *how* human actions are performed we cannot consider them apart from their actor. Essentially, what is their intention in acting? What do they desire? What do they love? Abelard makes this same point again in considering the very next verse, Romans 1:17.

For it follows, as if from contraries, that, while we know the things which deserve punishment with God, we understand also the things which gain reward, because it is necessary that he who hates evil love good, just as it is written: "You have loved righteousness and hated iniquity." But I think this is especially revealed and distinguished in the Gospel where the Lord considers all the things which happen according to the root of intention, saying: "If your eye is single (*simplex*), your entire body will be full of light. If your eye is dark, your whole body will be dark." And this indeed is the weighing of true righteousness, where all the things which happen are examined according to the intention rather than according to the quality of the works. The Jews paid more attention to these works than to the intention, although now Christians, with natural righteousness awakened, pay attention not so much to the things that happen as to the inclination (*animo*) with which they may be done (*Comm Rom. I.1.17*, pgs. 111-2).

The same general idea present in the previous passage is also explicit here: The New Covenant is rightly focused on intention, which tells us something about the quality of the work or deed being done. However, Abelard cross-references Matthew 6:22-23 here, which reveals more about what he believes intention to be. So, though I do not wish to embark on a detailed exegesis of Matthew 6 here, some explanation is helpful.

This bit of scripture is part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Just before this particular verse, Jesus provides an extensive exhortation on *how* one ought to act. He warns of doing pious acts in order to be seen. He warns of praying in a routine, innocuous way. At the very end of this exhortation, and right before Matthew 6:22-23, comes the verse: "Where your treasure is there your heart will be also," implying that one loves what is valued most. Putting all of this together, it is clear that, for Abelard, intentions in actions are inclined by what one loves. Do you love being viewed as pious? If so, that is why you do pious deeds. To pretend as though you do pious deeds for God when you *really* desire human praise more is delusion or lack of self-knowledge. We discern our intentions by evaluating what we want from our actions; what we want is determined by what we desire or love. Thus, the process of ensuring good intention is first being aware of what we desire and then simplifying what we desire.

Abelard explores this process of simplifying desires more deeply in the *Quaestio* in Book III, following his exegesis of Romans 7:6:

Truth says through himself (*semetipsam*), “You have heard that it was said to the ancients,” etc., and, “Unless your righteousness abounds,” etc., its reward could not be perfect; neither were heavenly things suitable for earthly desires (*desideriis*), nor can someone be fit for God who serves as much for earthly things as for heavenly ones. Therefore, the Truth warns through himself (*semetipsam*), saying, “Let not your left hand know what your right hand is doing”; that is, do not mix an earthly intention with a heavenly one in any work of yours, so that you obey God for transitory and eternal goods at the same time. (*Comm Rom.* III.7.4. 243)

Here the Augustinian association between intention and focus and between unity and desire comes to the fore. The motivational identity of the agent is most difficult to discern when there is no clear, dominant desire. If one’s desire for recognition and praise is on par with one’s desire for God, the mind’s eye is muddied, unclear, out of focus; it cannot see clearly. The result? We don’t know why we are doing what we are doing. Like pouring salt into water, once the two—and earthly and heavenly desire—are mixed they are near impossible to separate. So then, intentions are good insofar as they are simple, single, or pure. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Mt. 5:8). Again, the point Abelard tries to make is the same: actions alone have no value. They gain merit only through reference to the actor’s intention.

Hopefully by now it is apparent that intention is the interpretive lens through which Abelard reads and understands the Gospel. Though The New Covenant in Christ is not an abolishment of the Law; it does not dismiss the importance of obedience. Instead, it is a fulfillment or perfection of the Law—it requires that good works be done well, that is, with a good intention. Thus, when Abelard speaks of

intentio he means the affective motive with which an agent acts—in other words, what one *wants* in acting. In the section to follow, this will become increasingly clear as I look specifically at love, fear, and their respective intentional objects.

III. Fear versus Love: Slavery versus Friendship

Examining the difference between fear and love as affective motivators will elucidate Abelard's emphasis on good intention.³⁷ To begin, I will first turn to the *Collationes*. In the first *collatio* Abelard depicts an ethical debate between a Jew and a Philosopher. The Philosopher is interested in hearing out the Jew's justification for following the Mosaic Law and why it is *necessary*. The Jew's defense sheds light on how Abelard understands Jewish theology and moral psychology. Moreover, it explains Abelard's scorn for a sheer ethic of obedience. The Jew begins with this rationale:

JEW: "If, as we believe, the law which we follow was given to us by God, we should not be blamed for adhering to it but rather rewarded for our obedience—and those who scorn it are most seriously mistaken. It may be that I cannot compel you to accept that it was given by God, yet you are not able to refute this. But let me take an example from an ordinary run of human life and you, I beg, tell me what advice you would give. I am the servant of a lord whom I greatly fear to offend, and I have many other fellow servants who share this fear. They tell me that, when I was away, our lord gave a certain command to all his servants, of which I know nothing but which they are performing and which they urge me to perform along

³⁷ This same critique was made internally within Judaism by the philosopher Bahya Ibn Paquda. Tamar Rudavsky makes this point in his article "Ethics in Medieval Jewish Philosophy" in the *Cambridge Companion to Medieval Ethics*, ed. Thomas Williams, (Cambridge University Press, 2018). He says, "Bahya characterizes the 'inner duties of the heart' as connected to inward intentionality and expresses surprise that nobody has written about these duties, which he finds to be 'the basis of all the commandments! If they were to be undermined, there would be no point to any of the duties of the limbs!' The ultimate purpose of these inner duties is to serve God. The ideal state, which Bahya terms 'wholeheartedness,' is reached when human beings attain complete accord of mind and body" (105).

with them. What course of action do you commend to me, if I have doubts about this command, at which I was not present?" (*Coll.* 13, 15).

He continues:

JEW: "Indeed, it is pious and entirely fitting with reason and in accord with both God's goodness and the salvation of humankind, to consider that God takes such care of humans that he sees fit to teach them by means of a written law and to restrain our wickedness at least by fear of punishment" (*Coll.* 14, 17).

First, it is obvious that Abelard's Jew cites fear as the primary motivator for following the law. Second, according to the Jew, God seems strikingly similar to Hobbes's Leviathan—he is an absolute sovereign who restrains human wickedness through fear of punishment. This explanation fits squarely with Abelard's New Covenant theology; the New Covenant brings the Old to perfection because it is not only focused on human action, but the intention with which actions are performed. Obedience *qua* obedience is not praiseworthy. In fact, obedience with malintent may be damning.

Moreover, Abelard's Jew considers this obedience—one born of fear—as evidence of his love for God. He says, "I perhaps love (*diligo*) him as much as you do and, in addition, I show this by performing religious duties (*opera*), which you do not have" (*Coll.* 14, 19). Abelard's Jew makes an interesting claim here: love for God can be demonstrated through the performance of religious duties. That is, one can give a description of love for God by appealing simply to the actions one performs. Abelard could not disagree more. He insists that we cannot give a description of love for God by merely appealing

to one's actions. It is entirely possible that someone chooses to perform seemingly good acts for evil or selfish ends.

Let us consider an example to demonstrate Abelard's concern. Joe is a very obedient child. He completes his homework on time, helps with the dishes, keeps his room clean, and never talks back to his mother. Without considering Joe's intentions, we may be quick to call Joe a "good boy." He does just what his mother asks of him! However, what if we discovered that Joe is moved to behave simply because he fears his mother? She is ill-tempered and has a tendency to ridicule Joe when he misbehaves or makes a mistake. According to Abelard, we may not call Joe a sinner, but he certainly is not deserving of praise. More importantly, we would not be able to say that Joe is obedient because he loves his mother. We can understand what Joe *really* loves by considering the intentional object of fear. When Joe chooses to obey because he is afraid, Joe is concerned with his own self-preservation. He obeys because he does not *want* to be ridiculed by his mother. As it turns out, Joe *really* cares about himself. Thus, obedience born of fear is merely self-interest; the intentional object is reflexive. Just as Abelard explains "It should not even be called 'charity' if we love him for our own sakes, that is, for our own advantage and for the happiness of his kingdom which we look for from him, rather than for his own sake, establishing the end of our own intention in ourselves, and not in him" (*Comm Rom. III. Question 4*, 255). Therefore, love of God, by definition, must have God as the intentional object.

Truly, Abelard takes radical view of what is necessary for love, and thereby good intention. It must not contain a trace of self-interest; the intentional object must always be God. Abelard's exegesis of Romans 3:12, he makes this especially evident:

THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE. It is a repetition of what was said before, namely, of that which was said: there is none who does good, so that the qualifier might be supplied lest the saying be taken generally. Therefore, it is as if he should say, there is no one, I say, who does good until he comes by believing and by joining himself through love to him who truly is one and unchangeable by nature and unique through eminence, that is, to God or to Christ, who is "the one mediator between God and man" through faith in whom he argues in what follows that we are saved without the works of the law. It can even be understood in this way: there is none who does good, even one, as if he should say: there is scarcely anyone who does good; that is, there is almost no one who does good. For there is almost no one where one only remains. (*Comm Rom.* I.3.12, 154)³⁸

This passage exemplifies both the spiritual dimension of Abelard's intentionalism and the exclusivity that results from it. Love of God is not love of some abstract principle or free-floating Platonic form. Love has a specific intentional object and he is personal: Jesus Christ. In and through love of God one becomes joined to him. Though works come in and out of existence—they occupy a short and specific temporal space—love of God joins one to the infinite life of the Trinity. "For only charity, which never passes away, merits

³⁸ The Latin is: **NON EST USQUE AD UNUM.** Repetitio est praemissi, illius uidelicet quod dictum est non est qui faciat bonum, ut determinatio subderetur ne generaliter dictum putaretur. Tale est itaque ac si diceret: non est, inquam, qui faciat bonum usquequo ueniat credendo et per amorem se copulando ei qui uere unus est et immutabilis per naturam et singularis per eminentiam, id est Deo siue Christo, qui est unus Dei et hominum mediator, per cuius fidem in sequentibus saluari nos adstruet sine operibus legis. Potest etiam ita intelligi non est qui faciat bonum usque ad unum, ac si diceretur: uix est qui faciat bonum, id est fere nullus est qui faciat. Fere enim nullus est ubi unus tantum superest.

eternal life; and those who are equal in charity are held as equals before God in reward”
(*Comm Rom.* III.8.18, 275).

This notion of salvation by charity further pushes Abelard’s deemphasis on works. Merit is not tallied up according to the number of things accomplished by the faithful. If Simon fed the hungry more frequently than Matthew, Simon’s salvation is not *de facto* more secure. Simon may have had more opportunity to be charitable and thus accomplished these works more frequently. Simon may be more able-bodied, wealthy, or endowed with more free time. These circumstantial privileges should not hold any weight on the scale of salvation. Charity is not measured quantitatively, but qualitatively. God does not judge with one, long collective list of all their pious acts; He weighs the heart.

Though Abelard rejects the saving quality of works, he doesn’t claim that they are all together unimportant. This would be to gravely misunderstand Abelard’s theological position. Instead, Abelard believes that works are only given substance through their love—the intention with which they are performed. Works performed without love are but straw, they merit nothing. However, Abelard believes that the performance of good deeds, those motivated by charity, are essential for the life of the Church and the evangelization of souls. Through good works of the faithful, one perceives the charity that is hidden in their hearts—God’s love becomes incarnate and made known to others,

inspiring them to seek the source. Abelard explains this in his Sermon on Almsgiving, written for the Paraclete:

Now, the receding north wind departs and the south wind comes when the formerly cold hearts of men are enkindled by the fire of charity. The blowing south wind is felt (*sentitur*) and charity is demonstrated by the giving of alms. The south wind may be there in the soul, but it is not yet blowing full force; charity is held in the soul, but not yet manifest in the work. However, for it to blow, be raised up, and perceived, it must be manifest in the work one does for the needs of one's neighbor. Then the fragrance that was first in the soul hidden away, flows, in such a way that the love of God, just as much as love of neighbor, is exhibited by the performance of visible works. Then the flowing fragrance extends its smell in a similar way when the overflowing perfume of charity is made known to many and they are drawn to the imitation of others' good deeds.³⁹

Abelard explains that charity can only be seen is through our actions, since only God can see into the hidden parts of one's soul. In other words, simply because someone does something that appears charitable does not mean they actually possess charity in their heart. However, charity can only be seen and perceived through our actions; genuinely charitable actions make it possible for charity to be perceived.

Now we are in a position to consider the effects of such love, bringing this discussion to the final dichotomy Abelard uses to distinguish the Old Covenant from the New: slavery and friendship. In order to understand the theological distinction between slavery and friendship we should keep in mind both fear and love as Abelard

³⁹ This translation is my own. I utilized the Latin from Petrus Abaelardus Opera, vol. I. eds. Victor Cousin, C. Jourdain & E. Despois. (Paris, 1849), reprint Georg Olms Verlag, 1970.

understands them. To review, the kind of love articulated above is both affective in nature and must correspond to a particular, and personal, intentional object. Abelard seems to believe that fear, not love, was the primary motivation for obedience to the Mosaic Law — under the dominion of such fear man takes on a slavish posture. Fearful obedience to the law establishes servant/Master relation between man and God. Slaves have no expectation of inheritance from the Master's kingdom or share in the profit of the estate. They simply work for the sake of maintaining their existence and follow the law to avoid the consequence of punishment and secure his own livelihood. However, this is but one way to serve God. Abelard believes that love offers another way — the willing service of friendship.

TO THE BELOVED OF GOD, as if he should say: I do not say simply to all who are at Rome, to believers and to unbelievers, to the elect and to the reprobate, but to these only who through their conversion have now entered into friendship with God, now made subject to him in the manner of the Christians, that is, by love rather than by fear (*Comm Rom.* I.1.7, 105).

Such an affection for God prompts a willing sacrifice of self and one's corresponding carnal desires. Love prompts obedience instead of fear; the love moving the will shifts from a selfish love to a selfless love, resulting in different intentional objects.

Furthermore, such a friendship is free from the struggle that plagues the Master/servant relation. Abelard indicates this in his exegesis of Romans 2:13: "the doers are those who by the love of God act spontaneously (*sponte*), according to which a

good will is accounted as a work done" (*Comm Rom.* I.2.13, 133).⁴⁰ Friendship, because it is established in affection for the other, possesses an inherent freedom. The word "spontaneously" indicates this, as it suggests that the will is not forced or struggling to move in a particular direction. This is particularly what love, genuine affection, has the capacity to do: remove struggle. For example, I may be focused on writing my dissertation, making substantial progress on completing this work I *want* to finish. However, if a friend calls seeking support after a difficult day, I would graciously sacrifice my productive afternoon to take the call. I *want* to listen to her; I *want* to alleviate her hurt. So, even though I have my own selfish desires, the love for my friend trumps them; it frees me from the prioritization of myself. The greater our love for the other the easier self-sacrifice becomes. Ultimately, service born of affection is different in kind from service or obedience born of fear—one frees, the other shackles.

IV. Conclusions

Ultimately, Abelard's New Covenant theology is explicitly focused on the inner man—this distinguishes the Sermon on the Mount and the Mosaic Law. The New Covenant perfects human action by addressing the intention with which actions are performed and not simply *that* actions are performed. Moreover, according to Abelard

⁴⁰ Abelard also uses *spontaneous* to describe acts of charity in *Sc.* 72:6-10: "Otherwise they who bore the heavy yoke of the Law would be of greater merit before the Lord than they who serve with evangelical freedom because fear, which perfect charity casts out, has pain and they toil more in their work when all things are done in fear than those whom charity makes spontaneous (*spontaneos*)." The sense is that Abelard suggests that spontaneous actions are actions done without force, struggle, or coercion.

intentions are good insofar as they are born of love. He prescribes a qualification for this purifying love: it must be selfless, meaning that it must have God as the intentional object. In effect, this changes the nature of relation between God and man. In love the dominion of sin is dethroned; love moves and motivates the will to transcend the self, moving towards the other.

This reading of the Gospel has much in common with the “spirituality of desire” that Babcock identifies in Augustine’s *Confessions*. Let us carefully review the similarities: First, throughout the *Romans Commentary* a description of intentionality emerges that is unquestionably affective—what one loves or desires determines the orientation and motivation of the will. Second, the only proper intentional object of the will is God. In Augustine’s language: only God is to be enjoyed. This point is, perhaps, the most characteristic feature of Augustinian ethics and Abelard endorses it. Lastly, Abelard gives no indication that desires, or loves, which orient and motivate the will can be determined by consent or volitional force. On the contrary, discussions of intention always correlate with desire. My point in addressing these similarities between Augustine’s spirituality and Abelard’s theology is to show that any ethical claims Abelard makes regarding intention are clearly situated within this spiritual context. The spiritual grounds the ethical. *Intentio*, for Abelard, is not an intellectual determination, declaration, or establishment of ends. Instead, intention is determined

by what the heart wants. This will become especially important when considering the distinction between *intentio* and *consensus* in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO: DISTINGUISHING INTENTION AND CONSENT

It should be clear from the previous chapter that Abelard's understanding of the Gospel is heavily predicated upon a certain use and application of the word intention—it is informed by Augustinian spirituality and has clear affective connotations. In effect, when Abelard expresses that actions ought to be evaluated by looking at their root, or intention, he is concerned with what one wants or desires in their actions. This is very explicitly the case in the *Romans Commentary* and can be easily demonstrated through careful exegesis of *Scito te Ipsum*. Thus, it is curious that many have read Abelard as dismissing the role of the passions in assessment of moral praise, making his ethics rather Kantian as a byproduct.

The present chapter will diagnosis the source of this curious reading: the conflation of intention and consent. Distinguishing these formerly conflated concepts yields a new reading of Abelard's ethics, specifically his account of moral praise. For Abelard, moral praise is almost interchangeable with salvific merit. One is praiseworthy before God if and only if she poses charity. In other words, one acts well when one acts

charitably. This presupposes that one acts rightly, which is to do what the natural law demands.

I will proceed in three parts. First, I will review the existence of this explicit conflation of terms in the secondary literature. Second, I will provide an interpretation of consent and intention as they appear in *Scito te Ipsum*, demonstrating that the words have clear and distinct meanings. This will be heavily predicated upon Abelard's "Gospel of Intention" outlined in Chapter 1. Though this is difficult to detect in Abelard's prose, the distinction is present and crucial for getting the whole of his ethics correct. Last, I will consider how Abelard's conception of moral praise is intricately tied to his understanding of salvific merit—his conception of sanctification and eventual salvation. This can be shown by looking at the asymmetry between moral praise and moral blame: they do not have the same sufficient conditions. While his account of moral blame is dependent upon consent—a mere agreeableness of the will—and does not require that one desires something unlawful. In other words, someone can sin with no bad desire present, but a mere choice that violates the law. Abelard's understanding of moral praise rests upon intention, not consent. Resulting from this re-reading of Abelard's ethics will be a clear distinction between intention and consent and a clear and distinct appraisal of moral praise and blame.

I. A History of Conflation

With the exception of Margaret Cameron, who noted in a recent article on Abelard's ethics that *intentio* and *consensus* ought to be considered separate terms, nearly all recent secondary literature conflates the two.⁴¹ Because Peter King's article on Abelard's ethics influences later conflations of the terms in the secondary literature, I will begin with his reading and consider how it might be amiss. Following my evaluation of King, I will consider Calvin Normore, Ian Wilks, Jeffery Hause, William Mann and Jean Porter as continuing the history of conflation in the literature.

King's reading suggests that an intention is a consent to a given action with motivational force. In other words, I intend to x if and only if I consent to x and plan on carrying out x . In this way, an intention is a strong version of consent. One could even understand intention as a plan to perform a given action, akin to Anscombe's *intention-for-future*. Peter King makes this claim, as in the following in the fourth footnote of "Abelard's Intentionalist Ethics":

Abelard isn't very careful about the distinction between consent and intention. It seems as though an intention is a here-and-now desire to ϕ . Consent to a desire seems to produce an intention, which we may think of as a here-and-now desire to ϕ that has motivational force. But it is an odd sort of 'desire,' since it is intellectual. It is not clear to me that Abelard has

⁴¹ Cameron, Margaret. "Abelard (and Heloise?) on Intention." *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 81, no. 2 (2007): 323-338. Though Cameron notes this, it is a claim made in passing. She does not spend time demonstrating why she believes this to be the case or relishing in the consequences of understanding the terms as synonymous. In addition, Robert Blomme, *La doctrine du pecht? dans les ecoles theofogiques de fa premiere moitie du XIIe siecle* (Louvain: Publications universitaires de Louvain, 1958), 133-36, notes that *consensus* and *intentio* ought to be considered separate terms. Similar to Cameron, this is a claim made in passing, as if a side note.

a theory to back up his admittedly intuitive use of 'consent' and 'intention.'⁴²

King argues that intention is an intellectual plan to perform action x but makes the admission that this does not seem to fit with the overall theory Abelard presents. He resolves to continue utilizing Abelard's own intuitive use of intention in his analysis, making no effort to further delineate between consent and intention.

Now, if one understands Abelard's use of intention is such a way, it is difficult to distinguish intention from consent as Abelard defines it—"when we in no way draw back from its accomplishment and are inwardly ready, if given the chance, to do it" (*Sc.* 14:17-19). If intention is a plan, or a current desire with motivational force, and consent is an agreeableness of the will, then intention only differs from consent in its necessarily future orientation or its motivational quality; it will, invariably, include the act of consenting. This leads to a rather indistinguishable picture of the pair.

The issue with King's interpretation is that it cannot be supported by the text, a point he seems to acknowledge himself. There does not seem to be any indication in *Scito te Ipsum*, or in any of Abelard's other writings, that intention is akin to consent with motivational force. Abelard gives no explicit indication of this. Moreover, it is not implied in the way Abelard uses intention either—a point that will be belabored later. Interestingly, King's reading has paved the way for many later readings of Abelard's

⁴² King, "Abelard's Intentionalist Ethics," 2

ethics. Most of the interpretations I will be discussing next cite King in their attempts to outline *Scito te Ipsum* specifically and in their summaries of Abelard's ethics generally.

The first of these more recent readings of Abelard's ethics I will be discussing is Calvin Normore. Normore claims, "Consenting to or intending what one believes erroneously not to be what should be done for God's sake is bad, and so such an intention is a bad intention."⁴³ Normore's suggestion is that consent to a given action is synonymous with intending to perform an action. Both consenting to an action and intending to perform an action imply an agreeableness of the will—an action of the mind that does not necessarily culminate in the physical performance of an act. Interestingly, this leads Normore's evaluation of Abelard to be quite Stoic. He claims, rather boldly, that, "Peter Abelard is as close to Stoicism as a Christian could be."⁴⁴ According to Normore, both Abelard and the Stoic see virtuous, or morally praiseworthy, action resulting from a struggle against desire and concupiscence. At worst, desire, emotion, and the like are the enemies of virtue.⁴⁵ At best, they are merely not constitutive of it. Regardless, the affective orientation of the agent has no bearing on the morality of acts.

Ian Wilks's reading relies on this same conflation of terms:

⁴³ Normore, Calvin. "Abelard's Stoicism and Its Consequences," in Thomas Mathien & D. G. Wright (eds.), *Autobiography as Philosophy: The Philosophical Uses of Self-Presentation*. (Routledge, 2006).

⁴⁴ Ibid, 132

⁴⁵ Though this is not necessarily incorrect, in my view, it is not the full story.

Abelard is left only with what we have consented to do, what we have intended to do, as being worthy of moral consideration. Our consents and intentions (the words are used more or less interchangeably) render the full account of all the sins we have committed in our lives, and it is to these, no farther, that God will look in passing final judgement.⁴⁶

Like Normore, Wilks does not distinguish intention from consent and uses the terms interchangeably throughout his article. The seamless connection between the two terms results in the very same status of the passions espoused by Normore: desire or the affective quality of an act (be it interiorly conceived or externally performed) has nothing to do with praiseworthiness of agents. Instead, praiseworthiness is merely dependent upon choice of the will. This, according to both Normore and Wilks, is conveyed by both the words *intention* and *consensus*. Though Wilks does not make the explicit comparison to Stoicism, his interpretation of Abelard's ethics procures the same evaluative claim as Normore's reading.

Porter, like Normore and Wilks, concludes that Abelard places no particular importance on desire, or the agent's affective inclination. She begins her article on Abelard's ethics by stating, "In this article, I will examine Abelard's account of moral intention, or better, consent, in light of recent work on his own thought and the twelfth-century background of that thought."⁴⁷ She continues using intention and consent as if they had no systematic distinction and resolves that Abelard is strikingly proto-

⁴⁶ Wilks, Ian. "The Role of Virtue Theory and Natural Law in Abelard's Ethical Writings." *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 71 (1997): 137-149.

⁴⁷ Porter, 369.

Kantian, as he presents an ethic of “pure reason.” While Porter’s picture doesn’t include a Stoic comparison, she includes Kant for the very same reason that others conceive Abelard to be Stoic: the de-emphasis on emotion or the affective inclination motivating action.

This trend continues in most other readings of *Scito te Ipsum*. Jeffrey Hause, for instance, presents a detailed examination of Abelard’s conception of sin. However, he explicitly denies any clear distinction between consent and intention. Though considering it possible to imagine the two words being distinct, he quickly dismisses the idea, claiming, “I do not think we can abstract from this one occurrence a general distinction between *intentio* and *consensus*.”⁴⁸ Finally, in William Mann’s reading, which appears in the *Cambridge Companion*, he considers intention and consent nominally distinct, but the definitions of the two rely on each other in a way that makes it impossible to distinguish them in actuality. Intending action *x* requires consent of action *x*. Therefore, there can be no intending *x* without consenting *x*. Thus, his definition of intention engulfs consent: “Abelard suggests that to form an intention to do something is to consent to that thing.”⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Hause, Jeffrey. “Abelard on Degrees of Sinfulness.” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 81, no. 2 (2007): 251-270.

⁴⁹ Mann, William. “Ethics,” in *The Cambridge Campaign to Abelard*, Ed. By Jeffrey Brower. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 285.

Again, all five of these readings fail to make any clear distinction, or any distinction at all, between Abelard's use of consent and Abelard's use of intention. On this reading, a passionless picture of Abelardian ethics emerges, leading many to find his contribution to the ethical discourse underwhelming. He is read as an unsuccessful attempt to baptize Stoic ethics or as a less compelling version of Kant. In any case, two things are unanimous among the interpreters mentioned above: (1) Abelard makes no distinction between intending and consenting and (2) Abelard dismisses the importance of the passions or affective inclinations in determining the moral quality of acts.

Hopefully it is clear that the conflation of intention and consent in Abelard's ethics is normative throughout Abelardian scholarship.⁵⁰ To be fair, Abelard does not provide a clear definition for *intentio* in *Scito te Ipsum*. This does not appear to be a lazy error or lack of systematic precision. Instead, it seems Abelard assumes his readers, universally Christian and likely religious, are familiar with the word *intentio* and its spiritual sense. Intention is not the new concept Abelard is introducing or trying to clarify; consent is. Abelard is attempting to explain the possibility of sin where no bad will or desire is present, a clear extrapolation and elucidation of the Augustinian

⁵⁰ At the Medieval Philosophy Network at the University of London (April 2019), John Marenbon pointed out that this observation might be more appropriately said of American Abelard scholarship generally. This has resulted, as I argue here, because of American scholarship's dependence upon King's article for a general and accurate summary of Abelard's ethics. Thus, the Kantian association has been recycled and perpetuated. This is important to note because many Abelard scholars, such as Constant Mews and Marenbon himself do not explicitly associate Abelard with Kant.

account of sin which attempts to define sin as a *mala voluntas*. Therefore, Abelard is explicit in defining consent and does not seem similarly compelled to define intention.

In the following section I will provide clear and distinct definitions for both intention and consent as they are employed in *Scitio te Ipsum*. In an effort to be transparent, the definition of intention I presume is undeniably informed by the *Commentary on Romans*, written before *Scitio te Ipsum*. As such, I will recall the use of intention I demonstrated in the previous chapter to elucidate Abelard's use of intention in *Scitio te Ipsum*.

II. Re-Examining Intention and Consent

If we supply the view of intention I argue for, one informed by his *Commentary on Romans*, Abelard's ethics looks quite different. First though, let us consider consent. Abelard uses the word "*consensus*" in *Scitio te Ipsum* as a technical term to convey an agreeableness of the will—"when we in no way draw back from its accomplishment and are inwardly ready, if given the chance, to do it" (*Sc.* 14:16-18). One can, according to Abelard, consent to action without a bad will or bad desire. Abelard's most cited example is that of a servant who is running from his angry Master who wants to kill him.⁵¹ The servant runs as long as he can but is eventually faced with the reality that he may have to kill his Master in order to save his own life. So, the servant consents to kill his Master, but does not do so with a desire to commit a murder. Instead, he does so

⁵¹ See: *Sc.* 6:25-8:5.

with the desire to preserve his own life. This desire or will to preserve life is not a bad one. Even though this desire is not bad, the servant still commits sin by consenting to an unlawful killing. So then, a sin has been committed without a bad will. This does not mean though, that desire *qua* desire is morally neutral. Abelard never suggests as much. Instead, he makes the point that consent to sin can occur even when no bad will is present.

We can view consents to lawful or seemingly “good” actions in the same way. Just as one can consent to a bad action with no bad will, one can consent to a lawful act with an evil, carnal, or unqualifiedly bad desire. As a result, consent to what is lawful does not denote a good action. Abelard gives several examples of this, but he consistently returns, in both the *Romans Commentary* and the *Scito te Ipsum*, to Judas delivering up the Son—Christ—and the God the Father delivering up His Son:

The giving up of the Son was certainly done by God the Father; and it was done by the Son and it was done by that betrayer, since both the Father and delivered up the Son and the Son delivered up himself, as the Apostle observed, and Judas delivered up the Master. So the betrayer did what God also did, but surely he did not do it well? For although what was done was good, it certainly was not well done nor should it have benefited him. For God thinks not of what is done but in what mind (*animo*) it may be done, and the merit or glory of the doer lies in the intention, not in the deed (*Sc.* 28:5-17).

This is an example Abelard takes directly from Augustine’s homily on John 7:7, which is quoted in his very own *Sic et Non*. Here, what separates Judas’s “giving up of the Son” and God’s “giving up of the Son,” is *why* they performed the act. God gave up

himself as an act of love—love motivated or prompted the sacrifice. Judas gave up Christ because of his own greed, because he desired thirty pieces of silver for himself. In order to describe the distinction between these various acts, Abelard appeals to the term “*intentio*.” Now, let us be careful to explain what, exactly, an *intentio* is.

As Elizabeth Anscombe reminded analytic philosophy in 1957, the word “intention” can be understood in a variety of ways. Anscombe brings to light three intimately related descriptions of intention: *intentional action*, *intention for future*, and *intention-with-which*. If I were to say, “I intentionally hit the ball,” I would be describing an *intentional action*. Intention under this description corresponds to a meaning-to perform action *x*. In other words, it is a voluntary act. *Intention-for-future* implies a plan for a future action. For instance, if I were to say, “I intend to get a drink after work,” the word “intention” implies that I am planning to have a drink once I am off work. Finally, an intention with which is an agent’s reason or purpose with which they act. If I were to ask Peter, “Why did you buy Lucy flowers?” he may respond by providing the reason or purpose he did so—an *intention-with which*. Perhaps it was to let her know he was thinking about her or to congratulate her for a recent promotion. In any case, an *intention-with-which* answers the question “why?” Anscombe’s point is not to provide a theory of intention but give a description of how the word is used in ordinary language.

Anscombe’s account of intention is helpful in understanding what Abelard is *not* saying. When Abelard speaks of intention he does not mean to convey an intentional

action—one an agent meant to do. Abelard does not use *intentio* to convey a plan either—to set one’s mind on doing some action at future time *t*. Lastly, Abelard is not describing the reason one performs an action. That is, if “reason” is taken to be an intellectual justification or description of motive. Essentially, Abelard does not use intention to convey voluntariness, a plan, or a reason one supplies for acting. Let us apply these distinctions the example above. When Abelard points to God’s intention in “delivering up the son” he does not mean to convey that God planned on delivering up the Son, God meant to deliver up the Son, or that that God delivered up the Son for a particular reason.

Instead, Abelard uses the word *intentio* to relay something deeply affective and spiritual. An intention is what one desires or wants in acting. It still answers the question “why?” but appeals to affections in order to answer that question.⁵² So here we have a sort of intention that is not reflected in Anscombe’s typology; it is a “Why” account of a different kind. This is apparent in the *Commentary on Romans*:

Therefore, he is also said to be the tester of the heart and mind to see into what is concealed. In this passage, he substitutes the work for the inner disposition of the work, when the term is transferred from the effect to the cause. Otherwise, the judgment of God might not be shown to be equitable, since the works are indifferent in themselves, that is, neither good nor evil, or they seem worthy of recompense, except according to the root of the intention, that is, the tree producing good or evil fruit. So then, when he

⁵² It is worth noting that Anscombe understands an *intention-with-which* as the first premise of a practical syllogism. She claims that if this “reason” is to be acted upon that it must be wanted. So, in a way, Anscombe is making a claim that intentions are only genuine if they are wanted. Otherwise, they are merely idealistic ways we want to conceptualize our actions.

says **ACCORDING TO HIS WORKS** it is as if he would say according to their will—what they desire to happen or not to happen.⁵³ (*Comm Rom.* I.2.6, 126)

Here Abelard suggests that, indeed, works are indifferent in themselves. This is because they only receive their merit in reference to the intention that serves as their cause, source, or “root.” This root of intention, which defines the nature or quality of the work, is described as what one “desires to happen or not to happen” (*quae fieri uel non, fieri appetunt*). This is distinct from a reason for acting, which may refer to the justification an agent provides for doing

The connection between desire and intention reappears throughout the *Romans Commentary*, but one of the most explicit passages is from the *Quaestio* following Abelard’s Exegesis of Romans 7:6:

Truth says through himself, “You have heard that it was said to the ancients,” etc., and, “Unless your righteousness abounds,” etc., its reward could not be perfect; neither were heavenly things suitable for earthly

⁵³ I diverge from Cartwright’s translation of “*Unde et ipse probator cordis et renum in abscondito uidere dicitur.*” He translates this sentence as such: “Therefore, he is also said to be the tester of the heart and the kidneys and to see into what is concealed.” He translates *renum* as kidneys. Though this is a literal translation, it fails to convey the sense of the passage, as judging the “kidneys” is nonsensical in English and would leave the modern reader baffled. Instead, I have translated it as “mind.” Peter Abelard uses this language often—God is the tester of one’s heart, mind, the spirit, of the work, etc. In addition, Cartwright adds an extra “and” presumably because it appears after *Unde*. Here, I think the “also” satisfies the first “et.” Thus, I removed the second and that Cartwright supplies after “kidneys.” In addition, I have reconstructed the last sentence of this passage: *Tale est ergo quod ait SECUNDUM OPERA EIUS ac si diceret secundum uoluntatem eorum quae fieri uel non, fieri appetunt.* Cartwright’s translation reads: “Such it is, therefore, that he says **ACCORDING TO HIS WORKS**, as if he should say, according to the will of those things that they desire to happen or not to happen.” I have chosen to not personify will as having a desire, but instead translate the last phrase as a restatement of what Abelard means by saying “according to their will.” So, my translation is as follows: “So then, when he says **ACCORDING TO HIS WORKS** it is as if he would say according to their will—what they desire to happen or not happen.”

desires (*desideriis*), nor can someone be fit for God who serves as much for earthly things as for heavenly ones. (*Comm Rom.* III.7.6, 243)

Very similar language is used in *Scito te Ipsum*:

God is said to be the prover of the heart and the reins, that is, of all the intentions which come from an affection of the soul (*affectione animae*) or from a weakness or a pleasure of the flesh (*delectatione carnis*) (*Sc.* 41:17-19). The ethical claim is consistent in both passages: righteousness does not consist in the mere completion of works. If we want to understand our actions we must look at what we desire in our performance of them—spiritual or carnal goods? Are you keen on performing your religious duties so you can impress a particularly devout romantic interest? “Well,” Abelard might say, “it looks like you desire the romantic interest and not God.” In other words, the intentional object in the performance of such an act is the romantic interest because the romantic interest is desired. In this circumstance obedience to God is nothing more than self-interest. Abelard goes so far as to say that our intentions, and thus our actions, are not worthy of praise unless they are pure—God alone should be desired in them. So, this love must be, if one’s righteousness abounds, the only, or most dominant, intention in action. Surely, the Augustinian echo can be heard in his words—only God is to be enjoyed.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ See: *De Doctrina Christiana*, I.22.20, trans. John J. Gavigan, O.S.A. (New City Press: 1996): “Thus all of your thoughts and your whole life and intelligence should be focused on him from whom you received the very things you devote to him. Now, when he said with your whole heart, your whole soul, your whole mind, he did not leave out any part of our life, which could be left vacant, so to speak, and leave room for wanting to enjoy something else. Instead, whatever else occurs to you as fit to be loved must be whisked along toward that point to which the whole impetus of your love is hastening.”

I should also be clear in pointing out that intention is not synonymous with desire. In other words, we must keep in mind the influence of Augustine when piecing together Abelard's conception of intention, which I outlined in the previous chapter. An intention is not merely something one desires; it is the dominant desire that grants motivational identity to the agent. In other words, it is entirely possible that one has a desire for something without a corresponding intention for it. For one could want or desire many things simultaneously.

To explain, let us examine the event of going to the gym. I could want to go to the gym because I desire to be healthy and, at the same time, want to go to the gym because I desire to be attractive. In such an instance, the desire to be healthy is perfectly lawful, while the desire to be attractive may be fed by vanity or lust. Given the presence of both these desires, which one serves as my intention? In Abelard's language, is my going to the gym primarily fed by carnal or spiritual desire? Unfortunately, desires cannot be weighed like bricks and dissected like chemical compounds. We cannot perfectly demarcate them—two-parts carnal, one-part spiritual. Unless one knows oneself impeccably well, the process of sniffing out and identifying our actual intentions is quite difficult, near impossible. Nonetheless, the intention of an agent is their most dominant desire. If one yearns for health and attractiveness in equal measure, we can hardly speak of the agent being intentional. The sheer diversity of desire generates a kind of cooling effect—one is not on fire for any one thing, scattered, unfocused. The

author of Revelations calls this being “lukewarm.”⁵⁵ Augustine calls it “distention.”⁵⁶

On the contrary, the stronger one given desire grows, the more the others dwindle and become inconsequential. For example, a great love for one’s children might render a father’s own selfish desires obsolete. They may not be completely extinguished, but they are not nearly as influential in one’s decision making.

To review, I have pointed out that consent is merely an agreeableness of the will. It is an internal quality of the agent who might be described as having a willingness or readiness to perform a particular action if the opportunity to do so arises. One consents to adultery, for instance, when one is ready to perform the adulterous act if they are given the opportunity to do so. One would be, as Abelard sees it, just as guilty for such a consent as the man who actually completes the physical act. Intention, on the other hand, has nothing to do with voluntariness or agreeableness, *per se*. Abelard uses

⁵⁵ See: “So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth” (Rev. 3:16). The following passages imply the same: “He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me, scatters.” (Lk. 11:23). “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth” (Mt. 6:24, Lk. 16:13).

⁵⁶ See: *Conf.* 29:39, trans. Thomas Williams, (Hackett, 2019): “Yet because your mercy is better than lives, (Ps. 62:4) behold, my life is a distention, and your right hand has lifted me up in my Lord, the Son of Man, the Mediator (1 Tim. 2:5) between you, who are one, and us, who are many — with many distractions about many things — so that through him I might grasp the one who also has me in his grasp, and from the fragments of days past be gathered up to follow the One, forgetting those things that are past, and not stretched out through distention but straining forward in intention to the things that lie ahead (not to future things that are but fleeting), I press on toward the prize of the upward call, (Phil. 3:12–14) where I will hear the voice of praise (Ps. 25:7) and gaze upon your delight, (Ps. 26:4) which neither comes to be nor passes away.”

intention to describe the affective orientation of the agent—what they want or desire most.

Though sometimes this is used to refer to the intention of an act, it should be kept in mind that we cannot separate the intention of acts from the intention of the agent. Therefore, the intention of the agent yields the intention of particular acts, not vice versa. We cannot speak of an action being done with an intention of love if the agent does not possess love for the intentional object—the former inextricably follows the latter. Acts can only be intentional if the person performing them has a motivational identity, an intention. I also explained that although intention connotes desire, it is not synonymous with desire. As we explored in the previous chapter, one can have multiple desires concurrently. Intentions are dominant desires, not desires generally speaking. Mixed intentions, as Abelard calls them, are when there is no apparent dominant desire.

III. Blameworthiness and Praiseworthiness

The distinction between intention and consent does not gravely impact Abelard's account of sin or how it has been outlined in the secondary literature. Sin is not synonymous with a bad will or a bad desire. Sin simply requires consent to what is unlawful—that is, what the natural law forbids according to one's own conscience. Abelard makes clear that there are certainly cases in which desires do not necessarily

denote blame. As many in the secondary literature have already pointed out, he excludes both desire and mental vice as being occasions of sin.⁵⁷

In the case of desire not being sufficient for sin, Abelard uses the example of a man who finds himself traveling through another man's garden and is seduced by the delightful smell of fruit (Sc.14:6-14). Though the man may possess the vice of gluttony and be so desirous for the fruit, he can refuse to eat it. That is, the man can repress his desire and withhold consent. In this instance the desire is not cause for blame. As Abelard claims, "It shows in short that in such things also the will itself or the desire (*desiderium*) to do what is unlawful is by no means to be called a sin, but rather, as we have stated, the consent itself" (Sc. 14:15-16). However, this does not mean desire is altogether irrelevant in the evaluation of acts or persons. It simply means that a bad desire is not synonymous with a sin. A similar point is made with mental vice. Though someone may be prone to anger, it does not mean they will always consent to their anger—be ready to act on it should the opportunity arise. They are blameworthy if and only if they consent to that which is unlawful. However, this does not render vice irrelevant in our evaluations of acts. It simply means that it inclines but does not determine human action.

⁵⁷ See: Hause, Jeffrey. "Abelard on Degrees of Sinfulness." *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* no. 2 (2007): 252-270.

Most importantly, Abelard is lobbying for a move away from absolutist evaluations of acts. He assures that acts can be done that are, technically speaking, bad but they may not be consented to, making them not worthy of blame. Someone may, Abelard contends, sleep with someone who is not their wife while thinking that they are (*Sc. 24:11-12*) (Though, I have a hard time buying this; apparently, wives were all too gullible in twelfth century France). In such an instance, the person commits an act that is forbidden but did not consent to the action which is forbidden. They consented to sleeping with their wife but did something rather different: committed adultery. In other words, they did not agree to do something unlawful and are not culpable as a result. This leads Abelard to conclude that prohibitions of acts are really in reference to the consent of such acts, not the performance of them: "If we carefully consider also all the occasions where actions seem to come under a commandment or a prohibition, these must be taken to refer to the will or to consent to actions rather to the actions themselves" (*Sc. 24:25-27*). Clearly consent to what is unlawful is sufficient for moral blame.

In conflating intention and consent, many have assumed that Abelard's criterion for moral blame is analogous to his criterion for moral praise; however, it is not. In what follows I will demonstrate that praiseworthiness for Abelard is dependent upon the agent's intention— affective orientation or motivational identity. A good intention, insofar as Abelard is concerned, is born of charity—love for God for the sake of himself.

Moreover, consent may be present without a corresponding bad desire, but a good intention is necessarily predicated upon an affection for God. As a result, moral blame may not necessitate a bad desire, but moral praise necessitates an actual affection for God. In the context of demonstrating these premises, I will first clearly outline a negative account of moral praise, namely what praiseworthiness is not for Abelard. Then, I will point to the fact that we must consider Abelard's account of moral praise alongside his account of salvific merit, for they are one and the same—both depend, almost entirely, on *caritas*. In the context of this discussion, I will suggest that *caritas* both secures the classical requirements for virtue and addresses traditional theological concerns about soteriological merit. This should highlight the fact that Abelard's ethical account is unintelligible apart from his theological project.

Before delving into the positive account of moral praise, let me explicitly outline what it is not. First, praiseworthiness of agents does not correspond to the sum total of their consents, good or bad. In other words, my praiseworthiness as an agent is not directly correlated to the number of times I consent to sin, the number of times I am able to positively refrain, or the number of times I choose to do good. This, certainly, would be a very Pelagian system of moral praiseworthiness. Fortunately, it is not Abelard's, though some, such as Ian Wilks, seem to have suggested as much. God does not, according to Abelard, weigh moral praiseworthiness by putting us on a scale and ensuring our good consents (or acts) outweigh the bad. Who we are is not

synonymous with what we do. Sometimes saints act sinful; sometimes sinners act saintly. Most importantly, sometimes saints are prevented from acting saintly—the means necessary to do so are not available, for instance.

Second, moral praise is not incurred through obedience. This point cannot be emphasized enough. Considering Abelard's reading of the Gospel as espoused in Chapter 1, this should be especially clear. This is, again, for the very same reasons that praiseworthiness of agents is not determined by the sum total of one's acts: Abelard's ethic is a Christian ethic. In other words, praiseworthiness is not reducible to what one does. Unlike Sartre contends, the totality of Proust's genius is not the totality of Proust's works. Obedience, as Abelard makes clear in the *Commentary on Romans*, can be motivated by a variety of loves, desires, or concerns. I can obey my mother because I fear punishment, because I hate confrontation, or because I love her, for example. Obedience, or consent to obey, says nothing about who I am unless it is substantially qualified. It merely points to what one does or chooses.

As I have made clear, moral praise is not synonymous with the completion of many good works or obedience generally speaking. In contrast to moral blame, moral praise is determined by what one desires in acting or what affections motivate the performance of an action—the key word is intention, not consent. This emphasis on intention points towards a concern with the affective attachments of an agent. Such affections are not subject to change by choice; they are intimately part of our person—

characteristics of the soul. As a result, there is no clear distinction in *Sctio te Ipsum* between someone who is morally praiseworthy and someone who is authentically Christian. Charity is the source of both virtue and salvation, satisfying both the classical, philosophical requirements for virtue and the traditional, theological requirements for salvation. Let us explore each of these to provide a comprehensive picture of moral praise for Abelard.

In all varieties of virtue ethics there is an obvious concern for *how* actions are done not simply *that* they are done. Being a good person does not amount to doing good things, it requires that they are done with a very specific disposition and with a concern for certain ends. Depending on whether one is a Stoic, Aristotelian, or Epicurean, these ends may vary drastically. However, a concern for certain ends is a necessary prerequisite. Furthermore, the virtuous person is clearly distinct from the continent person. Doing something well means doing it with ease. The moral exemplar does not struggle to do what is right. Instead, doing what is just, temperate, or fortuitous becomes second nature. In other words, making good choices is anything but a struggle. How one accomplishes this difficult feat is the meat of debate between the various classical schools. How does one become virtuous? Though Abelard borrows from both the Aristotelian and Stoic accounts of virtue, his answer is neither Aristotelian nor Stoic.

Abelard's answer to the character gap is *caritas* — it is how one becomes virtuous, good, worthy of praise. Love for God satisfies the requirements for virtue outlined above: it constitutes (1) a concern for some proper end and (2) makes it easy to do what is just, temperate, or courageous. Insofar as (1) is concerned, Abelard discusses having proper care for proper ends in terms of intentionality — having an affection for particular, direct objects, those which receive action. He makes this especially clear in his *Commentary on Romans*, a point belabored in Chapter 1. In love for God, God becomes the end purpose or goal of our acts. Love for God constitutes a concern, a care for God that motivates action, just like care or concern for one's children disposes a mother or a father to act *for* them. This ought not to be confused with an intellectual acknowledgment that God ought to be obeyed because he is maximally great nor as respect for some Platonic form of Justice.⁵⁸ Love is an affection for God made possible through the passion of Christ.⁵⁹

This can be seen in a lengthy, and often forgotten discussion, towards the end of *Scito te Ipsum* in which Abelard discloses sufficient conditions for fruitful repentance, appealing to the same dichotomy of love and fear that is so prevalent in the *Commentary on Romans*. Expanding upon the words of the Apostle Paul, he claims, "With these

⁵⁸ Abelard struggles to find a place for virtuous pagans in his ethics because he rejects the views I articulated here. He believes knowledge and love of Christ is a necessary condition for salvific merit. He fashions all sorts of creative ways to try and have his cake (the priority of charity) and eat it too (make room for pagans in the salvation economy).

⁵⁹ As I will argue later, this is even reflected in Abelard's theory of atonement.

words he plainly declares what is wholesome repentance, proceeding from the love of God rather than from fear, with the result that we are sorry to have offended or to have shown contempt of God because he is good rather than because he is just" (*Sc.* 84:27-30). Love of God makes the penitent. Without such love, sorrow for one's sin is merely a reflection of self-interest. Instead of being concerned *for* God and her relationship to God, she merely is sorry that she has failed, that she may be punished, that her reputation may suffer.

Love also perfectly satisfies requirements for (2) as well—it makes doing what is good easier. Abelard explains this phenomenon in *Scito te Ipsum*:

Whence the Lord exhorts those who labour and are burdened to take up the sweet yoke and a light burden, in order, that is, to pass from subjection to the law by which they are oppressed to the freedom of the Gospel; and they who had started from fear may be perfected in charity, which without difficulty beareth all things, endureth all things. Nothing indeed is difficult to a lover, especially since the spiritual and not carnal love of God is so much stronger for being more true (*Sc.* 72: 10-16).

Love has a funny way of making easy things that would otherwise be difficult. Love makes us ready to give, to sacrifice, to lay down our lives when we ordinarily would struggle to do so. Though you may hate public speaking, you figure out a way to give a speech at your best friend's wedding. Though you may not be a fan of ballet, you figure out a way to sit through an entire performance for your partner—because they adore it. Though you may not enjoy talking on the phone, you go out of your way to phone your college roommate and stay in touch. Without such affections, similar sacrifices are not

sweet yokes or light burdens—they are miserable obligations that must be fulfilled.

Love for God procures an inclination to do what is good, removing the struggle that persists in its absence. Being virtuous, in other words, becomes easier. This is precisely Abelard's point. So then, love bridges the gap between ideal and performance. It orients the agent by providing affectionate focus—intention—and thereby lifting the burden of the law.

Caritas also buries the perpetual Augustinian concern about merit—the anti-Pelagian preoccupation with pure giftedness. Love says nothing about the goodness of ourselves, but points towards the goodness of the object. The person of Christ is so gripping because he is infinitely good, infinitely perfect and thus the rightful object of our affectionate gaze. Ultimately, love is not earned; it is the appropriate response to who God is. Furthermore, it means that praiseworthiness is said of persons, not acts. This is because acts always proceed from persons and their hearts; they are informed by the agent's intentions, desires, etc. Why? Per the Gospel, people are saved because of their transformation in Christ, not because they have performed many good actions. Charity, quite literally, is one's saving grace.

In this section I have shown that consent and intention are distinct concepts in Abelard's corpus, particularly in the *Commentary on Romans* and *Scito te Ipsum*. To be clear, Abelard maintains that consenting to an action *propter Deum* means actually loving God in that action—a movement of the soul towards God on account of his

goodness. The merit of any human action rests upon this being the case. To avoid any misunderstanding, it may be helpful to recall what loving God is not. One does not love God by understanding that they should. One does not love God by claiming or declaring they perform an action for God's sake. Even forsaking one's desire because they know that God commands it is not meritorious *per se*; this would suggest suffering *qua* suffering is praiseworthy. Finally, one does not love God because they are willing to obey his law. For, on that account, what fault could we find in the Pharisee? Surely, such a willingness would be present in one who loves God; however, that criterion alone is not a sufficient description of *caritas*.

IV. Conclusions

In this chapter I have demonstrated the source of much confusion in readings of Abelard's ethics. Though many posit that intention and consent have no systematic distinction in *Scito te Ipsum*, I argue that consent is a mere agreeableness of the will—a readiness to perform an action given the opportunity to do so arise—and that intention is akin to the motivational identity of the agent—determined by one's greatest love or desire. As result, Abelard's ethical account looks a bit different. Instead of moral praise being determined by consent to what is prudently determined to be lawful, moral praise depends upon the affective orientation of the agent, the intentional object of their action. This makes the Christian bar for moral praise is quite high—it demands that our actions come forth from a charitable heart, one enflamed by the fire of *caritas*. Love of

God orients our focus on the proper end, lifts the burden of the law, and assures that God alone is the cause of salvation. Thus, Abelard's account of moral praise becomes one with his understanding of salvific merit. To be good is to be freely Christian.

"Certainly, if virtue is understood in its proper sense, as that which obtains merit with God, charity alone is to be called a virtue" (*Coll. II*, 100).⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Trans. Marenbon, John & Orlandi, Giovanni. (Clarendon Press, 2001).

CHAPTER THREE:

ABELARD IS NOT A PROTO-KANTIAN

Kant is well-known for his emphasis on duty as a sufficient condition for moral praise. In other words, performing an action for duty's sake makes a moral agent praiseworthy. This Kantian claim is of particular interest in this chapter, precisely because many interpreters believe Abelard to be proto-Kantian in this regard. For example, Peter King argues "Abelard and Kant locate moral worth in features of the way the agent conceptualizes her performances, and each thinks that goodness is characterizable in terms of the form such conceptualization takes."⁶¹ As a result, King claims that Abelard's ethics can be described as a "medieval categorical imperative."⁶² Others, such as Jean Porter, have followed King's lead, distancing Abelard from his Augustinian roots and likening him to a medieval Kantian. Like King, Porter argues that Abelard's ethics is reminiscent of Kantian deontology precisely because it regards the passions as morally neutral: "What Abelard offers, in short, is a theologically

⁶¹ King, Peter. "Abelard's Intentionalist Ethics." *The Modern Schoolman* 72 (1995): 214.

⁶² Ibid.

grounded case for the moral neutrality of the passions.”⁶³ She later posits, “It might be said that Abelard's reading of Scripture leads him to a theory of morality that he could just as well have developed on the basis of pure philosophical reason, much as Kant was later to do.”⁶⁴ In other words, both King and Porter claim that Abelard is remarkably proto-Kantian.

In contrast to these interpreters, I claim that Abelard does not have the same reverence for sheer duty and its sufficiency for moral praise that appears in the Kantian ethic. Moreover, Abelard does not assess moral goodness through consideration of the agent's conceptualization of their act. Thus, this chapter will be primarily dedicated to detailing Kant's account of moral praise and showing how Abelard's ethic diverges greatly from it. I will accomplish this by demonstrating, against the proto-Kantian interpretation, that Abelard does not view the passions as morally neutral or have an intellectualist understanding of intention or motive.

I. Moral Praise in Kant's Ethics

For the purposes of this argument, the only relevant piece of the Kantian ethical system is Kant's account of moral praiseworthiness. In other words, here I will not be concerned with *how* Kant determines that a given action *ought* to be done, but what makes an agent worthy of praise for completion of a dutiful act. On this point Kant is

⁶³ Porter, Jean. "Responsibility, Passion, and Sin: A Reassessment of Abelard's Ethics." *Journal of Religious Ethics* 28, no. 3 (2000): 390.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 392.

infamous for his claim that emotions or inclinations in acting are morally neutral and should not be the basis of praise or blame, incurring the wrath of avowed virtue and care ethicists. The most explicit example of this claim can be found in Chapter 1 of the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. This example has become known as the cold-hearted benefactor:

Thus suppose the mind of that same friend of humanity were clouded over with his own grief, extinguishing all his sympathetic participation in the fate of others; he still has the resources to be beneficent to those suffering distress, but the distress of other does not touch him because his is sufficiently busy with his own; and now where no inclination any longer stimulates him to it, he tears himself out of this deadly insensibility and does the action without any inclination, solely from duty; only then does it for the first time have its authentic moral worth.⁶⁵

The implication of Kant's words is clear: inclinations to perform action x do not make agent A praiseworthy. On the contrary, the performance of a duty is praiseworthy if and only if agent A performs action x because it is A 's duty, because it is the right thing to do.

Kant goes on to explain that "an action from duty has its moral worth *not in the aim* that is supposed to be attained by it, but rather the maxim in accordance with which it is resolved upon; thus, worth depends not on the actuality of the object of action, but merely on the principle of the volition in accordance with which the action is done,

⁶⁵ Kant, Immanuel. *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. ed. and trans. Allen W. Wood. (Yale University Press: 2002), 14. All page numbers in subsequent citations for the *Groundwork* will be in reference to this translation.

without any regard to any object of the faculty of desire.”⁶⁶ Make no mistake, Kant’s account of moral praise is not teleological. Moreover, the intentional object of one’s desires is irrelevant. What does merit an agent moral praise? Acting in accordance with the principle prescribed by reason because it has been prescribed by reason— an austere commitment to the categorical imperative. Another way this can be explained in ordinary language is that an agent incurs moral praise for the intention with which he acts—*why* the agent performs the action. To return to the example of the cold-hearted benefactor, if Kant’s benefactor discerns that he ought to give to the poor and thereafter provides gives to the poor on the basis of that principle, then our benefactor has acted well.

Of course, this presupposes that intention is regarded in a purely intellectual manner—a reason or purpose one has for acting, akin to Anscombe’s account of intention-with-which. In other words, it is the reason that the benefactor supplies for acting, not the inclination or desire motivating the action. Thus, if one were to ask Kant’s cold-hearted benefactor, “why did you provide assistance to the needy?” he would reply, “because I know I ought to do so.” He would not be counted as praiseworthy if he said, “because I have a deep affection for the poor and afflicted,” or if he claimed, “I was moved to beneficence through sympathy.” These two latter responses would suggest that the inclination or desire in the action was meritorious, not

⁶⁶ Ibid, 15.

a choice to act in accordance with the prescribed ethical principle as determined by the categorical imperative. As C.D. Meyers points out, "Even actions done from love or sympathy have no moral worth for Kant because we cannot choose how we feel."⁶⁷

It is worth noting that there has been serious debate among Kantian scholars as to whether or not dutiful motive must exclude the presence of emotion. For instance, Julie Tannenbaum argues that one can act from the motive of duty while performing an act compassionately. She claims this is clear once one's *reason* for acting is clearly distinguished from the *way* one acts. Marcia Baron maintains that acting from duty does not exclude an inclination from pity, sympathy, etc.⁶⁸ Going even further, she claims that emotions are not altogether irrelevant in the Kantian schema; Kant even prescribes duties to cultivate certain emotions in the *Metaphysics of Morals*. C.D. Meyers rejects these "softened" appraisals of the Kantian ethic and claims that Kant means to suggest the superiority of pure duty as a reason for acting. Regardless of the details, Kant's central claim remains the same: only action from duty merits praise. Persons are regarded as good when they complete their duties because they feel the force of obligation and succeed in carrying it out.

⁶⁷ C. D., Meyers. "The Virtue of Cold-Heartedness." *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal For Philosophy In The Analytic Tradition* no. 2 (2008): 233.

⁶⁸ See: Marcia, Baron. "The Alleged Moral Repugnance of Acting from Duty." *The Journal Of Philosophy* no. 4 (1984): 197-220. And Baron, Marcia "Acting From Duty," in *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. and trans. Allen Wood. (Yale University Press, 2002).

Two central tenets of this Kantian account of moral praise are important for comparison with Abelard. The first is the claim that emotions do not contribute to the moral worth of actions or agents. If we recall, Jean Porter claims Abelard is Kantian in this regard. The second is the claim that motive or intention is understood as the reason one has for acting; it is a matter of rational judgment, not of emotional inclination. A good man, on this account, would be one who knows what he ought, does what he ought, and does so because he ought. On this point, Peter King finds Abelard to be proto-Kantian: moral agents earn merit dependent upon how they conceptualize their actions. In the following section I will show how Abelard's ethics is not Kantian in either respect.

II. Moral Praise in Abelard

In order to demonstrate that neither of these claims is Abelard's—that the passions are morally neutral or that an agent is praiseworthy for how she conceptualizes her actions—let us briefly recall Abelard's understanding of consent and intention outlined in the previous chapter. First, consent is a mere agreeableness of the will. Consent, for Abelard, does not require that an action be performed, but that an agent is ready to perform an action if the opportunity to do so presents itself. Such a readiness can be made in contempt, that is, opposed to the natural law, or it can be made in accordance with the natural law. This alone would be enough to understand Abelard's conception of sin. Sin is, strictly speaking, consent to act in opposition to the

natural law. As a result, knowledge of the law and prudence to determine when it applies are both necessary requirements to avoid the commission of sin.⁶⁹ This alone though, does not suffice to perform good actions. In other words, for Abelard, knowledge and prudence are not enough to constitute a good person; thus, it is not enough to constitute a good action.

To understand Abelard's conception of good persons and acts we must look beyond consent; we must look to the other major theme of Abelard's ethics: intention. The concept of intentionality is not as straightforward as it initially seems. To the modern ear, an intention is a "reason" that an action is performed. This is all well and good if one is reading Kant; this is likely where the West received that notion in the first place! However, it will not suffice if one is trying to understand a twelfth-century monk. For Abelard, an intention corresponds to what one desires in the performance of an action. We may even call an intention the affective cause of an act, one that joins the actor to the object receiving action. Thus, affection links the actor and the direct object. In determining what the intention of an agent is, the most proper question is, "What do they love?" If one, for instance, donates money to a charitable organization, we must ask *why* they do so. In asking why, Abelard would not be looking for the agent to

⁶⁹ Abelard is famous for this point. He is adamant about the fact that knowledge is a necessary condition for the commission of sin. His notorious example of this is not faulting those who condemned Christ because they did not know he was the Son of God. Though, he continuously points out that they may be exonerated from actual sin, due to ignorance, this does not mean they have the possibility of salvation. Salvation is not granted based upon one's ability to avoid sin. However, sin is an impediment to obtaining salvation because it hinders one's perseverance in charity.

supply the rational case for why they understand they should. Instead, he would ask, “What do you love?” In other words, what do you desire in your giving to that organization? Recognition? The attention of a potential lover? God? Only then can we have what Abelard is getting at. We have our *why* when we can locate the love that prompted the performance of an action. The root of our actions is our love. We can have holy desires or loves, which Abelard would describe (along with every other medieval theologian) as *caritas*. Conversely, we can have unholy or carnal desires which he would call, along with Augustine, *cupiditas*.

Still, we have not fully arrived at Abelard’s rather Augustinian notion of intention. In addition to asking, “Why do you love?” we must also ask, “How purely do you love it?” Abelard rightly recognizes that love comes in degrees. In the presence of competing loves, one’s holy desire might be described as rather weak. In the absence of competing loves, *caritas* may be described as pure, undefiled, or strong. Of course, stronger love denotes pure intention: one loves God purely if she loves God and God alone. The process of purifying intention, then, requires some letting go of other loves and strengthening the only one that counts: love of God. Only then can we speak of doing something for the glory of God or loving God in what we do; it affection, not mere intellectual acknowledgement. It is on this basis we determine the merit of human actions. They are good if they stem from *caritas*; merit depends on the object of our love. Strictly speaking, people have *caritas*. Actions are charitable, in that they stem from

caritas—that is, they are performed by a person who loves God in a rather pure way (as opposed to a half-hearted, lukewarm way).

Now, finally, we are in position to compare Abelard's account of moral praise with Kant's, returning to the two relevant features of Kant's account of moral praise outlined earlier. The Kantian Abelard presented by King and Porter should be seeming increasingly suspect. First, does Abelard suggest in *Scito te Ipsum* that the passions are morally neutral? When it comes to discerning what should and should not be considered a sin, Abelard does seem to advocate something quite deontological: consent to an unlawful act is sufficient for sin. However, when it comes to Abelard's assessment of moral praise this is clearly not the case; his criteria for blame and praise are quite different. When it comes to assessing praiseworthiness, or merit, charity renders moral agents righteous and praiseworthy before God. Abelard likens such charity to spiritual desire—a movement of the soul towards God for the sake of himself. Spiritual desires indicate the presence of good intention in acting. Conversely, bad intentions in acting is motivated by carnal desires: wanting to be seen as pious, to dominate, possess, or avenge, etc. On this account, evaluating the praiseworthiness of lawful actions depends upon the intention, or inclination, motivating them. Because desires—whether spiritual or carnal in nature—are key in evaluating the praiseworthiness of the moral agent, Abelard's criteria for moral praise are not only different from Kant's but entirely opposite. Whereas Kant puts forth an ethic based on

pure philosophical reason, Abelard puts forth an ethic based on charity, affection for God.

This first point helps demonstrate the second, namely, Abelard's use of *intentio* is not intellectual in nature. It does not correspond to a plan, a declaration of ends, or a consent to what the conscience deems lawful. Because *intentio* is absolutely not a present desire to perform an action—one consistent with what the conscience deems lawful—as Peter King contends, Abelard does not regard the agent's conceptualization of his or her actions as praiseworthy. In other words, Abelard does not fashion a “medieval categorical imperative.”⁷⁰ If intention is read and understood as a plan to do what one ought, a present desire to perform an action, or even as completely synonymous with consent (an agreeableness of the will to perform an action), it is no wonder that Abelard's ethics has been deemed Kantian. For, on that basis, an agent becomes praiseworthy because he has consented, after discerning what ought to be done according to natural law, to perform a particular action. Using this outline, interpreters have struggled to find a place for *caritas*—and they should because it does not fit here. As a result, some have made the suggestion that love of God is reducible to consenting to what one ought, even if it is difficult, making praiseworthiness of persons dependent upon continence. “Abelard's well-considered view then is that one should show a willingness to follow the will of the order-giver in one's moral consents or

⁷⁰ King, “Abelard's Intentionalist Ethics,” 214

choices.”⁷¹ Theologically speaking, this reduces Abelard’s ethics to a sort of Christian legalism. Charity is evidenced by a willingness to obey the lawgiver.

However, considering Abelard’s *Commentary on Romans* and the *Collationes*, this interpretation simply does not fit. Our analysis thus far has made one thing clear: actions in themselves are not praiseworthy. In order to assess praiseworthiness, Abelard suggests you must examine the root of the action. In effect, having a willingness to obey the lawgiver is only good if we qualify such a willingness substantially. Peter could be willing to obey the lawgiver because he is afraid to be punished. Peter could be willing to obey the lawgiver if he wants his friends to think well of him. A willingness to obey the lawgiver is good only if it is rooted in charity. A fearful or prideful willingness is not meritorious. Similarly, obedience for the sake of obedience is not praiseworthy either. Christian obedience is always with the intention of love, while Kantian obedience is motivated by duty.

In order to distance Abelard from the popular Kantian interpretation, it is worth relishing this point: understanding that an action ought to be done and being pulled to obedience through such obligation is very different than what Abelard suggests. Let us consider this further. It could very well be the case that a man does “good” things his whole life through the force of such Kantian obligation—his will conforms to the

⁷¹ Holopainen, Taina M. “Intentions and Conscious Moral Choices in Peter Abelard’s Know Yourself” in *Rethinking Abelard: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Brill, 2014).

autonomous, rational choice each and every time. However, even a man of such impeccable principle would be wholly insufficient by Abelard's standard of moral worth. For, it is not principle that makes a man, but his love. This is, in part, because the only sort of merit with which Abelard is concerned is soteriological merit. In other words, praiseworthiness is a consideration of whether or not an agent's actions are pleasing to God. Being that charity alone renders the Christian worthy of salvation, charity alone is meritorious.

In this section, I have just outlined Abelard's conception of moral blame and praise. In doing so, I have shown that, according to Abelard, affective inclinations are not morally neutral and that intention should not be taken to convey the rational declaration of some end. Instead, what emerges given the re-reading I proffer, is an ethical account that places clear emphasis on desire or affective inclinations. Abelard, in other words, is not a proto-Kantian who dismisses the role of inclination in assessing the moral praiseworthiness of agents. Instead, Abelard believes affective inclinations are crucial in determining when a moral agent has acted well. This manifests in the attention that Abelard gives to the theme of intention.

III. Struggle and Merit

I have presented a rather bold claim above and in my previous chapters: Abelard places a clear emphasis on affective inclinations and desire in determining the moral praiseworthiness of agents. This can be seen through the centrality of intention in his

ethical account. This may come as a surprise to many of Abelard's interpreters, who have claimed that there is a reoccurring link between merit and struggle against desire—or the passions—in Abelard's writing, most especially in *Scito te Ipsum* and his letters to Heloise. They focus on passages such as the following from *Scito te Ipsum*:

So too nature itself or the constitution of the body makes man prone to luxury just as it does to anger, yet they do not sin in this because that is how they are, but through this they have the material for a struggle so that triumphing over themselves through the virtue of temperance they may obtain a crown (*Sc.* 4:4-7).⁷²

Similarly, he writes to Heloise:

But what you suffer in your heart from the longing of the flesh, which certainly is far greater for your youth, he left intact and kept you then in readiness for your crown. I know it wearies you to hear it and you have told me not to say it, but still the truth is plain—where there is struggle there is also a crown: No one is crowned who does not strive.⁷³

Again, in *Historia Calamitatum*:

The wise men among the pagans—the philosophers—were so named not because of their knowledge but because of the character of their lives. To give examples of their sobriety and self-restraint would be teaching wisdom to Minerva, but I will ask you this: if pagan and laymen could lead

⁷² "Sic et multos ad luxuriam sicut ad iram atura ipsa uel complexio corporis pronos efficit, nec tamen in ipso hoc peccant quia tales sunt, sed pugnae materiam ex hoc habent ut per temperantiae uirtutem de se ipsis triumphantem coronam percipiant."

⁷³ trans. William Levitan in *Abelard & Heloise: The Letters and Other Writings*. (Hackett, 2007). All translations of *Historia Calamitatum* and the canonical letter exchange between Abelard and Heloise will follow this translation. Any modifications of Levitan's translation will be indicated in subsequent footnotes. When I include the Latin or modify the translations, I am using critical edition from J.T. Muckle, "The Personal Letters Between Abelard and Heloise," *Medieval Studies* 15 (1953), 47-94. This is also what Levitan utilized for his own translation. This passage is from the *Fourth Letter*, 101. All page numbers will be in reference to this text. The Latin reads: "refrigerauit ne corruam, multas adolescentiae tuae maiores animi passiones ex assidua carnis suggestione reseruauit ad martyrii coronam. Quod licet te audire taedeat et dici prohibeas, ueritas tamen id loquitur manifesta. Cui enim superest pugna, superest et corona quia non coronabitur nisi qui legitime certauerit."

such lives as these while bound by no religious calling, what should you do—you, a cleric and a canon—to hold your sacred duties above your pleasure, to keep yourself plunging headlong into this Charybdis and sinking irrevocably into sensuality and shame? If you care nothing for the privilege of a cleric, if you hold God’s reverence in low esteem—if nothing else, at least defend the dignity of a philosopher and control this shamelessness with self-respect.⁷⁴

Depending upon how one interprets these passages, they seem to challenge the affective intentionalism I attribute to Abelard, as they may suggest a clear distrust of the passions and reinforce the proto-Kantian reading of his ethics. Thus, it is my goal in this section to consider such claims seriously and explain how Abelard’s language here is not at odds with the affective intentionalism I argue for in this dissertation. In other words, placing a clear importance upon struggling against certain passions in order to obtain virtue does not amount to dismissing the importance of desire and affective inclination all together, especially in the context of merit.

At first glance this struggle Abelard speaks of looks similar in nature to the struggle against inclination that Kant expounds upon in the example of the cold-hearted benefactor. The cold-hearted benefactor struggles against his preoccupation with his

⁷⁴ *Historia Calamitatum*, 17. The full Latin passage is in reference to a claim Augustine makes describing what a philosopher is/was: “Hoc itaque loco cum dicitur “qui modo quodam laudabilis uitae aliis praestare uidebantur, etc.” aperte monstratur sapientes gentium, id est philosophos, ex laude uitae potius quam scientiae sic esse nominatos. Quam sobrie autem atque continenter ipsi uixerint, non est nostrum modo ex exemplis colligere, ne Mineruam ipsam uidear docere. Si autem sic laici gentilesque uixerint nulla scilicet professione religionis astricti, quid te clericum atque canonicum facere oportet, ne diuinis officiis turpes praeferas uoluptates, ne te praecipitem haec Charybdis absorbeat, ne obcenitatibus istis te impudenter atque irreuocabiliter immergas? Qui si clerici praerogatiuam non curas, philosophi saltem defende dignitatem. Si reuerentia Dei contemnitur, amor saltem honestatis impudentiam temperet. Memento Socratem uxoratum fuisse, et quam fedo casu hanc philosophiae labem ipse primo luerit, ut deinceps caeteri exemplo eius cautiore efferentur.”

own misfortune to do what is right—what is discerned through reason. Although he is pulled by a contrary inclination, he, through strength of will, overcomes that pull and acts dutifully. The cold-hearted benefactor, though having no inclination to give, gives to the needy. In both the scenarios offered by Kant and by Abelard in the passages above there is a clear struggle. However, these struggles are very different in kind. Let me explain why.

First, Kant and Abelard are working with two entirely different schemas. Kant's primary concern is to show how inclinations or desires pose a threat to rationality. Why? The passions "allow reflective formation of an immoral maxim."⁷⁵ This is a point that is brought to the fore in feminist critiques of Kant. Lawrence Blum, for instance, claims, that Kant is a "moral rationalist." He defines the moral rationalist as defining morality in terms of "self-control, strength of will, consistency, acting from universal principles, adherence to duty and obligation."⁷⁶ He continues his characterization of the moral rationalist claiming:

A further characteristic of rationalist moral philosophies' conception of the good man is the absence of the following qualities of character: sympathy,

⁷⁵ It is important to note that Kant does not use the word "emotion." As many commentators have pointed out, that is a creation of 19th century readings and the Romantic movement in general. For instance, see: Hare, John, "Kant, the Passions, and the Structure of Moral Motivation," in *Faith, Rationality and the Passions*, ed. Sarah Coakley, (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012). Though there is not space to argue for how Kant uses "desire," "inclination," "passion," and "affect," Hare provides a clear outline. He describes Kantian desire as something that "can come and go" (140). When desires become settled habits of mind they are referred to as inclinations. "When feelings are resistant to reason or reflection, Kant calls them "affects." When this resistance to reason is true of inclinations, he calls them "passions" (140).

⁷⁶ Blum, Lawrence A. "Kant's and Hegel's Moral Rationalism: A Feminist Perspective." *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 12, no. 2 (1982): 287-302.

compassion, kindness, caring for others, human concern, emotional responsiveness. These qualities are much more closely bound up with emotions and with the emotional aspect of human nature than are the qualities associated with rationalism.⁷⁷

So then, the Kantian schema is one in which rationality must overcome the influence sentimentality has on our ethical decision making—the Kantian schema is one of emotion verses reason. In order to merit moral praise, we must utilize a maxim fashioned by pure reason. This is why Kant dares to claim that women are morally inferior to men: their proclivity to sentimentality.⁷⁸

On the contrary, this concern about emotion clouding reason, even the juxtaposition between emotion and reason, is not central for Abelard. Instead, Abelard's schema is quite Pauline—it is about carnal verses spiritual desires and intentions, a battle of wills. Carnal desire should not be understood as that which pertains to the body, strictly speaking, but that which is contrary to holy desire. Under the umbrella of “carnal” would be lust and gluttony but it also might include the desire for prestige, the love of money, etc. In other words, this battle between the carnal and spiritual should be understood within the Pauline and Augustinian framework: the concept of divided will and disordered love that prevents the Christian from a flourishing relationship with Christ. In other words, strong desire is not altogether bad. It is bad when it is not

⁷⁷ Ibid

⁷⁸ See: Marwah, Inder S. “What Nature Makes of Her: Kant's Gendered Metaphysics.” *Hypatia* 28, no. 3 (August 2013): 551–67. Marwah claims that, “women's sub-ordinate status is internally connected to Kant's view of moral personhood.”

properly ordered, when one loves something more than Christ. Therefore, strong carnal desire is negative not because it clouds reason, *per se*, but because it weakens love of God.⁷⁹ In fact, when love of God is pure and primary the mind's eye sees clearly.

Second, Kant and Abelard are utilizing different conceptions of will. For Kant, will amounts to a faculty of choice; an exercise of will is an exercise of choice. Thus, the word "will" in the Kantian usage is much closer to "consent" in Abelard's usage. However, in Abelard's usage, will is not contrasted to feeling or desire; will is occurrent desire, which includes feeling.⁸⁰ This is why he continually speaks of acting contrary to one's own will. He says, for instance, "What else is it to bear the cross, to suffer some crucifixion, but to act in a way against the will though it seems so easy or advantageous?"⁸¹ Dying to self or taking up one's cross means dying to selfish desire so that one may follow the will of God. It presumes a multiplicity of wills and that some wills or desires are congruent with God's and others are not. Finally, it presumes that a will is licit if and only if it is congruent with God's. In this sense, one's struggle against his will or struggles against the flesh in order to walk according to the spirit. This does

⁷⁹ In the *Seventh Letter* to Heloise, Abelard gives a detailed account of the religious rule for the Paraclete. All of his instructions come back to this notion of purifying desire—intention—so that it is single and for God alone. He continuously makes a distinction between doing *good* and doing *well*. To do well, he says, is "to act with correct intention." It involves loving God and extinguishing selfish desire in our hearts.

⁸⁰ This is Thomas Williams's language. He defines Abelardian will in this way in "Will and Intellect" *Cambridge Companion to Medieval Ethics* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 243.

⁸¹ *Seventh Letter*, 173. "Aut quid est aliud crucem ferre, id est cruciatum aliquem sustinere, nisi contra uoluntatem nostram aliquid fieri quantumcumque illud uideatur facile nobis esse uel utile?"

not suggest that all emotion is contrary to acting with right reason, even though it can be. Instead, it merely suggests that certain desires or wills may be contrary to God's will or command.

This concept of divided will makes it completely plausible for Abelard to speak of suffering or struggle as opportunity for merit without compromising the importance of affective inclinations in the assessment of persons or acts. Why? Because it is possible that someone may have two occurrent wills—one carnal and one spiritual. Furthermore, it is good and praiseworthy to forsake one's will—desire—out of love for God. This is Abelard's point and the very reason he emphasizes intention while maintaining that suffering can be meritorious. Forsaking will and want out of charity—the movement of the soul towards God for the sake of himself—is praiseworthy. As far as Abelard is concerned, anything done in charity is praiseworthy. So here we have it: the Abelardian struggle is one between spiritual and carnal desire, love of God is the praiseworthy motivational force. On the other hand, the Kantian struggle is between reason and emotion, one acts well, or dutifully, when rationality beats out inclination in the formation of ethical principle.

IV. Moving Beyond the Kantian Appraisal

The spiritual and theological context of *intentio* yields a vastly different account of Abelardian ethics. Though Abelard is most certainly philosophically driven and implements the tools of logic to discern religious questions, his theological concerns

about grace, spiritual affections, purity of heart are much more central to his ethical account than previously acknowledged. When taken seriously, these theological concerns render a nuanced Augustinian ethic, not a proto-Kantian one. This realization is crucial in understanding both Abelard as a monastic figure in the Middle Ages and his ethical project more specifically. Abelard's ethics is not a prototype of the Early Modern project. Moreover, it does not need to be paraded as one in order to merit philosophical interest. Instead, he provides a robust philosophical account of sin and salvific merit with the dialectical acumen of a logician, allowing him to elucidate rather muddled concepts received from the Patristic tradition. Ultimately, the only prototype of future philosophical movements that can be seen brewing in Abelard's ethics is the scholasticism of the High Middle Ages.

Now that it has been demonstrated that Abelard's ethic is not a proto-Kantian, what is it *really*? If we are going to assess Abelard's ethics using modern philosophical categories and distinctions, we will find that his ethics does not fit perfectly into any of them—virtue ethics, natural law, deontology, divine command, care ethics, or consequentialism. In fact, with the exception of consequentialism, there are traces of each of these in Abelard's thought. Abelard talks incessantly of virtue but alludes to the fact that charity alone is the only *real* virtue—one that cannot be practiced into reality. He upholds a notion of natural law though it is overwhelmingly clear that the natural law alone is insufficient in determining the moral praiseworthiness of agents. He

recognizes the importance of obedience to divine command but does not admit the praiseworthiness of obedience without qualification. Meanwhile, he considers the role of intention and affective inclination but also acknowledges that immense zeal can sometimes cloud the mind's eye and lead to illicit resolutions.

I suggest that we shouldn't force Abelard's ethics into any of these categories previously mentioned. Instead, we should acknowledge it for what it is: an ethic of charity. I believe this designation is particularly fitting because charity is, in fact, the defining feature of Abelard's ethic and the lens through which he understands and evaluates human action. An ethic of charity has the following necessary conditions for good actions. First, as far as Abelard is concerned, love of God necessarily includes adherence to the natural law because it is born of the Holy Spirit. If someone truly possess charity they will not be led in error—they will not be led to believe that something contrary to the natural law is good. Ignorance may, in some cases, exonerate an agent from blame, but it does not make a bad action good. Second, an act must be consented to with charitable intentions, which presumes that the agent possess charity—a movement of the soul towards God for the sake of himself. In other words, an agent must love God for his actions to be considered good in a strict sense. This is not a matter of constructing a principle consonant with charity and also differs from the simple acknowledgment that God's precepts and commands are good; it is knowing and loving God *in persona Christi*. Thus, charity is sufficient to determine the moral

quality of acts. Lastly, charity is also sufficient in assessing the moral quality of persons. Someone is a good person because they are inclined by charity – they love in the manner that God loves, see through the lens that God sees, understand through the precepts God has set forth. In other words, someone is good because they become more like Christ – vessels of selfless love.

This ethic of charity manifests perfectly in a sermon of Abelard’s written for the Paraclete during Lent, entitled “On Almsgiving.”⁸² Abelard claims that charity itself, if truly present in the heart of the Christian, produces an affection for the poor. In other words, a Christian *feels* differently towards the poor. Throughout the sermon he employs the metaphor of fire, which enflames the heart with love for the poor and afflicted, and the metaphor of water, which hardens one’s heart to the needs of others. Fire is the warmth brought into the Christian heart through charity. Water is the absence of this warmth—a stagnant heart that has yet to be enflamed by the love of God. Abelard’s exhortation is not to warn Christians that they have a duty to give to the poor. Instead, he suggests that charity will change the way a Christian sees the poor. It will move their heart to compassion and pity, which will prompt them to give. Seeing the poor should make them feel something specific. He even argues that almsgiving has

⁸² It is worth noting that the sermons for the Paraclete were likely written after Abelard’s *Scito te Ipsum*. “On Almsgiving” is the thirtieth sermon in a collection of thirty-five that were sent to the nuns at the Paraclete. The original Latin title is *De eleemosyna pro sanctimonialibus de Paraclito*, “On Almsgiving for the nuns of the Paraclete.” I have shorted the title to “On Almsgiving” for convenience.

acquired the name “charity” because it is a practice of those who are most on fire for God, saying, “Thus, because of this, almsgiving itself has been called by the special name of “*caritas*,” meaning charity. On the contrary, hardheartedness toward the poor displays a frigid mind (*mens*), utterly bereft of the fire of charity.”⁸³ For Abelard, there is no such thing as a cold-hearted, Christian benefactor—a Christian benefactor who is not moved by the plight of the less fortunate. Ultimately, Abelard explains the importance of almsgiving through underscoring the importance of Christian emotion. He argues that compassion for the poor is a consequence of charity. Without it, he claims, our minds and hearts are hardened, they refuse to hear the “cry of the poor” (*clamore pauperum*). Charity inclines the heart towards the poor and increases affection for the have-nots. Charity is the indelible mark of true Christian character.

He continues the sermon offering an argument as to why Christians should practice almsgiving. He doesn’t make any sort of deontological claim. Instead, that almsgiving is a good Christian practice for two reasons. First, he argues that giving to the poor helps decrease inordinate desire and preoccupation with “unrighteous mammon” that we have acquired and assumed to be our own. Through giving, he

⁸³ Quotations from “On Almsgiving” are my own translations, which utilize the Latin from *Petrus Abaelardus opera*, edd. Victor Cousin, adiuvante C. Jourdain et E. Despois. Tomus prior, Paris, 1849. This was conveniently scanned to forumromanum.org. Because these translations are my own, I have included the Latin from the critical edition here and for each subsequent quotation: “Unde et per excellentiam quamdam ipsa elemosynae largitas quasi proprio iam uel speciali nomine caritas uocari consuevit. Sic e contrario obduratio mentis in pauperes maxime frigidam mentem esse conuincit, et ab omni caritatis igne priuatam...”

argues, we loosen the grip that such mammon (money, wealth) has in our lives and make room for love of God to grow. He substantiates this claim by referencing Luke 11:41, in which Christ himself encourages almsgiving in order to cleanse the soul—to decrease carnal desire.⁸⁴ He later compares the Christian’s desire for money to Judas’s betrayal of Christ.

Judas took unrighteous mammon as payment for betraying Christ; by holding on to unrighteous mammon we ourselves are constantly killing Christ. We accuse Judas for handing over Christ once in exchange for money, but we do not accuse ourselves when our desire (*cupiditatem*) for money nails him to the cross again and again. Brothers and sisters, let us transform the mammon of iniquity into the mammon of equity and justice.⁸⁵

The desire to hold onto money that, Abelard argues, isn’t even ours in the first place, is no different than Judas handing over Christ for thirty pieces of silver. One’s preoccupation with money is a choice to love money over Christ and the poor whom he loves. In effect, we exchange Jesus for money. His exhortation to give alms is substantiated by calling to mind that it is a sort of spiritual exercise—one that shapes desire by decreasing carnal love.

In addition, this is a point Abelard also emphasizes repeatedly in his Rule for the community of nuns at the Paraclete:

⁸⁴ Luke 12:41: “So give for alms those things that are within; and see, everything will be clean for you” (NRSV).

⁸⁵ Suscepit Iudas mammonam iniquitatis, ut Christum traderet. Nos mammonam retinentes iniquitatis, ipsum interficere non cessamus. Accusamus Iudam, quod eum propter pecuniam semel tradidit. Non accusamus nos, quod per pecuniae cupiditatem eum quotidie quasi iterum crucifigentes interficimus. Transferamus, fratres, istam mammonam iniquitatis in mammonam aequitatis atque iustitiae.

But when we renounce our possessions and ourselves, then truly is our property cast aside and truly do we enter in the life of the apostles, in which all things were held in common [...] All things were for the common good and no one sought what was his own but only what was Christ's. There was no other way they could live without property, which consists more of desires than possessions.⁸⁶

Here Abelard explains monastic vow of poverty in terms of desire. The reason for giving up possessions is so that they do not preoccupy the mind and divert one's attention from Christ. All aspects of the monastic life, in fact, are traced back to this purpose: to increase the purity of devotion and prayer. In other words, to increase charity.

Abelard's second point in justifying the practice of almsgiving is that it is sacramental—it makes God's love visible. Through giving to the poor the Christian increases knowledge and awareness of God's love. "Clearly, as your charity to the poor is extended, the Lord is not only made known to you, but is made known to others through your example," he preaches to the nuns of the Paraclete.⁸⁷ Why? It is because of that love (God's love for them) that they are moved to give—charity or giving alms is understood as a unique Christian call. In effect, good deeds take on this evangelical

⁸⁶ *Seventh Letter*, 173. The Latin reads: "Cum uero ita tam rebus nostris quam nobis ipsis penitus renuntiamus, tunc uere omni proprietate abiecta uitam illam apostolicam inimus, quae omnia in commune reducit [...] Alioquin nequaquam sine proprietate uiueretur, quae magis in ambitione quam in possessione consistit.

⁸⁷ Ut uestra uidelicet caritas pauperibus impensa, non solum uos Dominus lucretur, sed exemplo uestro alios ei acquirat.

spirit, allowing others outside the faith to be drawn to the Kingdom of God through an encounter with love.

Abelard's justifications for almsgiving both come back to charity. The importance of good deeds, almsgiving being one of them, is justified through explaining how they increase love on an individual and communal level. Giving extinguishes greed or inordinate desire through letting go of our possessions and our preoccupation with them and it also allows others to have an experience of charity that awakens them to the reality of God's love. In addition, Abelard also explains the cause of giving to be rooted in charity. He insists that charity makes almsgiving possible. When Abelard suggests that charity warms the heart and mind, it is obvious that he implies charity causes Christians to *feel* something for the poor—to be moved by their suffering and poverty. This is a stark contrast to the Kantian proposal. One might even describe Kant's "cold-hearted benefactor" as a foil to the portrait of Christian love that Abelard paints in his sermon. In it, he maintains that Christian love is not merely performing loving actions nor is it doing loving actions because they are the right thing to do. Instead, charity changes the way the Christian sees the poor. Charity "warms the heart" and enflames affection for those whom God loves. Through charity the Christian sees the poor in the same manner that Christ would see them. This recognition procures affection, an affection that is impossible without the grace of charity. As a result, this sermon

perfectly demonstrates that Abelard's ethic really is an ethic of charity. All things that pertain to the good, Christian life are unquestionably rooted in this love.

V. Conclusions

I believe it is clear through what I have presented that the Kantian appraisal of Abelard is misguided and forced. Due to the conflation of intention and consent procured by a modern bias in understanding intent, different usages and notions of "will," and an improper construal of struggle through failure to couch struggle within the context of a divided will, Abelard's ethics has been lost in translation. Truly, the theological foundation of his ethics has been cast aside in exchange for a modern schema of reason against emotion—a concern that is not truly present in the text.

While Abelard's suggestions are not particularly novel, they are lost when a Kantian ethical framework is ascribed to him. The Kantian suggestion of a *practical* Christian love is rather bourgeois—the very passion-less, duty-centered Christianity that Soren Kierkegaard so rightly despised. This is not the sort of Christianity Abelard endorses. However, if we take King and Porter's interpretations of his ethics, that is exactly where they lead: to a reading that is largely incongruent with his theological commitments.

CHAPTER FOUR:

SOLA CARITATE

So far, I have come close to providing a full account of Abelard's ethical theory. In Chapter 1, I discussed the Augustinian foundation and context for Abelard's understanding of intention and demonstrated that intention is a central theme present in his interpretation of the Gospel. In Chapter 2, I carefully distinguished between intention and consent and exposed some possible sources for the history of conflating the two terms in the secondary literature. In Chapter 3, I showed that Abelard is not a proto-Kantian and suggested that he does not fit neatly into any contemporary ethical categories. As a result, I claimed we might best understand Abelard as prescribing an "ethic of charity," *caritas*. Although the reading I have provided so far demonstrates *what* makes a person and their actions praiseworthy — *caritas* — there is still some question as to how one obtains charity and cultivates it in order to become all that Abelard suggests the Christian can be. It will be the goal of this final chapter to explain this mystery, only to the extent that Abelard is able. In answering this question, it will become increasingly clear that the ethical life and the spiritual life are indistinguishable, as the answer depends upon the Incarnation and atonement. As a result, though

Abelard tries to find a place for virtuous pagans, he is unable to do so successfully, while also maintaining that charity is sufficient for virtue and salvation.

The present chapter, which will complete this nuanced account of Abelard's ethics, will be divided into two parts. First, I would like to utilize the nuanced account of Abelard's atonement clearly outlined by Thomas Williams and Phillip Quinn. Using and expanding upon the work they have already done, I will clearly situate Abelard's ethics within his theory of atonement. One participates in Christ's atoning work (the objective sacrifice of Christ available to all people) through being joined to Christ in charity, in love. This depends upon the subjective response and transformation of the Christian. In other words, I argue that Abelard's emphasis on intention in his ethics fits within a larger theological narrative, one about the Christian's transformation in Christ and how that transformation occurs. Christ turns out to be the climax of this salvific narrative because his life, passion, death, and resurrection make possible the sanctification of intention—the gift of the Incarnation engenders a response of charity. In the second half of this chapter, I will consider how this narrative creates an especially difficult dilemma for pagan virtue, since Abelard believes virtue is predicated upon knowing and loving Christ.

I. Abelard's Theory of Atonement

Abelard's theory of atonement has a long history of misinterpretation. In most standard Christian theology anthologies Abelard is accused of being an advocate and inventor of the moral exemplar theory of atonement—Christ came to be an example of holiness and through following his example we can merit salvation through working out our sanctification.⁸⁸ This unorthodox account is normally highlighted as a contrast to orthodox explanations of Christ's saving work, such as Anselm's satisfaction theory or Luther's penal substitution theory.⁸⁹ The dissatisfaction with Abelard's apparent moral exemplarism is that it refuses some objective transaction, in which Christ's saving work accomplishes salvation on behalf of sinners. Richard Swinburne, for instance, emphatically dismisses Abelard's account in *Responsibility and Atonement* because "Abelard's exemplary theory of the atonement, that Christ's life and death work to

⁸⁸ Rashdall Hastings posits this notion in *The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology* (Macmillan, 1919), 360. Gustaf Aulén suggests something similar in *Christus Victor*, (Wipf & Stock, 1931), 96: "He was, indeed, so far in accord with the mindset of the period that all his thought lay on the moralistic level." It is worth noting that this caricature of his theory of atonement was likely popularized by Bernard of Clairvaux. For instance, Bernard claims, "This is the righteousness of man in the blood of the Redeemer: which this son of perdition, by his scoffs and insinuations, is attempting to render vain; so much so, that he thinks and argues that the whole fact that the Lord of Glory emptied Himself, that He was made lower than the angels, that He was born of a woman, that He lived in the world, that He made trial of our infirmities, that He suffered indignities, that at last He returned to His own place by the way of the Cross, that all this is to be reduced to one reason alone, viz., that it was done merely that He might give man by His life and teaching a rule of life, and by His suffering and death might set before him a goal of charity. Did He, then, teach righteousness and not bestow it? Did He show charity and not infuse it, and did He so return to His heaven?" in Letter LX, "Against Certain Heads of Abelard's Heresies," in *The Complete Works of S. Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux*, trans. Joannes Mabillon, (John Hodges, 1904).

⁸⁹ It is worth noting that some, such as Gustaf Aulén, claim that Luther's atonement theory is more akin to a "classic" view of atonement. He argues that Luther prescribes a *Christus Victor* model of atonement, where Christ defeats death and sin through his passion death, and, resurrection. Consequently, we can share in that victory through faith.

remove our sins by inspiring us to penitence and good acts, contains no objective transaction.”⁹⁰

However, in recent years the secondary scholarship has tackled this mistake. Thomas Williams explains in the *Cambridge Companion to Abelard* that Abelard’s atonement theory does not refuse acknowledgement of an objective transaction: “The exemplarist reading denies any such objective benefit and therefore misses a key aspect of Abelard’s theory of the Atonement.”⁹¹ Likewise, Phillip Quinn describes Abelard as a hierarchical pluralist—his atonement theory has a number of moving parts, one of them being penal substitution; however, the dominant motif is exemplarism. In other words, simply because Abelard could be described as exemplarist, that does not exclude the use and implementation of additional metaphors and motifs in his atonement theory. I agree with Quinn and Williams that Abelard is not a pure exemplarist—there are objective and subjective elements present in Abelard’s atonement theory. The remainder of this section will detail what, exactly, those objective and subjective elements are and how they are relevant to Abelard’s ethics by looking at *Scito te Ipsum* and Abelard’s *Romans Commentary*.

⁹⁰ Swinburne, Richard. *Responsibility and Atonement* (Clarendon Press, 1989), 162.

⁹¹ Williams, Thomas. “Sin, Grace, and Redemption,” in *Cambridge Companion to Abelard*. (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 259.

As Williams describes, according to Abelard humans need a redeemer because they are under the dominion of sin.⁹² There is an objective aspect of this dominion and a subjective aspect of this dominion. First, let us review the objective dominion, which is a direct result of original sin. Though Abelard's view on original sin deviates from the norm, he does hold that all human beings incur punishment as a result of original sin—the sin of Adam. He proposes that “Properly, as we observed above, sin is said to be that contempt of God or consent to evil from which little children and the naturally foolish are immune” (*Sc. 56: 22-23*).⁹³ In other words, sin in the strict sense cannot be said of everyone. He takes this view because, as he demonstrates in *Scito te Ipsum*, consent is needed for sin and consent requires reason. Therefore, humans without the ability to consent (those who lack the power of reason) are unable to sin. However, sin can also be discussed in terms of penalty. Abelard contends that when we speak of “original sin” we speak of sin in terms of penalty. He claims, “But when we say that little ones have original sin or that all of us, as the Apostle says, have sinned in Adam, the effect is as if to say that by his sin we have incurred the beginning of our punishment or the sentence of damnation” (*Sc. 56: 30-32*).⁹⁴ From this we gather that

⁹² Williams, Thomas, “Sin, Grace, and Redemption,” 265-269.

⁹³ All of the translations from *Scito te Ipsum* are taken from Luscombe (Oxford, 1971). Luscombe also provides a Latin critical edition of the text in the same publication.

⁹⁴ Abelard discusses this point in the *Romans Commentary* as well. See Book II in a *Quaestio* on sin following his exposition of Romans 5:14: “Since, therefore, we say that men are begotten and born with original sin and also contract this same original sin from the first parent, it seems that this should refer more to the punishment of sin, for which, of course, they are held liable to punishment, than to the fault of the soul and the contempt for God. For the one who cannot yet use free choice nor yet has any exercise

human beings are not born sinful, *per se*; they are born bearing the punishment for the first sin of Adam. So the objective dominion of sin is the punishment we incur through the first sin of Adam.

Now what about the subjective dominion? As Williams explains, concupiscence is the subjective dominion of sin Abelard describes in the *Romans Commentary*.⁹⁵ Abelard understands concupiscence in the typical Augustinian way: disordered love. Human beings love the wrong things too much and the right things too little. This inordinate love results in turmoil—we know what is right but for some reason do not want it as we should. Thus, a lot of time is spent chasing after things that ultimately lead to our degradation. In other words, we are subject to the power of our own rogue desire, enslaved to ourselves.

So far we have gathered, with the help of Williams's exposition of the *Romans Commentary*, that there is an objective and subjective dominion of sin in Abelard's theory of atonement. This means that there also must be an objective and subjective redemption from sin, which is precisely what we find Abelard describing. The objective redemption is the notion that Christ died *for* the remission of sin—to remove the punishment for sin, which is damnation. This is accomplished through the Passion—the

of reason, as though he recognizes the author or deserves the precept of obedience, no transgression, no negligence should be imputed to him, nor any merit at all by which he might be worthy of reward or punishment, more than to those beasts, when they seem either to do harm or to help in something."

⁹⁵ Williams, Thomas, "Sin, Grace, and Redemption," 267-269.

suffering and death of Christ on the cross. The subjective redemption depends upon an individual's transformation in Christ. If the subjective dominion of sin suggests that people are enslaved by inordinate loves, then the subjective redemption of sin denotes a release from these inordinate loves. When someone is released from the subjective dominion of sin, she can love what she ought. This is precisely what the subjective transformation entails, coming to love Christ and letting go of other loves that are impediments to relation with him. This does not mean that one will never struggle against carnal desire. Instead, it means that the love of Christ allows one to conquer those desires.

II. Justified by Love

Now there are two questions that we might consider that help make more sense of this atonement theory. First, how is Christ's expiation for sin transferred to particular people? Second, why was it necessary for God to become man to accomplish all this—to atone for the punishment of original sin and to remove the dominion of concupiscence? Why couldn't one final, really awesome goat suffice? First, let us consider the matter of transference. How does a particular person gain access to the merits of Christ's sacrifice? Martin Luther has one possible answer: one is justified or made right with God by virtue of one's faith.⁹⁶ One gains the merits of Christ through accepting Jesus as

⁹⁶ Martin Luther indicates this pretty explicitly in "On Christian Liberty," trans. Henry Wace and C. A. Buchheim, in *First Principles of the Reformation* (John Murray, 1883), 108: "But you ask how it can be the fact that faith alone justifies, and affords without works so great a treasure of good things, when so

one's personal Lord and savior. Another possible answer is the prevailing Roman Catholic sentiment of the Middle Ages: the sacraments. In baptism one is justified; through reception of the Eucharist one is joined to the sacrifice of Christ; in confirmation one receives the gifts of the Holy Spirit; in confession the grace of God's mercy, etc.

Though Abelard would not deny the importance of faith and the sacraments, he considers neither to be sufficient for transference of Christ's merits. As he sees it, faith is a feature common to the saved and the reprobate:

But he imparts this grace equally to the reprobate and the elect by instructing each one equally about this, so that by the same grace of faith which they obtained, one is aroused to good works, and the other is rendered inexcusable through the negligence of his sluggishness. Therefore, this faith, which works in the first through love, and is of no effect, inactive, unfruitful, and inoperative in the other one, is the grace of God, which goes before each of the elect, so that he may begin to desire well; and again it follows the beginning of a good will, so that that will may persevere. (*Comm. Rom. IV.9:21, 298-9*).⁹⁷

many works, ceremonies, and laws are prescribed to us in the Scriptures. I answer: before all things bear in mind what I have said, that faith alone without works justifies, sets free, and saves, as I shall show more clearly below."

⁹⁷ All of my quotes from the Romans Commentary follow Stephen Cartwright, (Catholic University Press, 2012). If amendments to his translations are made, I will indicate this in the footnotes. I will utilize, as Cartwright has done, the Latin critical edition provided by E.M. Buytaert, CCCM 11 (Turnhout, 1969). Latin for this passage is: Hanc autem gratiam tam reprobis ipse quam electis pariter impertit, utrosque scilicet ad hoc aequaliter instruendo, ut ex eadem fidei gratia quam perceperunt, alius ad bona opera incitetur, alius per torporis sui negligentiam inexcusabilis reddatur. Haec itaque fides quae in isto per dilectionem operatur, in illo inens et segms atque otiosa uacat, gratia Dei est quae unumquemque electum praeuenit, ut bene uelle incipiat, ac rursus bonae uoluntatis exordium subsequitur, ut uoluntas ipsa perseueret.

In other words, there seem to be a lot of Christians who claim to believe and accept Christ but have no corresponding transformation—they lay claim to the objective redemption but are still walking according to the flesh. The same seems to be the case with the sacraments. Many get baptized and show no signs of personal transformation. Abelard is clear that the sacraments themselves are not sufficient for salvation; someone can be deemed righteous even without the sacrament of baptism.

For if someone already believes and loves before he is baptized—just like Abraham, concerning whom it is written, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness,” and perhaps Cornelius, whose merciful acts were accepted by God when he had not yet been baptized—and truly repents of his previous sins, just like the tax collector who went down from the temple justified—I do not hesitate to say that he is righteous or has righteousness (*iustitia*), which renders to each person what is his. (*Comm Rom.* II.3.27, 170).⁹⁸

In one breath Abelard identifies three examples of men who have “righteousness” without the sacrament of baptism. He considers each of these cases to be instances in which the person already believes and has love. This notion—that love, charity, can provide clear exceptions to the rules—also manifests in his treatment of confession in

Scito te Ipsum:

With this sigh and contrition of heart which we call true repentance sin does not remain, that is, the contempt of God or consent to evil, because the charity of God which inspires this sigh does not put up with fault. In this sigh we are instantly reconciled to God and we gain pardon [...] For

⁹⁸ “Nam et antequam aliquis baptizaretur, si iam credit et diligit, sicut Abraham de quo scriptum est: Credidit Abraham Deo et reputatum est ei ad iustitiam et fortasse Cornelius nondum baptizatus cuius eleemosynae susceptae sunt a Deo, et de praeteritis peccatis uere poenitet sicut publicanus qui de templo descendit iustificatus. Eum iustum non dubito seu iustitiam habere qui unicuique reddit quod suum est.”

although he may be prevented by some necessity from having an opportunity of coming to confession or of performing satisfaction, he by no means meets hell on leaving this life sighing thus. (*Sc.* 88: 5-22)⁹⁹

True repentance is born of charity; it is the sigh or groan of an offense against God because he is loved. As a result, true contrition is unfathomable without love as its source. If Peter dies and is prevented from going to confession beforehand, this does not necessarily mean he ceases to be forgiven for his sins. This is because, as Abelard contends, reconciliation is the consequence of love, not the consequence of a technicality.¹⁰⁰

In order to make sense of this, let us consider the alternative. Peter can be truly sorry he has sinned because he does not want the punishment for sin. He could go to confession, confess his sins, and technically be absolved. However, if Peter does so because he simply he fears punishment, it is not counted to him as righteousness—it does not reconcile him to God. Putting all of this together, there is one sufficient condition for salvation: love, charity. While faith is logically prior to love, it is not sufficient for salvation. While the sacraments are important in maintaining love, they

⁹⁹ “Cum hoc autem gemitu et contrition cordis, quam uerum penitentiam dicimus, peccatum non permanent, hoc est, contemptus Dei siue consensus in malum, quia karitas Dei hunc gemitum inspirans non patitur culpam. In hoc statim gemitu Deo reconciliamur et precedentis peccati ueniam assequimur [...] Et si enim articulo necessitates preuentus non habeat locum ueniendi ad confessionem uel peragendi satisfactionem, nequaquam in hoc gemitu de hac uita recedens gehennam incurrit...”

¹⁰⁰ See: Lucas Briola argues this point in “A case study of scholasticism: Peter Abelard and Peter Lombard on penance.” *Journal Of Moral Theology* 5, no. 1 (January 2016): 65-85 and Susan Kramer does as well in “We speak to God with Our Thoughts: Abelard and the Implications of Private Communication with God,” *Church History* 69, no. 1 (March 2000): 18-40.

are not sufficient for salvation. Strictly speaking, the Christian is not saved by faith or the sacraments, but love.¹⁰¹ This is how the merits of Christ are transferred to particular people—charity.¹⁰²

And if we diligently pay attention, nothing transitory is worthy of the reward of eternal good. For only charity, which never passes away, merits eternal life; and those who are equal in charity are held as equals before God in reward, even if another is deprived of the operation of charity, entangled by some failure. Therefore, blessed Augustine rightly claims that John, who did not suffer, has a crown of martyrdom equal to that which Peter has, who did suffer, so that God may consider not so much the effect of the suffering as the inner disposition. (*Comm Rom.* III.8.18, 275)¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ It is worth pointing out that Abelard's suggestion is consonant with scripture, probably the most well-known passage in the Pauline epistles, the Ode to Love. I included part the passage, 1 Cor. 13: 1-13, for comparison: "If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love."

¹⁰² It is worth noting that although charity is sufficient, Abelard by no means suggests that the sacraments are unimportant. In addition, he suggests that faith is necessary for love because one cannot love without knowing God. This requires belief. Abelard is seeking to answer the question in terms of necessity. If one could be saved without *x*, then *x* is not a necessary condition for salvation.

¹⁰³ Et si diligenter attendamus, nihil transitorium aeterni boni remuneratione dignum est. Sola quippe caritas, quae numquam excidit, uitam promeretur aeternam; et quicumque aequales sunt caritate, pares apud Deum habentur remuneratione, etiamsi alter effectu caritatis priuatur aliquo casu praepeditus. Unde et merito beatus Augustinus aequalem de martyrio coronam asserit habere Iohannem qui passus non est, quam et Petrus habet qui passus est, ut non tam passionis effectum quam affectum Deus attendat.

Abelard's answer has obvious benefits over the faith-based theory of transference or a sacramental theory of transference. As I already suggested, in the case of faith and the sacraments there is a seeming disconnect between the objective and subjective.

Redemption in the objective domain does not denote redemption in the subjective domain. Peter could claim faith in the Gospel and still act nothing like Jesus. Peter could participate in sacramental life and still look nothing like Jesus. This disconnect between the objective and subjective redemption of sin makes salvation technical—it consists of believing the right things or performing certain religious rituals. As a result, soteriology and morality become distinct discussions. In other words, one can be saved without also being transformed.¹⁰⁴

Abelard avoids these pitfalls by locating charity as the medium of transference. Charity is the effective means through which the merits of Christ are transferred to particular people and the means of subjective transformation. In other words, love is the agent of objective and subjective redemption—it removes the punishment of sin and the subjective dominion of sin, concupiscence. As a result, it is impossible to speak of removing the punishment for sin without also speaking of the subjective transformation of a particular person. In Abelard's theory of atonement we see a complete synthesis of the soteriological and the moral. Moreover, redemption and transformation of

¹⁰⁴ This notion of transformation accompanying redemption is a Pauline theme in his epistle to the Romans 12:2, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

particular people both depend upon the paschal mystery—Christ’s passion, death, and resurrection.

This is the perfect point to consider the second question I proposed as being worthy of consideration: Why did Christ need to become a person to enable this entire process? How come one final, really awesome goat could not suffice and accomplish the same effects? The answer requires taking a look at moral psychology. As Phillip Quinn suggests, Abelard’s theory of atonement provides a keen awareness of *how* human beings work.¹⁰⁵ This is useful in understanding the *why* of the Incarnation and its relation to the theory of atonement Abelard puts forth. In what follows, I would like to expound upon that notion—that Abelard’s theory provides keen awareness of how human beings work—by focusing on the role of moral exemplars in creating virtue and what kind of exemplars are effective in achieving that end.

First, I will begin with Jennifer Herdt’s explanation of the connection between virtue and moral exemplars in Aristotle, which has significant insights that will be helpful in understanding the subjective elements of Abelard’s theory of atonement. I am not suggesting that Abelard is inspired to create an atonement theory based upon

¹⁰⁵ Quinn discusses this in “Abelard on Atonement” in *Reasoned Faith*, 209: “It seems that one of the advantages of the Abelardian emphasis on love in giving an account of the Atonement is precisely that it provides a model of psychological transformation rooted in ordinary human experience that can be analogically extended to divine action. Many of us have actually experienced the power of human love influence our characters for the better by provoking a response of love, and some of us have experienced the power of human love, and some of us have experienced the power of meditation on the example of love displayed in the life and death of Christ to contribute to bringing about such psychological improvements in us.”

Aristotelian moral psychology. I am merely pointing out that Herdt's explanation can help defend an otherwise curious emphasis on the exemplarism of Christ and the corresponding subjective emphasis Abelard places on his atoning work. Herdt claims:

What is crucial in order for one's desires to be transformed into those of a virtuous person (such that one performs the actions characteristic of a virtuous person but does so with the accompanying enjoyment in doing the right things for the right reasons and in the right ways) is that one *love and be loved* by the moral exemplar set before one.¹⁰⁶

She continues:

Moreover, forced compliance alone cannot give rise to more than continence; it might over time relieve the pain of unfamiliarity and yield mechanical conformity, but not a positive enjoyment.¹⁰⁷

Herdt's central claim contains two suggestions. First, a student of virtue must love their teacher—their exemplar. Second, a student of virtue must be loved *by* their teacher—their exemplar. If one of these pieces is missing, then the student will fail to cultivate the intrinsic motivation necessary for virtue—she won't do what is right for the right reasons and enjoy doing so. In pointing this out, Herdt underscores the fact that love is the bedrock for virtue. It is important to distinguish love and admiration, for love occurs only in the context of relationship. Without it, she insists, the student of virtue can accomplish nothing more than continence or forced compliance. By definition,

¹⁰⁶ Herdt, Jennifer. *Putting on Virtue: The Legacy of Splendid Vice*. (University of Chicago Press, 2008), 28-9.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid

forced compliance does not leave room for the possibility that one enjoys the good. In effect, forced compliance inherently falls short of the criteria for virtue.

If we explore the notion of Christ as moral exemplar, he fits the bill in both of these significant ways. He is not merely a person we point to as worthy of imitation, like a saint or a winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. Quinn makes a similar point: “The love of God for us exhibited in the life of Christ is a good example to imitate, but it is not merely an example.”¹⁰⁸ Instead, the act of suffering and dying *for us* makes clear that we are loved *by* him and provides an open invitation for relationship. As Abelard so often recalls in the *Romans Commentary*, Christ demonstrates his supreme love for all people through the willingness to suffer and die *for us*. Abelard is keen on quoting John 15:13 in substantiating this point:

Concerning his ineffable charity surrounding us, he elsewhere says, *But God commends his charity towards us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Likewise again, He did not spare his own Son, but handed him over for us all. And the Son says through himself, “No one has greater love than this, that he [should lay down] his own life,” etc. (Comm. Rom. III. 7:6, 247-8)*¹⁰⁹

The Gospel message—that God loves us—is communicated uniquely through the expression of sacrifice, an expression made possible through the Incarnation. If God did not become a man, he could not suffer and die as a man. Though this point is obvious, it

¹⁰⁸ Quinn, “Abelard on Atonement,” 296.

¹⁰⁹ The Latin is: “De cuius quidem circa nos ineffabili caritate alibi dicit: Commendat autem suam caritatem Deus in nobis quoniam si cum adhuc peccatores essemus, Christus pro nobis mortuus est. Item rursum: Proprio Filio suo non pepercit, sed pro nobis omnibus tradidit illum. Et per semetipsum Filius ait: Maiorem hac dilectionem nemo habet ut animam suam... etc.”

is an important one. This communication of love would be impossible if God himself were not the sacrifice, which is precisely why a really awesome goat will not do.

Indeed, this is necessary in rousing us to our perfection in charity:

And this is what he says: that the perfect charity for God and neighbor **IN US**, which the law teaches, justifies us. For that greatest kindness, which he showed to us, compels [us] truly to love Christ in the same way as God, in the same way as our neighbor. This [kindness] is the condemnation of sin in us, that is, the destruction of all guilt and defect through charity, generated in us by this greatest kindness. (*Comm. Rom.* III.8:4, 206)¹¹⁰

In other words, God's love entails more than simply not punishing us. He loves us to the point of willing and providing the means necessary to actualize our supernatural perfection: the very gift of himself.

Moreover, this loving sacrifice of Christ transcends the limitations of human love because it is extended universally. What I mean by this is that Christ does not designate this sacrifice for one person in the way that I would be sacrificing my life for one person if I jumped in front of a bullet that was supposed to kill them. By virtue of his omniscience, Christ knows each of us and died for each of us. In this way, the love he extends is open to all willing to reciprocate it; it is truly catholic. These stipulations for good mentorship that Herdt identifies become open to all. This solves the elitist difficulty that we are unable to explain away in Aristotle: only some privileged people

¹¹⁰ The Latin is: Et hoc est quod ait ut caritas Dei et proximi, quam lex praecipit. **IN NOBIS** perfecta nos iustificaret. Ipsum quippe Christum tamquam Deum, ipsum tamquam proximum vere diligere summum illud beneficium, quod nobis exhibuit, compellit. Quod est in nobis peccatum damnare, id est reatum omnem et culpam destruere per caritatem, ex hoc summo beneficio in nobis propagatam.

have access to virtue because of their aristocracy, their location, their gender, their intellectual aptitude and luck in finding a suitable mentor. It must be practiced, habituated, and inspired through intense schooling and study. Abelard's exemplarism challenges this notion. The scope, power, and influence of the Gospel (and its capacity to inspire this response of love) are only limited by the authenticity and evangelizing power of the church. This reveals both the awesome agent and painful hindrance Christianity has the potential to be.

By considering both the objective and subjective dimensions of sin's dominion simultaneously we can arrive at a compelling account of the Incarnation—humans needed an extraordinary witness of love to rise above subjective dominion of sin. This is a crucial point for Abelard. In Christ, one gets more than an exemplary figure worthy of admiration, but a perfect specimen who loves each of us personally, enough to suffer and die so we could know love. In other words, Christ is an objectively good exemplar who has made a personal investment in each of us. Through consideration of moral psychology and the force of moral exemplarism in the context of relationship we can arrive at an explanation of the Incarnation and atonement that relies on charity: God was willing to endure a mortal death to show all people how deeply he loves and so that we may come to love the same. Again, such a love transcends the remission of punishment but wills the flourishing, the perfection, of humanity and provides the means to actualize it. Relying solely on the objective dimension of the atonement as

recourse for explanation makes it difficult to rationalize the brutality of satisfaction and why God himself needed to be that satisfaction for sin. All answers point to justice, punishment, and are couched in legalistic terms. Explanations for how Christ's merits are transferred to individuals follow suit. However, doing away with it completely removes the force of Christ's demonstration of love and exemplarism. So the subjective dimension of Abelard's atonement theory relies upon the objective transaction—without it, the supreme example of love is mere suffering for suffering's sake.

I have shown that Abelard's ethics and his theory of atonement are interdependent and cannot be considered without the other. Charity is the effective medium through which we receive the merits of Christ and begin the subjective transformation of our person. Through charity, love of God for his own sake, the Christian sanctifies intention, which is the foundation of salvific merit. Abelard does not suggest that there can be such a thing as a "good action" that ceases to have charity at its core. As a result, becoming truly virtuous and obtaining salvation are the very same thing—both depend upon knowing the person of Christ and coming to love him, for it is only the force of his extraordinary example, his inspiring love, that virtue is possible. As we will see next, this makes the possibility of virtuous pagans a rather difficult theological conundrum.

III. Pagan Virtue

As John Marenbon notes in *Pagans and Philosophers: The Problem of Paganism from Augustine to Leibniz*, pagans presented a genuine difficulty for philosophers throughout

the Middle Ages—the veracity of pagan knowledge, the possibility of pagan salvation, and the authenticity of pagan virtue.¹¹¹ Abelard is infamous for his struggle with all of the above. As the account of Abelard’s ethics I have provided makes apparent, Abelard places charity at the center of the good life and salvation—true virtue and salvific merit depend entirely upon it. Because Abelard defines charity, along with Augustine, as “loving someone for his own sake,” it requires explicit knowledge of who God is.¹¹² One cannot love something that one does not know. As a result, Abelard has to admit either the possibility of charity without explicit knowledge of the Incarnation or the possibility of virtue without charity. There does not appear to be clear textual support for either of these options. Instead, we uncover a messy attempt to create a space for both pagan virtue and salvation that do not exactly fit within the narrative he offers in the *Romans Commentary*.

There are a few central concerns driving this messy, egalitarian attempt. First, Abelard is committed to the idea that works only gain merit by virtue of their intention. This is how he understands the perfection of the New Covenant and the Law of Love.

¹¹¹ Marenbon, John. *Pagans and Philosophers: The Problem of Paganism from Augustine to Leibniz*. (Princeton University Press, 2015).

¹¹² See: “Therefore, by these words of blessed Augustine it is declared openly what true and genuine love towards someone is, namely, to love him for his own sake, not for what he has. Finally, if I love God because he loves me, and not because, whatever he does for me, he is someone who should be loved above all things, then that saying of the Truth is spoken against me, “For if you love those who love you, what reward will you have?” Certainly not the reward of righteousness, because I do not consider the equity of the thing loved, but my advantage. And I might love another equally or more, if it profited me equally or more; indeed, I might not love him if I did not look for my own advantage in him.” (*Comm. Rom.* III. Question 4, 256)

At the same time, though, he seems rather insistent that there are certain pagans who lived exemplary lives prior to the coming of Christ. In effect, Abelard needs to find a way to make love possible for those who do not know Christ, if he is consistent in calling them excellent. The only way, it seems, to legitimate pagan virtue is to ascribe a weak sort of charity to it—a general love of God. This is the move we see Abelard making. There is evidence of this in the *Problemata Heloissae*:

It is in accord with piety and reason that whoever, recognizing by natural law God as the creator and rewarder of all, adhere to him with such zeal that they strive in no way to offend him through consent, which is the proper name for sin: such people, we judge, should by no means be damned; and what is necessary for them also to learn in order to be saved will be revealed to them by God before the end of their lives either through inspiration, or through someone sent by whom instruction may be given about these things, as we read was done in the case of Cornelius about faith in Christ and receiving baptism.¹¹³

He discusses this instance of Cornelius in *Scito te Ipsum* as well.

Cornelius did not believe Christ until Peter, when sent to him, taught him about Christ. Although previously by the natural law he recognized and loved (*diligeret*) God, and through this deserved to be heard in his prayer and to have his alms accepted by God, yet if he had happened to depart from this light before he believed in Christ, we should by no means dare to promise him life however good his works seemed, nor should we number

¹¹³ The translation for this passage was included in John Marenbon's *Pagans and Philosophers: The Problems of Paganism from Augustine to Leibniz*, 92. The Latin from Victor Cousin, ed. adiuvante C. Jourdain et E. Despois. *Petri Abaelardi opera*, tom.I, Paris 1849, 237-294 is.: "Pietati quippe atque rationi conuenit, ut quicumque lege naturali creatorem omnium ac remuneratorem Deum recognoscentes, tanto illi zelo adhaerent, ut per consensum, qui proprie peccatum dicitur, eum nitantur nequaquam offendere, tales arbitremur minime damnandos esse, et quae illum ad salutem necessum est addiscere, ante uitae terminum a Deo reuelari siue per inspirationem, siue per aliquem directum quo de his instruatur, sicut inn Cornelio factum esse hegimus de fide Christi ac perceptione baptismi."

him with the faithful but with rather the unfaithful, however eagerly he worked for salvation. (*Sc. 64:15-23*)¹¹⁴

Notice that in both passages Abelard insists that Cornelius had love or a strong affection for God prior to receiving the Good News from Peter. This love allowed him to excel in the natural law, so much so that God apparently considered him as a contender to receive revelation of Christ. In fact, Abelard suggests this is why God sent Peter: to teach Cornelius about Christ. So it seems that general knowledge of God is enough to love God and thus, excel in the natural law. At the same time, though, Abelard is careful in his word choice. He does not posit that Cornelius is virtuous, praiseworthy, meritorious, or righteous. “However good his works seemed” (*quantumcunque bona opera eius viderentur*), he says.

We receive a similar suggestion in *Historia Calamitatum*. Though Abelard clearly holds philosophers in high regard, he also suggests some deficiency on their part:

The wise men among the pagans—the philosophers—were so named not because of their knowledge but because of the character of their lives. To give examples of their sobriety and self-restraint would be teaching wisdom to Minerva, but I will ask you this: if pagan and laymen could lead such lives as these while bound by no religious calling, what should you do—you, a cleric and a canon—to hold your sacred duties above your pleasure, to keep yourself from plunging headlong into this Charybdis and sinking irrevocably into sensuality and shame? If you care nothing for the privilege of a cleric, if you hold God’s reverence in low esteem—if nothing

¹¹⁴ The Latin is: “Non credebat Cornelius in Christum donec Petrus ad eum missus de hoc ipsum intruxit. Qui quamvis antea lege naturali Deum recognosceret atque diligeret, ex quo meruit de oratione sua exaudiri et Deo acceptas elemosinas habere, tamen si eum ante fidem Christi de hac luce migrasse contingeret, nequaquam ei uitam promittere auderemus quantumcunque bona opera eius viderentur, nec eum fidelibus sed magis infidelibus connumeramus, quotocunque studio salutis esset occupatus.”

else, at least defend the dignity of a philosopher and control this shamelessness with self-respect.¹¹⁵

This passage is telling. Abelard is aware of the hypocrisy and lack of virtue among his Christian brethren and impressed by the ability of pagans to temper their will, even without the inspiration of Christ. However, he does not go so far as to claim that these revered pagans are virtuous to the fullest extent. What appears to be praise in this passage actually turns out to be a back-handed compliment. It is almost as if he exclaims, "If you have no love of God, at the very least maintain the dignity of a philosopher!" Embedded in this beautiful condemnation is the acknowledgment that the philosophers have a knack for self-mastery; however, this is inferior to charity which grounds the Christian life. Considering such evidence, Marenbon suggests that Abelard might advocate a distinction between "virtue proper," which requires charity, and "true pagan virtue," which is accessible without it.¹¹⁶

Even if Abelard does recognize the deficiency of pagan virtue, the suggestion that pagans could excel in the natural law without explicit knowledge of the Incarnation

¹¹⁵ Trans. William Levitan, (Hackett, 2007), 17. The full Latin passage is in reference to a claim Augustine makes describing what a philosopher is/was: "Hoc itaque loco cum dicitur "qui modo quodam laudabilis uitae aliis praestare uidebantur, etc." aperte monstratur sapientes gentium, id est philosophos, ex laude uitae potius quam scientiae sic esse nominatos. Quam sobrie autem atque continenter ipsi uixerint, non est nostrum modo ex exemplis colligere, ne Mineruam ipsam uidear docere. Si autem sic laici gentilesque uixerint nulla scilicet professione religionis astricti, quid te clericum atque canonicum facere oportet, ne diuinis officiis turpes praeferas uoluptates, ne te praecipitem haec Charybdis absorbeat, ne obcenitatibus istis te impudenter atque irreuocabiliter immergas? Qui si clerici praerogatiuam non curas, philosophi saltem defende dignitatem. Si reuerentia Dei contemnitur, amor saltem honestatis impudentiam temperet. Memento Socratem uxoratum fuisse, et quam fedo casu hanc philosophiae labem ipse primo luerit, ut deinceps caeteri exemplo eius cautiores efferrentur."

¹¹⁶ Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 89.

trivializes the Passion of Christ and complicates Abelard's atonement theory. It would mean that love of God, generally speaking, is possible without the person of Christ—without his communication of love manifested through his sacrificial death. In effect, Abelard's eagerness to sanctify pagan virtue downplays the subjective redemption from sin which he insists is made possible through the person of Christ in the *Romans Commentary*. In fact, Abelard's entire appreciation for the New Covenant, in comparison with the Law of Moses, is its ability to sanctify intention, again, because of charity which is supposedly "aroused" by the Passion of Jesus. He argues for this rather emphatically: "**WHO DO NOT [WALK] ACCORDING TO [THE FLESH]**. . . *In us*, I say, *it was fulfilled* through Christ, in us who by his teaching and example and that supreme display of charity were made spiritual, not carnal" (*Comm Rom.* III.8:4-5, 267). As a result, Abelard's insistence that the philosophers had love of God, generally speaking, complicates his theological position substantially. If the philosophers could love without the "supreme display of charity" Christ offers, why does Abelard place such importance on the Passion as being necessary for subjective redemption from concupiscence? In order for his theology to be consistent, Abelard would need to admit either that Christ was either the best, but not the only, way to rouse one to such love or that the philosophers simply had good works (or consents) but not virtue. Abelard is unwilling to defend either of these positions wholeheartedly. However, there is more textual evidence that he leans towards the latter.

IV. Conclusions

I have come full circle in offering an account of Abelardian ethics and dispelling the popular Kantian appraisals that appear in the secondary literature. Almost every question regarding Abelard's ethics, and the theory of atonement that it rests upon, can be traced back to charity—a movement of the soul toward God for his own sake. As a result, Abelard's ethics is unintelligible unless it is placed within a larger redemption narrative. That narrative begins with the original sin of Adam, through which humanity subjects itself to the dominion of sin. The Law of Moses is extended to the Israelites, but it only makes the dominion increase ten-fold because it increases the awareness of one's fallenness and the preoccupation with reward and punishment—an obstacle to charity and relationship. Such a preoccupation yields empty works, which are reflective of self-interest. The Jews are promised a Messiah, who will release them from this slavery; the Messiah comes in the person of Jesus Christ. In Christ, God perfectly communicates his love through his willingness to take on human form and suffer a brutal death. According to Abelard, all of this is with the intention of charity; it was to make the love of God known to humanity. This sacrifice of Christ accomplishes a two-fold redemption: redemption from original punishment and redemption from the subjective dominion of sin that reigns in the form of concupiscence. Love, charity, is the only release from this bondage, as it is the only force strong enough to overcome

concupiscence. With the love of Christ comes the sanctification of intention—charity— which grants substance and merit to our actions.

As a result, Abelard contends that virtue is only accessible through charity. It is not a feat of self-mastery. It is not acquired through sheer habituation and force. It is not the product of skill, afforded to those who have the privilege to be trained by great mentors and to read the best philosophers. The person of Jesus extends an open invitation for relationship. The cross is a testament to this love and affection that evokes or “arouses” a loving response in those who choose to follow him. As a result, a friendship is formed that begins the exodus out of slavery—from the bondage of self-interest and obsession. This, for Abelard, is the true freedom of a Christian: the release from the burden of law without love.

This account of atonement and redemption from sin is fairly reasonable and consistent, until Abelard tries to incorporate the possibility of pagan virtue. By insisting that the ancient philosophers possessed love of God, he muddies the centrality and importance of Christ. At any rate, one thing is clear: human excellence is rooted in love. Abelard insists that even the philosophers who lacked knowledge of Christ were only able to achieve excellence because they had love for God.

CONCLUSIONS

I. Review of Argument

My central concern in this dissertation was to demonstrate that Abelard's ethical account is not proto-Kantian. I began in chapter two by showing the Augustinian influence and context of *Scito te Ipsum* and Abelard's *Romans Commentary*. I was specifically interested in the Augustinian use of intention within *Confessions*, which has indelible spiritual connotations. After considering Augustine's use of intention, I outlined Abelard's "Gospel of Intention." I argued that intention was the defining feature of the New Covenant in Christ, which was made clear through Abelard's exegesis of Paul's epistle to the Romans. Ultimately, I resolved that Abelard's understanding of intention is affective in nature and retains an Augustinian sense and use.

This provided sufficient background context to distinguish Abelard's use of consent and intention in *Scito te Ipsum*, which I demonstrated in Chapter 2. Contrary to most of the secondary literature on Abelard, I argued that consent and intention are not interchangeable concepts. Consent is an agreeableness of the will—when one is ready to perform an action and would not withdraw from doing so if the opportunity presented

itself. Intention is the affection or desire motivating action. This is an important distinction because consent can occur in opposition to desire. In addition, one can consent to perform certain acts devoid of good intention. For instance, giving to the needy with a desire to be perceived as pious.

In Chapter 3, I took the notion of “affective intentionalism” and used it to challenge the popular Kantian construal of Abelard’s ethics. I argued that Abelard’s ethics is not proto-Kantian in that it does not render affective inclination obsolete in determinations of moral praise. Whereas Kant posits that rational principles are the loci of moral praise, Abelard contends that charity—a movement of the soul towards God for the sake of himself—is meritorious. As a result, Abelard’s ethics depends upon a passion or desire for God; his ethics is not proto-Kantian. Finally, I suggested that Abelard’s ethic does not fit neatly in any modern ethical categories. Instead, I claim, it should be deemed an ethic of charity.

After considering, and dismissing, the Kantian reading, I further reinforced the synthesis of the spiritual and the ethical by detailing Abelard’s account of the atonement. Using the outlines provided by Thomas Williams and Phillip Quinn, I provided a summary of the objective and subjective dominion of sin and corresponding redemption. I claimed that both the objective and subjective redemption from sin depend upon charity. In other words, charity is the means through which the merits of Christ are transferred to individual believers and the means through which an

individual overcomes concupiscence. I conclude by trying to see how Abelard might fit the possibility of pagan virtue into this charity-centric ethical account. Ultimately, Abelard's eagerness to attribute a weak sort of love for God to those outside the Christian tradition raises serious questions about his theory of atonement, especially its emphasis on subjective redemption, which apparently depends upon the passion of Christ.

II. Abelard's Intentionalist Ethics?

From what I have argued, it is clear that the Kantian appraisal of Abelard's ethics is a mischaracterization. Though there are certainly deontological aspects of Abelard's account, appeals to them cannot sufficiently explain all that is going on in *Scito te Ipsum*. What is going on then? Clearly, intention is a central theme of Abelard's ethical and theological writings. It features largely in both *Scito te Ipsum* and Abelard's *Romans Commentary*. The failure of many attempts to characterize Abelard's intentionalism in *Scito te Ipsum* results from the inability to bridge Abelard's use of intention in these two works. This is, in part, what I have accomplished in the work of this dissertation: showing that there is, indeed, obvious continuity between Abelard's affective use of intention in the *Romans Commentary* and in *Scito te Ipsum*. In turn, this demonstrates the continuity between his ethics and his theology. As a result, we can appropriately characterize Abelard's intentionalism, which I will now do.

Because former interpreters gathered that consent and intention were synonymous—used interchangeably throughout *Scito te Ipsum*—intention seemed to be a word that could encompass the entirety of Abelard’s points made within his ethical treatise. However, considering that intention is, in fact, distinct from consent, it only reveals half the story. Abelard’s ethics is intentionalist insofar as he claims that intention reveals the quality of our consents, good consents in particular. Abelard looks to intention in order to discern if seemingly good works are *actually* good. This is not a tool for our analysis of other humans, being that we are unable to know another man’s heart. Instead, this is where Abelard believes that God searches to make his judgements. While consent reveals what we are ready to do, intention reveals *why* we are ready to do it. In opposition to a majority of the literature on this subject, Abelard’s intentionalism is not about how an agent conceptualizes actions, not their plan to perform and action, not their voluntariness, nor their rational justification. Abelard’s intentionalism is affective; it is determined by what one desires. This is what should be meant by attributing Abelard with an ethical intentionalism: An agent’s action is good if it proceeds from charitable intention, bad if it proceeds from carnal or selfish intention.

III. A Medieval Ethic of Authenticity?

There is a common narrative that continental philosophy perpetuates: existentialism is the mother of authenticity—a stark contrast to ethical legalism, absolutism, and dogmatism that characterized the continental attitude throughout the

Christendom of the Middle Ages and rationalism of the Early Modern period.¹¹⁷ Though some make room for the rare mystic who lived “authentically;” they are the exceptions that slipped through the cracks of thick, Christian veneer. Phenomenology and its emphasis on subjectivity usher in a new era with competing concerns. Heidegger makes authenticity the center of subjectivity. Kierkegaard’s critique of the Dutch bourgeoisie is focused on the centrality of duty and lack of “passion” in cold, church pews. As the evolution of this idea makes its way into the twentieth century, it takes on a distinct Nietzschean character—a rejection of any objective value or law.¹¹⁸ Creation *ex nihilo* becomes the source Truth, Goodness, and Beauty—the artist becomes the moral exemplar. Charles Taylor deems this the new “ethic of authenticity.”¹¹⁹ Setting aside the critiques of the Early Moderns, dogmatism, and rationalism, this general narrative suggests that medieval Christendom was marked by a divorce of the inner and the outer—it forced a conscious death of the true, genuine, or authentic subject. Because the

¹¹⁷ This sentiment is no doubt reflected in Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, Jean Paul Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*, and Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morals*. Also, this critique about rigid legalism and obsession with vain works becomes a popular pejorative trope against Catholics, medieval Catholicism in particular, from the Protestant Reformation going forward.

¹¹⁸ Alasdair Macintyre argues this in *After Virtue*, (University of Notre Dame Press, 1984). He claims, “In another way too Nietzsche is *the* moral philosopher of the present age” (114). He characterizes Nietzsche in the following way: “The underlying structure of his argument is as follows: if there is nothing to morality but expressions of will, my morality can only be what my will creates. There can be no place for such fictions as natural rights, utility, the greatest happiness of the greatest number. I myself must now bring into existence ‘new tables of what is good.’ We, however, *want to become those we are*—human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves” (114).

¹¹⁹ Charles Taylor says in *Ethics of Authenticity*, (Harvard University Press, 1991), 27: “Our moral salvation comes from recovering authentic moral contact within ourselves [...] Self-determining freedom demands that I break the hold of all such external impositions and decide for myself alone.”

Christian must suppress or disengage with the passions, she is incapable of being true to herself, which presumes a static, “core self” that is curiously synonymous with dynamic, mutable desires.

While there certainly is nothing like the Nietzschean *ubermensch* hiding somewhere in a medieval manuscript, I am hesitant to accept the truth of this narrative. Thinkers such as Abelard evidence the fact that there was, indeed, a sort of medieval ethic of authenticity, so long as one defines authenticity as “a person who acts in accordance with desires, motives, ideals, or beliefs that are not only hers (as opposed to someone else’s), but that also express who she really is.”¹²⁰ In what follows, I will outline the general characteristics of this medieval conception of “authenticity” as informed by my reading of Abelard’s ethics and the writings of his kindred contemporaries, which I believe is reflected in the concept of intention.¹²¹ In doing so, I will distinguish medieval authenticity from modern, existentialist conceptions.

It is first important to note that the general medieval worldview assumes a human essence. A human being is not born as a *tabula rasa*, waiting to be impressed upon by the world. Instead, the Christian metaphysical biology presumes a human essence and supernatural *telos*. As a result, human beings cannot be fully explained in

¹²⁰ Guignon, Charles, “Authenticity,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2014).

¹²¹ Eileen Sweeney alludes to this in “Abelard’s ‘Historia Calamitatum’ and Letters: Self as Search and Struggle.” *Poetics Today* 28, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 303–36. She claims that Abelard’s *Historia Calamitatum* reflects a search for his true self. Though, she claims that such a search is “modern” precisely because it reflects concerns about authenticity. Sweeney even notices the underlying concern about intentionality as the basis of authenticity.

natural terms. As Erik Kenyon puts it, “human beings are metaphysical straddlers: we have one foot in eternity and one foot in time. When it comes to the good life the task is to live the best life is to live the best life *for us*, given the kind of thing we are.”¹²² In effect, a human being is born with deep longings that push her towards the realization of a specific, supernatural *telos*—union with God. Human actions are good or bad insofar as they move human beings towards or away from this *summum bonum*. Thus, the path to authenticity will look very different than the modern path: it first involves recognition that because of *what* a human is, which will include the reality that certain desires are licit and others are not. In other words, certain desires will move one towards God and others will not. As a result, being authentic will involve acting in conformity with deeper human longings that move one towards union with God.

Given this worldview, a medieval sort of authenticity does not involve shifting through desires to discern which one’s are not the product of outside influence or which belong to the core self. Instead, it can be understood as a movement towards synthesizing the inner and the outer—of acting in such a way that expresses who one *really* is, that is, in conformity with the human essence. This comes to the fore in medieval philosophy and theology through the notion of intentionality. Intention is the bridge that connects our desires with our actions; determines the orientation of the will

¹²² Kenyon, Erik, “From Augustine to Eriugena,” *Cambridge Companion to Medieval Ethics*. ed. by Thomas Williams, (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 9.

and puts our deepest longings into focus. It is, as Abelard contends, the root of human action. When human action is motivated by one's own desires, it is intentional. When a human action is motivated by the deepest longing of the human heart—union with God—that intention is one of charity, a movement towards God for his own sake. In fact, from Augustine through Aquinas, this movement involves sustaining focus upon God as the object of our desire. Hugh of St. Victor states it explicitly and succinctly:

We leave our father's house, when we put the whole world and all that it contains right out of our thought and fix the whole intention of our souls on things eternal only.¹²³

He elaborates on this later, saying:

Wherever your delight is, there is also your thought, where your thought is there is the dwelling of the inner man. For according to the inner man, everyone is said to dwell in that place where he dwells in thought. They, therefore, who find their delight in the vanity of this world, are shipwrecked men within, though they may have the ark of faith.¹²⁴

This seems as though it could have been plucked straight from Abelard's *Romans Commentary*. Like Abelard, Hugh also maintains that intention is a focused love, delight, or affection. Moreover, a good, Christian intention is a focused love of God. Consequently, when one lives in accordance with their truest, deepest desires one is living an authentic human life. In this state one can claim that one's exterior action is

¹²³ Hugh of Saint-Victor, *Selected Spiritual Writings*, trans. a Religious of C.S.M.V., (Wipd & Stock, 2009). This passage is from *Noah's Ark*, Book 4.13, 141.

¹²⁴ Hugh of Saint-Victor, *Noah's Ark*, Book 3.6, 104.

actually a reflection of all one was created to be—a vessel of love in conformity with the image of Christ.

In fact, according to the notion of medieval authenticity I am painting here, to live only in the realm of the temporal would be to live *inauthentically* because it presumes that one refuses to acknowledge *the* fundamental longing of humanity: relation with God. Consequently, this would yield an infinite restlessness—moving through a life with no purpose or end. In such a state human existence is marked by the anxiety of ambiguity and distention, a reality that Simone de Beauvoir and Jean Paul Sartre seem to acknowledge.¹²⁵ Now, rigid legalism ensues when the Christian life becomes one about law without love—a striving for perfection that does not implore the divine aid of charity. In other words, when one fails to respond to and cultivate the deepest desires of their heart, who one *really* is. If there is no love as the foundation of law, it would certainly be onerous and potentially oppressive.

What I have sketched above challenges the denigrated, medieval narrative of subjective oppression. Upon closer examination, it becomes clear that medieval ethics and spirituality are marked by a pervasive concern with being true to oneself and one's desires. Though muted by the clamor of the world, God's call for relationship is constant. Only by responding to that call can one quench the insatiable desire for

¹²⁵ I suggest this simply because of the content and titles of their works. Take, for instance, Simone De Beauvoir's *Ethics of Ambiguity* and Sartre's plays *Nausea* and *No Exit*.

infinite love and live the authentic, human life in pursuit of *the* supernatural end. In effect, love allows one to claim one's actions as one's own; the heart becomes incarnate through intentional action. Modern authenticity differs from medieval conceptions in one way only: modern authenticity presumes no human essence endowed by God and thus no distinction between licit and illicit desire. Consequently, modern authenticity has no roots except for the whims of fleeting desires which comprise the core self. Human beings are only left with the burden of choice and the consequences of those choices which collectively constitute their being.

I decided to end with this suggestion for two reasons. First, I think it reflects the nature of this project—the necessary consideration of medieval spirituality or theology in order to understand medieval ethics. Through doing this—contextualizing medieval ethics within the scope of medieval spirituality—the seeming rigidity of scholastic ethics can be seen in a different light. Moreover, considering intention as the basis of a medieval sort of authenticity reveals a fundamental concern throughout the Middle Ages about enriching and properly ordering human desires, not extinguishing them all together. This lends new readings of major medieval thinkers (that have not been marred by an Enlightenment lens) which have already begun to surface in the secondary literature in the past decade. I think this work is essential in continuing the “work of retrieval” Taylor calls for in *Ethics of Authenticity*, providing a sketch for an

objective sort of authenticity, which can forge new paths of exploration in contemporary religious ethics.

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