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The following work identifies what the author contends are the two primary problems of modern behavior that inhibit the full development of human potential, namely: an over-confidence in reason, and a desire to influence other people for personal gain. These inhibiting behaviors are shown to originate specifically from features of the modern paradigm. To counter these problematic behaviors, the author suggests that contemplation can be an antidote. However, the author stresses that solely thinking of contemplation in its secular or spiritual categories is a limitation to its etymological roots and usage. Thus, the author introduces the term *aneutral contemplation* to move the reader past these restricting categories. The notion of *aneutral contemplation* is uniquely equipped to handle both modern behavioral limitations mentioned above, specifically by creating a space amicable to the contexts of silence and solitude. To clarify these contextual characteristics, examples are provided from the author's 44 days spent living and observing the monks of Mepkin Abbey.

Finally, the project turns specifically to the process of education. The term *transformative education* is introduced to indicate a variety of education interested in promoting the contexts of silence and solitude. It is shown that only through the practice of mindfulness can this type of education be actualized. In other words, contemplation acts as the theoretical basis for the practical measures of mindfulness. The following project is meant to be a philosophical examination rather than a project of practical

methods. I hope those who read this work will find the motivation to take off where this project concludes.

CONTEMPLATION AND MINDFULNESS IN EDUCATION:  
BETWEEN SELF AND OTHER IN MODERNITY

by

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Approved by

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Committee Chair

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For my wife, Aubrey. You are the only person I would dare say walks the earth  
enlightened. I love you!

For my Father, William and my Mother, Barbara, thank you for showing me the right  
ways to live and to love.

For my children, Harper and Liam. You boys are my heart, always!

And, for my brother Kevin, you are still my hero.

APPROVAL PAGE

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## PREFACE

Growing up, I remember lying in bed every night, looking over my sheets at a fixture of Mary (Jesus' mother), hanging on the wall across the room. The figurine was phosphorescent so that it would glow when the lights were turned off. Underneath, there was a small bowl that was meant to hold water blessed by a priest. However, this particular reservoir remained empty and hung on the wall as a simple reminder of my family's faith practices. Each night, lying in bed staring at this glowing figure of Mary, I talked to God. Talking to God was not unusual for me—in fact, I prayed throughout the day, as I went about whatever activities were before me. It was not until I was a teenager that I learned that my friends didn't pray as often or as much as I did. It made no difference, however; my prayers continue even now.

When I was young, I would thank God for the good times I experienced, and when sad times came, I asked God why I had to experience such sadness and that I needed His help to make things better. I'm not sure if my prayers ever swayed God, but praying did make me happy, providing relief during difficult times. One such time affected me a great deal. Now, the event seems almost silly; it was the death of my parakeet, Bosley. I was very young, maybe 6 or 7, and it was my first experience with death. I walked into our dining room and found Bosley's head wedged between two of the vertical cage bars. He had suffocated. I yelled for my mom, who came quickly, and told me to go outside as she handled the situation. I did as she said. When I made it outside, I cried heavily and asked God why Bosley had died. I also begged God to take



my life instead. Even if it was only a pet bird, it was my bird, and I loved him. Of course, my response seems proper for a young child, but absurd to an adult. Still, there is something meaningful about my response as a child: I saw that the world was not right, and I wanted to do something about it, even if it required sacrifice. In this same spirit, I write this dissertation.

There have been numerous developments and situations that show the potential for a more peaceful world, yet we still have many obstacles to overcome. Wars still flourish, famine and diseases still spread, social and economic inequality is growing at faster rates, and the homeless, hungry, and handicapped are ignored. Through research, observation, conversation, and reflection, I have come to the conclusion that many of these problems share a dual root cause: an over-confidence in reason, and the desire to influence other people for personal gain. I neither intend for this critique to appear as a bashing of humanity, nor do I mean to seem overly pessimistic. Rather, I want this to be a wake-up call. I am afraid people are becoming more complacent with combating these issues. It appears to me that it is becoming normal to expect the worst. I want to encourage critical thinking about the direction of the world so that together we can move in a better direction. Having said that, however, the following project will not provide you with practices that you can use pragmatically in the world; rather, my concern is to pinpoint the root of the problems, and highlight an alternative way of Being in the world, so that we can find a better way forward. I think you will find that I have accomplished this. I will show you this alternative way of Being in the world by introducing you to the monastic lifestyle.

With a lifestyle so very different from that of the rest of the modern world, monks offer both perspective to reveal weakness, and also remedy to find strength. Where the modern world is focused on exterior achievement and domination, the monks focus inward and forge a community. Where the modern life is filled with noise and distraction, the monks embody silence and attention. In the midst of the modern bustle, one feels more connected to others, and yet more alone. The monk finds solitude and also communion. Thus, the monastic life contrasts with modern life in very promising ways. Fortunately, you don't have to become a monk to learn their wisdom and employ it in your life.

When I arrived at Mepkin Abbey for my 30 day monastic retreat (I would later return for 14 more days), I had expectations, but no idea what the reality would be. I came into the monastery expecting to be with these mysterious, almost super-humans, 'glowing' with understanding. As I interacted with these men, through daily work, ritual, prayer, and meals, I saw glimmers of reality. It was the weekly conversation with one of the monks that really helped me to see them as real people. It was nice to sit and talk with him, especially given the lack of verbal communication at the monastery. Besides talking about my observations, we discussed how normal the monks' lives are. I came expecting people aglow with enlightenment and spirituality, so in touch with God that their feet barely touched the mundane earth; what I found were people just like you and me. Of course, the monks are special people, with a unique outlook. But, as we talked, he told me how they all still get irritated with one another and even with life, and that they have many of the same frustrations and worries that you and I have day to day. Learning this

surprised me, and proved just how little I knew about the monks' way of living. This experience reminded me to be open to the power of uncertainty, a refrain that remained with me while I stayed at Mepkin and became a major theme in the following dissertation.

Although I mention the ordinariness of the monks, one aspect where extraordinariness is present is in the monks' understanding and grasp of silence and solitude. Cistercians are known for their devotion to silence, and even over the very landscape of Mepkin there seems to be a hush. Thus, it was a natural place for me to explore my own interest in these subjects. Prior to arriving at Mepkin, I had read a lot on silence and solitude in preparation for my stay. In my studies, I learned that silence and solitude are not only exterior phenomena, but interior as well. I thought I understood the exterior qualities of silence and solitude, but to be frank, I had no idea what it meant to possess interior silence and solitude. It was my hope that the monks of Mepkin could give me some insight into these characteristics, an insight that I have tried to capture in this dissertation.

While the themes of silence and solitude are not exactly 'hot topics' in academia, they have always held a fascination for me. To be alone, to have no distractions from myself and my own thoughts, seemed both alluring and strangely uncomfortable. Whenever I am alone with myself, I am faced with myself. I am forced to confront my thoughts, whether those thoughts are positive, negative, or indifferent. My hope was that learning more about silence and solitude would grant me insight into myself. Looking around at Western culture, so obsessed with connection and bustle, I saw that I was not

alone in feeling discomfort with silence and solitude. Thus, exploring these difficult topics seemed worthwhile not only for me, but also for the wider circle of academia and even society itself.

This dual concern with the individual and society has led to a unique structure for this project. I have always been fascinated when writers experiment with their craft, or researchers attempt to try new means of research. It seemed fitting to approach this project in the same experimental vein, so in this dissertation I mix philosophical musings with participant observation and analysis. Moreover, I mix methodologies by employing both ethnography and auto-ethnography in my work. I believe doing so grants an array of readers access to my work as well as making it a pleasurable read for academics and non-academics alike.

Making my way into such territory has necessitated the use of many terms that carry baggage—what we could consider ‘troubled terms.’ What I mean by this is that there are terms and concepts in this project that do not have clear-cut definitions and seem more troublesome than helpful; nevertheless, they are needed to give us a vocabulary by which we can begin to come to grips with the most important themes of this project. Such words include modernity, post-modernity, reason, emotion, doubt, faith, contemplation, individual, community, mindfulness, Other, etc. I don’t want the reader to be discouraged by the fluid meanings of these terms. I too, find them difficult; thus, I want the reader and I to explore these terms together. Another difficult term is the gendered pronoun ‘he.’ I have elected to use this pronoun (and its various forms)

throughout for no other reason than that our language has yet to formulate a gender-neutral singular personal pronoun.

In employing these troubled terms, I may sometimes seem to be intellectually bashing the idea of reason, emotion, or the individual for example, but this is not my intention. Rather, I am critiquing the extreme forms of these principles. I fear when reason is seen as the only purveyor of truth, or when emotions are encouraged to run wild; I am even concerned when individualism unchecked grows to excess in harmful individualistic behavior. I am interested in quelling these extremes. I will present my case for each of these terms (and others), but my musings are only the beginning of the full understanding of these ideas.

Indeed, I have purposefully maintained a level of objectivity when discussing my observations of the monks and the ideas of silence and solitude. One reason for this is that I am still a spiritual novice compared with the monks; the other, equally important, is that I wanted to leave space for you, the reader, to participate in the conversation with your own interpretations, instead of being stifled by mine. I suggest that it is the combination of my ideas with your thoughts that ultimately determines the best description and application of these terms and themes. Furthermore, I see you and I in a working relationship with one another. I am beginning our talk from my experience; it is up to you to move the conversation forward, agree with it, amend it, or argue against it. I believe this discourse is necessary, and frankly, I welcome and expect it. This is not to say that you and I may ever again speak together about these topics. However, I hope that you do speak about them with others. This discussion will support both the full

exploration of these ideas and also, ultimately, spread those ideas around so that the goals of this project can be realized someday.

When I selected my dissertation project, I knew it would be a grand undertaking. All dissertations are mammoth projects, but I believe that the themes mentioned above are some of the most difficult themes we can grapple with. I feel I can add thoughtfulness to the conversations revolving around these themes, and I welcome the challenge.

Second, I wanted to bring attention to the monastic tradition. The numbers of Christian monks, particularly the Cistercian Order have been decreasing over the past decades, and yet in my view, their role in this world is priceless. The monks are a mirror back onto the world, demonstrating, by their lives, that there is an alternative way to live. Further, the monks reveal that the human condition is not destined, but becomes what we make of it together. For those who claim that the monk's life is simply one of leisure and a disengagement with the world, I invite you to spend some time with the monks of Mepkin Abbey. You will find that their lives are just as filled with activities and responsibilities as anyone's life in the secular world is. Finally, I understood that this project would force me to examine themes I struggle with but am also highly passionate about. Through this dissertation, I have more clearly defined my dissatisfaction with the current trajectory of human development. This position, far from being pessimism, has become a call to rededicate myself, and hopefully you, the reader, toward positive ways of thinking and action so as to reverse these difficult trends together.

## Project Introduction

This project aims to answer the following questions:

1. Can contemplation and mindfulness lessen people's dependence on what I have identified as two of the primary behavioral problems of modernity (an over-confidence in reason, and the desire to influence other people for personal gain) that limit the full potential of human development? If so, how?
2. Can education, as a process of transformation that aims to better a person's quality of life, assist in lessening these two modern behavioral obstructions? If so, how?

To answer these questions, Chapter I examines what I have identified as the two primary behavioral problems of modernity responsible for inhibiting the full development of human potential, namely: an *over-confidence in reason*, and a *desire to influence other people for personal gain*.<sup>1</sup> These inhibiting factors originate from a person's continual dissatisfaction with his psychological state of Being,<sup>2</sup> and are inevitably tied to the modern human condition. Furthermore, people search for lasting inner peace in their lives, but find only dissatisfaction because their focus remains fixed on exterior rewards rather than interior developments. This need for exterior affirmation drives individuals to participate in (and thereby strengthen) various socio-economic and political structures;

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<sup>1</sup> Additional behavioral problems and benefits of modernity could be examined; however, it will be shown that these two circumstances are responsible for most other modern behavioral troubles.

<sup>2</sup> Being, as I use the term, is an idea of Self that is developed in response to social and psychological pressures.

and, because their participation is driven by a desire for personal reward, individuals forge structures that benefit themselves at the expense of others. How these structures are manufactured historically and embedded within Western culture is expounded upon in Chapter I and its discussion on paradigms. Examining the characteristics and developments of a paradigm will illustrate how historical contexts determine the trajectory of thought, the actions of individuals, and the validation of self-imposed systems of oppression.

After Chapter I identifies and discusses what I have found to be the two central behavioral problems of modernity, Chapter II proposes contemplation as an antidote to these problems. A thorough analysis of contemplation, including its typical secular and spiritual configurations, shall demonstrate that it is uniquely equipped to deal with the modern condition. In this project, I advocate a view of contemplation that redirects the practitioner toward a form of Being that can topple the two problems currently plaguing Western culture by shifting attention from selfish priorities to more inclusive thought patterns and behaviors.

In order to slow down, and hopefully reverse the two chief problems identified in modern behavior, contemplation first challenges an individual's over-confidence in reason—showing the absurdity of believing that the intellect can answer all questions. To substantiate this position, contemplation opens the possibility that reality is more than the sum total of sensory inputs—whispering the presence of something 'more' than the sense organs can detect. Second, contemplation minimizes a person's desire to influence others for personal gain by showing the absurdity of the modern agent's unquenchable desire for



self-serving behavior. The modern individual overlooks the importance of the Other when he desires nothing more than to influence others. A single person is only half the experience of consciousness: the Other is mandatory and completes the dynamic, working with him to co-create experience and social interaction. The social construction of reality is continuous; therefore, the desire to influence another for personal gain undermines one's own development. Contemplation motivates a person to act in the best interest of the Other, trusting that the Other will reciprocate. Only through this mutual relationship can a person experience the lasting inner peace he seeks.

Chapter III moves beyond the discussion of how contemplation can address the two problems of modern behavior that are identified, and offers a more in-depth picture of contemplative characteristics. Unlike the exterior achievements valued in the modern paradigm, contemplative rewards are interior. If a person wishes to experience the interior benefits of contemplation, he must create a space amicable to it—a space filled with silence and solitude. To clarify the contextual characteristics of contemplation (silence and solitude), Chapter III includes examples gathered from my 44 days spent observing the monks of Mepkin Abbey. The Cistercian monks (also known as Trappists) offered me a distinct knowledge regarding the cultivation of silence and solitude. The monks of Mepkin are the grand architects of silence and solitude; these traits fill their lives daily. The monk maintains that “one called to live in solitude is at the same time invited to associate with God” (Wencel, 2007, p. 31). Fortunately, one does not have to be a monk to understand and experience contemplation. The monks teach that contemplation is

available to all who seek and prepare for it, and they are happy to share their knowledge and skills with others.

In Chapter IV, the project focuses more on action than abstraction, turning specifically to the process of education.<sup>3</sup> I introduce the term *transformative education* to distinguish it from contemplative education or mindful education. Contemplation reveals the importance of promoting silence and solitude, but it is only through the practice of mindfulness that these two contexts can be actualized. In different words, contemplation acts as the theoretical basis for the practical measures of mindfulness.

Finally, Chapter I is designed to position the work historically and provide a trajectory for discussion. Thus, Chapter I is the only section where ethnographic/auto-ethnographic observation and analysis are omitted. All subsequent chapters provide ethnographic/auto-ethnographic observations and discussions to support the project's theoretical stances. Essentially, the project aims to unite the theoretical with the practical.

The structure of the project, in sum, is as follows: two key problems of modern behavior that have been identified as obstructions to a fuller development of human potential are examined. Next, the task is to reorient the individual from exterior to interior ways of Being by discussing the subject of contemplation, giving the modern agent an alternative way to view his modern condition. Then, the project examines how an exterior and interior (psychic) environment of silence and solitude are necessary if a contemplative behavior is to be produced by an individual. Afterward, the skills of

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<sup>3</sup> When education is mentioned, it should be thought of in its widest application. This project is concerned with education as a whole- both *in* and *out* of the classroom.

mindfulness are shown to be beneficial to cultivating silence and solitude into the process of transformative education.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS OF THE MODERN CONDITION**

#### **Chapter Introduction**

The following chapter describes the culture of modernity and its influence on our lives. In order to situate ourselves historically and understand a little bit about how thought evolves,<sup>1</sup> Chapter I opens by explaining the paradigm framework, and the process of a paradigm shift. While there are some suggestions that such a shift is underway, I argue that modernity, not post-modernity, still dominates our present culture.<sup>2</sup> To support this position, I establish the current prevalence (in Western society) of what I have identified as the two primary behavioral problems of modernity: an over-confidence in reason and a desire to influence other people for personal gain. Not only do these factors reinforce the presence of modernity, but they also inhibit the full potential of human development. Post-modern critiques that introduce and advocate the idea of subjective, partial truths push against modernity's commitment to objective truth and selfish tendencies, but modernity's continuing effort to construct fixed meanings of 'Truth' pushes back, establishing modernity's sustained momentum and relevance. As

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<sup>1</sup> Given the time that will be spent examining matters of contemplation and consciousness, thought is an ideal starting point.

<sup>2</sup> I do, however, agree that modernity is evolving into a post (modern) period, something that is indeed foreign to what modernity presents.

such, the modern experiment is not over, but it is evolving and weakening, making it hard to deny that a transitional juncture is near, yet far from establishment.

The two central problems of modernity that I have identified (an over-confidence in reason and a desire to influence others for personal gain) must be resolved<sup>3</sup> before a transition in paradigms can occur. The two central problems work sequentially. The first problem gives rise to the self-centeredness that is at the heart of the second problem. Further, the second problem appears when an individual has been so blinded by an over-confidence in reason that he wants to extend his control over others.<sup>4</sup> Such an individual sees his knowledge as ‘Truth’ having normative force. Nikolas Rose’s (1998) discussion of “regimes of truth” claims that

Truth is not only the outcome of construction, but of contestation. There are battles over truth, in which evidence, results, arguments, laboratories, status, and much else are deployed as resources in the attempts to win allies and force something into the true. (p. 55)

Likewise, Michel Foucault (1980) argues that “‘truth’ is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it” (p. 133). Each of these authors, make it clear that claims to ‘know’ the ‘truth’ are also moves to dominate the Other who lacks this ‘knowledge.’ The time is

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<sup>3</sup> I should mention that modernity has borne positive developments (such as enhanced health care, engineering achievements, novel forms of artistic expression, etc.). Nevertheless, positive developments are not my concern. I am interested in examining the ways modernity negatively impacts people (for example, economic systems that place profit over the well-being of people, new environmental calamities, the downsizing of arts education, etc.).

<sup>4</sup> See Nietzsche’s (1966) discussion of master/slave morality (pp. 204–208).

ripe to challenge these standards, given that a fundamental shift in paradigms is presently underway, and that this burgeoning space now allows alternative thoughts and directions to gain legitimacy.

To examine the exterior and interior causes that support these foremost problems, I introduce Rene Girard's (1996) model of mimesis as an exterior mechanism that creates and reinforces problems for the interior of the human psyche. This last examination will complete the critique of modernity. In sum, the reader will find the central idea of this opening chapter is to diagnose two of the most prominent 'ailments' of modernity, so that in subsequent chapters, an appropriate remedy can be applied to augment human potential. A discussion of paradigms sets the scene.

### **Paradigms**

Throughout recorded human history, periods of time have emerged that provide salient markers of the development of human culture and thought. A reference to medieval Europe, for example, conjures up a certain picture of the culture and beliefs of the time period. Likewise, the culture of modernity can be identified by its unique ideologies and sets of skills, which converge to form what is commonly known as the modern paradigm. The term paradigm refers to particular frameworks or ways of viewing the world that organize information into a manageable and referential structure. They are developmental, not permanent. As Thomas Kuhn (1996) notes throughout *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, a paradigm remains accepted until a new, timelier one replaces it. A new paradigm arises out of a disruption in ways of thinking. As these new ways of thinking show themselves to be more relevant and valuable in the world, they gain wider



and wider acceptance until they become the dominant paradigm, fully replacing the former.

Paradigms provide an essential, common language among scholars and non-academics, allowing them to enter into dialogue about the current state and future direction of society.<sup>5</sup> Through this dialogue, a paradigm's components are either endorsed or rejected. As a result, paradigms encapsulate their own justification and maintain their own internal consistency; still, exterior critiques are useful for furthering knowledge, since they can lead to the creation of a new paradigm or a modification of the established one. Moreover, no paradigm is immune to the forces of criticism. If the people within a paradigm view features of it as arcane, unnecessary, or harmful, the collective representatives of the paradigm in question are capable of altering its script.<sup>6</sup> There is no guarantee that every problem will be addressed—in fact, it is highly unlikely; nevertheless, paradigms not only *can* change but ultimately *will*. In the end, it is up to the representatives of the paradigm to determine whether change moves in a beneficial or harmful direction, and the responsibility to define terms like 'beneficial' and 'harmful' likewise rests in their hands.

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<sup>5</sup> I am reminded of the scores of publications in academic journals, and the conversations I overhear while walking on campus or sitting at a coffee house. All of these dialogues are filled with specialized terms and sets of accepted knowledge.

<sup>6</sup> Who determines what features get changed is a discussion that far exceeds the parameters set up for this project. If the reader is interested in such matters, I suggest he investigate the work of critical theorists concerned with social and individual matters of power.

### **From Religious Community to Rational Individuality**

The shift to modernity aptly illustrates the concept of a paradigm shift. The previous paradigm, in medieval Europe, was dominated by the church community. As Singman (1999) explains:

The church wielded influence comparable to that of the aristocracy. The importance attached to so small a group reflects the status of religion in medieval society. There was no distinction between church and state, or even between church and community: to be a part of society was to be part of the church. . . . The medieval church constituted a kind of second social system, sharing governmental authority with the feudal hierarchy, and occasionally coming in conflict with secular lords over disputed rights. Every community and neighborhood was under the auspices of a parish. The church had its own law code, called canon law, and a system of church courts to enforce it, exercising authority over many aspects of people's lives. Marriage and its legal ramifications fell under the jurisdiction of the church, and wills were also solemnized and enforced by church authority. The church was also responsible for what today would be termed moral legislation, including such matters as adultery, fornication, and blasphemy. (p. 12)

In late medieval Europe, conflict within the Catholic Church began to reveal itself, most notably in Martin Luther's *95 Theses* (1517).<sup>7</sup> The reaction that galvanized around them demonstrates the paradigm constituents' widespread dissatisfaction and readiness for change.<sup>8</sup> As the strong structure of a unified Catholicism gave way to a splintered Protestantism, European Christians began fighting over the practices and laws of Christianity. In addition, social factors contributed to a general instability. Goodman and

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<sup>7</sup> See Spitz (1987) p. 66 ff.

<sup>8</sup> In letters quoted in Spitz (1987), Luther himself commented on the speed with which "the whole of Germany" read his Theses, "for the whole world complained about indulgences," one of the primary targets of his complaint (p. 88).

Marcelli (2010) point out that “increas[ing] literacy, urbanization, and the burgeoning role of the businessman had largely displaced the power of the lord” (p. 566), thus dismantling the feudal system that had previously dominated the social structure. This unrest culminated in the bloody and widespread Thirty Years’ War (1619-1648), which at its resolution redefined the loyalties of the common people and the power of the nobles: “Where Europe’s power had previously been spread across noble lords and bishops, the wars essentially formed communal enclaves and political societies that began turning inward, rejecting external sources of influence, control, and power” (Goodman & Marcelli, 2010, p. 566). Along with this increasing independence of European “nation-states” came a widespread desire to avoid the sources of conflict that had led to the bloody, prolonged, and devastating Thirty Years’ War: “tradition and religion” (Goodman & Marcelli, 2010, p. 566).

This turn from exterior authority to rational, epistemological individuality is the most salient defining feature of the modern paradigm. This transition toward individualism and away from community-oriented values equipped the individual like never before, heralding an age of unsurpassed advancement powered by reason as the “fundamental means of knowing reality. It [Reason] stresses necessarily true propositions, a method of strict deduction, the quest for absolute certainty in knowledge, and the irrelevance or deceptive nature of sensory experience” (Woodhouse, 1994, p. 164). This was a radical shift from a medieval understanding of the world. Prior to this development, truth was always something produced in the distance by experts or others in positions of power who were able to decipher the knowledge and preach it to others

incapable of directly perceiving or comprehending what was true. The early Catholic Mass, for example, was spoken in Latin, which the common man was incapable of understanding. Further, the priest had his back turned to the congregation, as if he were speaking directly to God on behalf of the congregation. But in the shift to the modern paradigm, reason led the charge, claiming that one could master the world, including the physical environment of nature, since he could identify 'Truth' through what is seen and grasped rationally.

Whereas in the Middle Ages knowledge was gained from Church-sanctioned authorities, as reason ascended, the individual became an authority unto himself, trusting more and more on his intellect. The rise of reason as a way to knowledge also had profound consequences for the individual's concept of himself as a knower. In the process, ironically, knowledge about the objective world gained ascendancy and legitimacy over the knowledge of the subjective Self. Forcing the church to reorient itself to maintain power and legitimacy, and pushing private knowledge to the periphery in favor of objectively-verifiable, scientific knowledge, reason itself became the ultimate authority, preparing the way for one of the primary modern ailments: an over-confidence in reason.

The turn from religion to reason was motivated by a desire to make the truth more universally accessible, so that it would not become a subject of sectarian violence—hence Rene Descartes's search for a "method" that any rational being could use to find the truth (Goodman & Marcelli, 2010, p. 566; see also Shapin, 1998, p. 124). The individual's capacity to reach the 'truth,' through reason, independent of the community (that, in

medieval times, had been the arbiter of truth), gave reason both autonomy and secularity: as Descartes aptly explained, the criterion for truth was “a clear and distinct idea” in one’s own mind (Goodman & Marcelli, 2010, p. 568). This revolution, this paradigm shift, was only possible because the Catholic church’s control of knowledge had first been disrupted, revealing a tension and opening up the possibility of an “overarching resolution”—a resolution eventually located in the scientific method, which was seen as a way to purify the use of reason, expunging biasing influences of tradition and religion, and ultimately clearing the way to the bedrock of truth (Dueck & Reimer 2003, as cited in Goodman & Marcelli, 2010, p. 569).

Often touted as the father of modern philosophy, Descartes provided the seed of this confidence in reason that found such powerful expression in the works of Immanuel Kant, in which rationality not only became “a tool to find truth” but also a marker of value from which an entire ethics could be derived (Goodman & Marcelli, 2010, p. 568; Kant, 1988). The idea of sweeping away old ways of knowing things and building new structures of knowledge using individual reason dominated science in the seventeenth century: “If one wanted to secure truth about the natural world, one ought to consult not the authority of books but the authority of individual reason and the evidence of natural reality” (Shapin, 1998, p. 68). Descartes characterized his own search in such terms in his *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1993). Thinkers from Francis Bacon to Robert Hooke and Robert Boyle advocated a similar approach to ancient knowledge: “using individual sensory experience to evaluate traditionally established bodies of knowledge” (Shapin, 1998, p. 74). Encouraging readers to approach ancient texts themselves rather than rely

on the words of commentators, Renaissance humanism also provided a “spur to direct observation” as a means to gain true knowledge (Shapin, 1998, p. 76).

The move from a medieval to a modern perspective affected how members of society formulated ‘Truths’ about themselves and their relationships with the world. The ‘great chain of being,’ the divine right of kings, and other similar ideas permeated medieval thought with an emphasis on hierarchy—literally meaning ‘order according to the will of God.’ Violation of this order, then, was violation of God’s will (Furr, 1999; see also Lovejoy, 1976). This proved an influential incentive to maintain the existing status quo. Yet, beneath the allure of the church, an ontological shift was gradually forming; human consciousness was discovering a new relationship with Self and the world. As the Middle Ages waned, “The church began to lose some of its grip over Western religious life. . . . [D]evotion became partially separated from the institution of the Church” (Stearns, 1995, p. 240).<sup>9,10</sup> In time, this fundamental shift in consciousness challenged the primacy of religious control over society, the church’s authority, and ultimately its ‘Truths.’ In short, people started to question what was once unquestionable.<sup>11</sup> With the turn from the collective authority of the church toward the authority of individual reason, the Enlightenment arrived.

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<sup>9</sup> Consider the character portraits in Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, which presents a survey of medieval characters who both embody their station and seek to rise above or otherwise subvert it.

<sup>10</sup> As I define it, the Self can be considered the ontological uniqueness of each consciousness.

<sup>11</sup> Shapin (1998) cites the dedication of William Harvey’s 16<sup>th</sup> century book of natural philosophy: to “true philosophers, ingenious minds, who not only in books but in things themselves look for knowledge” (p. 68). Consider also figures like Galileo Galilei and Nicolas Copernicus who challenged fundamental ‘truths’ about the structure of the universe.

### **The Enlightenment and the Scientific Revolution**

The Enlightenment period (also known as The Age of Reason), roughly 1688-1789,<sup>12</sup> brought with it three central features: a heightened ability to reason, a different way of conceiving and utilizing nature, and a redefining of progress (Edwards, 1967, pp. 520–521). The Enlightenment also lessened the vigor of organized religion and questioned the church’s metaphysical stances. “The Enlightenment critiques of religious thought—such as David Hume’s *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* and Immanuel Kant’s chapter ‘The Ideal of Pure Reason’—set the terms for the modern philosophical debate concerning the status of religious beliefs” (West, 1999, p. 361). Enlightenment values initiated what would later be known as the modern period. “The period of history which is commonly called ‘modern’ has a mental outlook which differs from that of the medieval period in many ways. Of these, two are the most important: the diminishing authority of the Church, and the increasing authority of science” (Russell, 1972, p. 491). It was human reason, not the mandates of organized religion, that was seen as capable of addressing the ongoing heap of human troubles.<sup>13</sup> Instead of believing that religion could save them, people found a savior in themselves. Caputo (2001) describes this change from religious authority to modern circumspection in a striking manner:

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<sup>12</sup> These dates are mentioned in West (1999), p. 55. West cites these dates from various sources.

<sup>13</sup> As mentioned above, this was prefigured in the Protestant Reformation of Martin Luther, in which the locus of influence was shifted to the individual & God (v.) individual and church and God. This was a backlash against the position of the church—hence its emphasis on the personal relationship with God, and the mystery of salvation.

So, in modernity, the question of God is profoundly recast. Instead of beginning on our knees, we are all seated solemnly and with stern faces on the hard benches of the court of Reason as it is called into session. God is brought before the court, like a defendant with his hat in his hand, and required to give an account of himself, to show his ontological papers, if he expects to win the court's approval. (p. 46)

The dawn of the scientific revolution changed the individual's understanding of both his environment and himself. As West (1999) explains, the scientific authority that arose from this revolution "justified new modes of knowledge and new conceptions of truth and reality; it set the framework for the advent of modernity" (p. 73). Unlike the medieval authority of the church which handed out (even mandated) Truth to its waiting practitioners, science drew its authority from the individual knowers themselves. In a striking fashion, and contrary to the will of religious establishments, the rise of the scientific method standardized the individual's use of rationality and logic, and made this objective knowledge accessible to all rational creatures. Furthermore, in the process of standardization, any knowledge that could not fit into this experiential framework was devalued. As Dewey (1944) notes: "Science is experience becoming rational. The effect of science is thus to change men's idea of the nature and inherent possibilities of experience" (p. 225).

Eager to organize the world, science made use of a positivist epistemology that restricted knowledge to the realm of sense experience. Positivism presumed that knowledge could only be acquired through methods of analysis that were empirical and measurable (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, pp. 203–204). Using logic as its measure, positivism argued that knowledge is only achievable by way of the scientific method. Indeed,



knowledge for the positivist must be objectively provable, not dependent on subjective experience. Thus, empiricism, the “view according to which all knowledge, with the exception of math and logic, is based upon and cannot go beyond what is known by experience,” became the primary means of creating a view of the world (Woodhouse, 1994, p. 158). Empiricism aligned itself with positivism to form what was believed to be a non-biased understanding of the world. These thoughts led the modern agent to believe that he could ‘master nature’ once all phenomena were finally measured.

From this rational, empirical position, the scientific method reached beyond the exterior world of nature to the interior workings of the Self: “Scientific methodology was entrusted with defining the self” and has carried out this task by focusing on “characteristics and qualities generalizable to the entire human species,” a trend that has “flatten[ed] the discourse concerning the self” (Goodman & Marcelli, 2010, p. 574). Reason sets the standard for the acceptable analysis not just of nature but of Self, and in so doing disregards any ways of understanding the Self that are not universal, measurable, and immanent (i.e., in the physical, empirical world).<sup>14</sup> The reach of rationality into the human psyche is problematic and already demonstrates overconfidence, for it assumes rationality to be an objective tool by which self-understanding is possible; however, as rationality is situated within the Self, problematic circularity

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<sup>14</sup> Shapin (1998) likewise sees a “paradox” here, in attempts to understand “human nature” using science. On the one hand, there is the modern desire to understand all of nature in a non-teleological (i.e. non goal-oriented) way, which he traces back to the “mechanical” science at the heart of the Scientific revolution (in figures like Sir Isaac Newton, for example). On the other hand, it is this very ability to set goals (and be held responsible for actions we take toward them) that defines “human nature.” And yet, the “objective” criteria of science that makes it reliable is also what makes it “valuable as a tool for political and moral action” (pp. 163–164). Kant resolves this paradox with his Categorical Imperative, which elevates reason to the status of *telos*.

arises—reason examines itself. The consequences of this over-confidence can already be discerned in the constraint of ethics by reason: “The authority for determining what is ‘good’ is given to ‘reason,’ which can only see what ‘is.’ And, with reason merely reflecting the given order, Hobbesian social contract theory easily becomes the prototypical version of ethical theory within modernity” (Leahey, 2004, as cited in Goodman & Marcelli, 2010, p. 575). Limited by rationality to the realm of the immanent and empirical, ethics becomes “human nature . . . prescriptively applied”: reason defines the ethical but is not itself subject to ethical critique; in defining the ethical, it elevates itself to an objective standard that reaches beyond the individual human and into the realm of human interaction (Goodman & Marcelli, 2010, p. 575). This reach is one of dominance—even as Kant’s Categorical Imperative counsels us to refrain from treating others as “a means only,” it derives its legitimacy from the individual’s reason itself (Kant, 1988, p. 57). This is the fundamental ethical command that reason gives to itself (Kant, 1988). Thus, the rise of reason in modernity is the rise of the Self; “Individual well-being, rather than a moral imperative arising from relationship, becomes the ‘moral outlook’ of the modern self” (Bellah et al., 1985, p. 47, as cited in Goodman & Marcelli, 2010, p. 580).

### **The Church’s Response**

The newfound position of reason placed medieval religious structures and their ideologies on the defensive. “The medieval Church made a theoretical separation between the sacred and secular spheres. This separation was in reality pragmatic and political. It was inseparable from the Church’s struggle to preserve her liberty from

secular power”<sup>15</sup> (Merton, 1965, p. 50). With the increasing cultural mistrust of the church, religious ideologies and dogmas were thought to be arcane and out of touch with the needs and newly revealed rational faculties of the people. The advancement of reason thus disrupted the collective identity of the church, rooted in the medieval paradigm. “New movements in thought, especially in science, . . . were regarded with profound distrust as a secular threat, and were seen in a context of power struggle, not of love for truth” (Merton, 1965, p. 51). The church as an institution was being pulled in opposing directions: on one hand trying to retain its devotion to all that is sacred, while on the other developing itself as a secular institution. The church had to become a political body in order to remain influential and relevant within the changing times. In this way, the church sought to bridge the divide forming between the sacred and secular worlds. The attempt to maintain a connection between the sacred and secular worlds was a new development for Christianity. To retain its relevance and power in the face of the newly-empowered individual, the church turned more and more to secular means, seeking to bridge the divide between sacred and secular rather than maintain its focus on the sacred, as early Christianity had done in its support of the monastic life.

Monasticism—understood as the solitary practice of religion—was the original dominant form of Christianity, existing before religious institutions were shaped and regulated. The idea of *contemptus mundi*, a turning away from worldly things, was central both in monasticism and in Christianity at large. Contemplative prayer and other

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<sup>15</sup> In this conflict, the church sought to retain the power to appoint church officials (i.e. bishops) and the Crown sought to allocate this power to itself.

forms of wisdom-practices were significant in the earliest centuries of Christianity as well (Bludworth, 2004; Tuoti, 2003). Among these non-institutional groups were ascetics, or hermits, living an eremitical life (a life of isolation). As institutional Christianity developed, so did the monastic traditions, which likewise formalized into cenobitic (communal) monasteries that participated somewhat in the larger institution of the church while still retaining their independence. As the church's development continued (in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries), monasticism proved an important shaping force, though increasingly separate from the institution both spatially and idealistically. Thus, the monastic pursuit of religion resisted the control that inevitably followed the institutionalization of the formalized church. The monastic tradition saw the church's institutional strategy and the impinging dictates of reason as less important than the development of the individual's relationship with God. As such, the early monastic tradition separated itself from the church's quest for control. Monasticism diverged from institutions to relationship, giving monastics both independence and an effective antidote to the sweeping claims of reason and the church's struggle for socio-economic and political supremacy.

It should not be overlooked, however, that the contemplative path was still valued highly by some in the church;<sup>16</sup> but, as the first stirrings of what would become modern individualism made themselves known, the church saw its control over 'its flock' strained, and so wanted to focus its efforts on building itself as an institution *within*

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<sup>16</sup> This is demonstrated by the respect granted to the early Desert Fathers, and Vatican II documents that stress the importance of the contemplative life to the mystical body of the church.

society to advance its influence. In the end, and even today, Western Christianity is forced to walk the divide between its traditional *contemptus mundi* heritage and its attempt to stay relevant in a new rational world. As Merton (1965) claims: “In all that concerned man’s social, intellectual, and cultural life, the last word belonged to the clerical specialist trained in a theology which was indifferent to ‘the world’ (in theory) and indeed retained something of the old ascetic ‘*contemptus mundi*’” (p. 50). Even as the church attempted to maintain its rootedness in this monastic ideal, its very survival as an institution was under threat. Turning again to Merton (1965):

Unfortunately, this *contemptus mundi* became a formality of religious organizations that were, in their own way, quite worldly. The ascetic concept of *contemptus mundi* has been radically transformed since the theoretical distinction of ‘spiritual’ and ‘secular’ power worked out during the medieval struggle over lay investitures. *Contemptus mundi* became more and more an asceticism of obedience in the service of ‘spiritual’ power—or the Church’s side in politics (p. 45).

While the church was confused on how to handle tradition and survival, the monastic was not. Monasticism retained the original understanding and intent of *contemptus mundi*, cultivating a perspective of reality that favored interior success and relationship with God rather than the achievement of exterior (i.e. political) power. The church’s increasing focus on exterior success (social, economic, and political) pushed aside the monastic mission of interior, spiritual success. Thus, monks were left largely to themselves. Their relationship with the church was not adversarial; the aims of each simply diverged.

This divergence had important consequences for the division between public and private space. To maintain exterior power and relevance, religious institutions developed

relentless socio-economic, political and epistemological influence (even control) over their members, ingraining themselves ‘functionally’ into the private lives of the people and disrupting the balance between public and private identity. As the Christian church sought to assert its relevance by bringing more of the secular world under its scope, the privacy of the *contemptus mundi* tradition that lay practitioners began to adopt also became fodder for public scrutiny.<sup>17</sup> The church’s efforts to grasp power and maintain control amounted to the institutionalization of the individual.

### **The Development of an Over-confidence in Reason**

As the church searched for ways to remain relevant and powerful in the face of increasing confidence in reason and the individual knower, the individual himself revealed in his newfound epistemic potential. The Enlightenment’s ascendancy of reason cast it as the ultimate faculty of the mind, one that, if cultivated properly, would guide people toward sounder decisions and actions. As the Enlightenment evolved into a steadfast modernity, people’s trust in reason ascended further. Though many have now abandoned this stringent view of reason, the connection of thinking to reason, and reason to correctness, still persists. In other words, people consider what they think about situations, people, and even reality, to be close to infallible because they have reasoned it out. The logical form and operations of reason gives its conclusions an air of mathematical certainty, though the content of reasoning is actually nowhere near as

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<sup>17</sup> For a fuller discussion on this matter, refer to Jurgen Habermas, especially his 1962 work entitled: *The structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*.

clearly defined or comprehensible as mathematics. This 'fail-safe' stature gives people an over-confidence in their abilities to reason and think.

Reason not only balks at doubt, but is also impervious to resistance. A person resists something (whether an idea or action) because he doubts its supremacy among other choices. He resists because he singles out a finer alternative: his own. "The ego is accustomed to keeping a tight grip on things, and always having the last word" (Laird, 2006, p. 87). Thus, because reason is not vulnerable to doubt, it is not impacted by resistance. There is nothing to resist if nothing is doubted. The choice which reason selects, therefore, must be the best of all paths. Is this not recognizable in the ways people are taught to believe in what they think, and to trust their thoughts in the face of others? As people age, is there any doubt that life becomes more a process of having others try to persuade us that we are wrong in our 'Truths' then they trying to prove to others that they are right? In short, people tend to believe their state of Being is infallible. This situation, I would argue, reflects the ascendancy of the individual's over-confidence in his reason. This is not to say that people believe they are flawless; experience proves the error of their ways time and time again. *In the moment of decision, however, a rational choice is never doubted.* A later realization of error may introduce doubt, but *not in the instant the choice is made.* Ultimately, reason eschews doubt because, as the arbiter of how one thinks, reason is as close to a person as his own identity, which the modern individual regards as sacrosanct.

All of the ills of the individual and society, according to the contemporary mindset, can be solved by reason, manifested by a faith in science and the scientific

method. Even in 1956, for instance, J. Bronowski claimed that “we live in a world that is penetrated through and through by science. . . . The world today is made, it is powered by science; and for any man to abdicate an interest in science is to walk with open eyes into slavery” (as cited in Abelson, 1966, p. 481).<sup>18</sup> Sanford A. Lakoff likewise traces the development of western society from the feudalism of the Middle Ages, through the techno-industrial, and in his time (1966) identifies an emerging “scientific society” as the key to “advancement” (p. 55). Data-driven studies on everything from the best practices in healthcare to the best way to achieve happiness prevail in academia. Attempts to analyze the natural world into its most basic elements, as seen in recent developments in quantum physics leave little room for spiritual perspectives. The pervasive contemporary mindset argues that if people can just gather enough data and run enough experiments, they will understand everything from the origins of the universe to the human mind itself. The conflict with which the modern period opened continues even now: the rational, with its claims to objective truth, against the spiritual, with its claims to a truth beyond objectivity. This spiritual truth leaves a space for the unknown, which reason finds intolerable. Indeed, the modern ailment of an over-confidence in reason still seeks to sit at the head of the table. Now that we have traced and examined how an over-confidence in reason evolved into its modern form, we turn our attention to the second behavioral problem of modernity: a desire to influence others for personal gain.

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<sup>18</sup> Cited in Philip H. Abelson’s 1965 address, “Science in the service of society,” in which he traces the history of science’s impact on society and projects scientific innovations for the future.



### **A Desire to Influence Others for Personal Gain**

The distribution, regulation, and expression of influence vary with the paradigm in which one lives. Influence is an inevitable ingredient in modern life, an integral part of the human condition. Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651/1994) identified the basic right of self-preservation, or "the liberty each man hath to use his own power as he will himself for the preservation . . . of his own life," a power which, without government, extends unchecked to "anything which, in his own judgement and reason, he shall conceive to be the aptest means thereunto" (Ch. 14). Likewise, in Ch. 10, he describes man's value as the "price of his power," the highest such value being obtained by "compound[ing] of the powers of most men, united by consent, in one person, natural or civil, that has the use of all their powers depending on his will." Thus in Ch. 13 of the same, he finds that the state of Nature (man without government) is characterized by perpetual conflict that only a greater power—the titular Leviathan that is his State—can subdue (Ch. 17). For Hobbes, this fundamental drive for power (especially over others) as a means to self-preservation is the driving force of human nature (1651/1994).

Nietzsche's (1989) discussion makes this dominion-seeking more subtle and pervasive by moving it one step back in the causal chain. He explains that "self-preservation is only one of [its] indirect and most frequent *results*," but indeed that "life itself is *will to power*" (Nietzsche, 1989, p. 13). These make a compelling case for the pervasive desire to influence others within modern thought.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> For an extensive discussion, see R. V. Sampson's (1968) *The psychology of power*.

Influence, as I define it, takes interior desires and creates exterior opportunities to gratify them; more often than not, gratification requires the use of others to be successful. When this use comes to pass, influence has occurred. Influence can exist through small successes, such as wanting the weeds to be picked in the garden (interior influence), and having your son pick the weeds with the promise of three dollars upon completion (exterior influence). Or, influence can express itself through forceful and devastating ways; for instance, the belief that one's religion is superior to all others (interior influence), and detonating a bomb outside a different denomination's church to instill fear and persuade the congregation to leave the town (exterior influence).

The second behavioral problem of modernity (desire to influence others for personal gain) is derived from an individual's self-serving behavior. Self-interest's key role in motivating behavior can be deduced from several sources. The assumption of "rational self-interest" is foundational to the discipline of economics (Hu & Liu, 2003, n.p.).<sup>20</sup> Likewise Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651/1994) makes self-interest the central drive of man, out of which a long-standing debate about the role of self-interest in determining human action has arisen in both philosophy and psychology, a debate that is ongoing, despite the default assumption of self-interest gaining currency (Schwartz, 1986). Self-serving behavior is an unavoidable feature of the human condition, but its dominant value

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<sup>20</sup> See also Adam Smith's assertion in *The wealth of nations*: "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages" (Smith, 1776/2012).

in human identity (and its excessiveness) is a modern creation—it is both a defining characteristic of modernity and a response to it. Self-service, as I use the term, implies the prioritization of self over others—an overriding concern with the formation and maintenance of individual identity. Self-serving behavior ranges from simple acts, such as aggressive driving or hateful words, to more complex matters, such as child labor and genocide. These examples are only a few of the countless examples that point to the modern individual's lack of responsibility for others. As a result of such actions, self-serving behavior develops into a desire to influence others for personal gain. Let us examine this matter further.

### **The Turn to the Self**

The excess of self-serving behavior in modernity is partly due to the individual's over-confidence in his reason, the first modern behavioral problem examined. The affirmation of his ability to reason for himself leads him to think he is in possession of the 'Truth'; as his confidence in reason reaches hubristic excess, he turns *only* to himself for guidance and answers.<sup>21</sup> Trapped in a frame of reference of his own creation, his behavior mirrors his self-centeredness. In this limited sphere, his rationality remains unchallenged by others, and his confidence in his own reason burgeons. As over-confidence in reason grows, self-serving behavior ascends; meanwhile, self-service feeds back into rationality, thus solidifying the place of both within the identity of the individual.

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<sup>21</sup> This was the predicament the church found itself battling.

His overweening self-confidence makes the individual think that his version of the Truth is the only correct one; thus he desires to influence others so that they understand and accept this Truth. He turns to his rational faculties to discern a way to accomplish this goal. Thus, a desire to influence others relies on both reason (thought) and self-serving behavior (action) to produce his sought-after reality. Self-serving behavior creates a cocoon that insulates the individual from any dissenting voice. As these two cooperatively grow, it is no longer enough to simply remain in this self-affirming cycle. Now any threat to the individual's worldview must be brought into alignment. As a result, the individual desires to influence others so that they too will affirm his outlook and advance his own personal gains.

To further understand how the desire to influence others for personal gain is part of an individual's modern behavior, two features need to be examined: first, how interior value is determined (or, how a person ends up influencing himself to believe that what he desires is of worth); second, how exterior value is established (or, how a person can influence others). Comprehending these points provides a fuller picture of what it means to be influenced and to influence. We begin with the first point: determining how self-influence is created through value.

### **Creating Value**

Everything is assigned a value in consciousness. When people interact, each person assigns and endorses a unique value to the objects within their interaction. Since assigning value is unavoidable, the potential for it to be manipulated to one's own advantage is always possible. The space for inequality is further opened by the movement

of influence from thought (potential influence) to action (realized influence).<sup>22</sup> As an example, a person with a proficient understanding of rhetoric can persuade others that his defining of value for an object is better than another's attempt to establish a different value for the same object.

As the play for influence progresses, each participant assumes a specialized role.<sup>23</sup> When an individual realizes that he retains less influence than another, he concludes that the Other must better understand how to apply value to an object.<sup>24</sup> He yields to the influence of the more self-assured and confident Other, thus increasing the influence of the Other by reinforcing the value the Other assigns to the object in question. As more people converge on the same object and look to assign their own value to it, people desire to possess the object –to make it their own so that the value of the object will always remain in their control (think of the latest fashion trends, or the latest Smartphone, for example). To understand the construction and maintenance of value, we need to look no further than Rene Girard's (1996) model of mimesis.

### **Mimesis**

The ability to influence a person indicates an imbalanced relationship. Without imbalance, it would be impossible to influence anyone to think or act in a manner other

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<sup>22</sup> Inequality begins even before birth, given that individuals are born into existing socio-economic and political contexts. And, since some contexts are valued more than others in a given society, it makes sense that individuals born into modernity begin their lives on uneven ground.

<sup>23</sup> For more information on this matter, refer to organizational, small, and/or large group communication dynamics.

<sup>24</sup> Objectively, this does not mean that the value assigned to the object is necessarily the best value; it only suggests that the individual is capable of influencing Others *to believe* it is the finest of all possible values.

than he sees fit. Still, we know people are influenced all the time, sometimes even to the detriment of their own well-being. Consequently, an imbalance of power—between Self and Other, or Self and society—does exist. Our own society, for instance, is fond of this absurd disparity. Many spend a lot of time chasing frivolity and seeking to assert their own frivolous authority over Others. As Merton (1960) puts it, “our absurdity is blended with a certain hardheaded, fully determined seriousness with which we devote ourselves to the acquisition of money, to the satisfaction of our appetite for status, and our justification of ourselves as contrasted with the totalitarian iniquity of our opposite number” (pp. 178–179).

The desire to influence is also expressed through socio-economic and political systems that are poised to establish inequality. These systems allow the few to actualize their influence indiscriminately while the many have no choice but to sacrifice. In other words, there are those who wield influence, and those who are ruled by it.<sup>25</sup> Influence becomes problematic when an individual opts to use exploitation as his primary means of influence. Too, this action limits the ability of another to express his own influence on matters, resulting in a form of oppression. Unfortunately, this is the accepted trend today. This range of influence can be expressed overtly or covertly. Itself a neutral quality, it becomes value-laden (positively or negatively) when individuals assign meaning to the goals of their influence. I argue that the subtle expression of influence is cause for greater concern than its blatant use. When a desire to influence Others is kept secret, it can

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<sup>25</sup> These points have been proven time and time again by both academic and social commentaries.

become insidious, lurking in the dark, hidden from view, articulated not by brute force, but through subtle political manipulation, technological engineering, access to opportunities, and the usurpation of earthly resources from their rightful beneficiaries. With the rise of socio-economic and political pursuits designed to wail aloud the mantra, ‘more and more and more,’ for all to hear and follow, excess has spread so ubiquitously and savagely across the globe that imbalance between people seems normal to many; and, as a desire to influence others for personal gain grows in momentum, so does a continual and regenerating focus on exterior pursuits.

Rene Girard’s (1996) model of mimesis demonstrates the potential danger that results from a life lived chasing the things Others value, and provides further understanding about the sway of influence. The relationship forged between an individual and the Other that opens the potential for influence is exceptionally volatile because it is necessarily a hierarchy. The individual and the Other form a dichotomous relationship: each needs and despises the Other, and neither is fixed in their roles –both positions fluctuate as each jockeys for greater influence in assigning value to an object (Girard, 1996, p. 9). The individual’s desire for the object is fueled by the Other, and not the object itself. An individual sees the Other as an idol, someone to model. He looks upon the Other with star-struck eyes, captivated by how the Other can influence the desires of people, causing them to assign identical value to the object. The individual thus tries to emulate the Other to acquire greater degrees of influence over other people. He looks to these Others to fill a void within himself. “The model is likely to be mimetically affected by the desire of his imitator. He becomes the imitator of his own imitator, just as the latter

becomes the model of his own model” (Girard, 1996, p. 12). The individual’s feeling of inadequacy perpetuates his low self-esteem, while paradoxically his overriding concern with personal image gives rise to narcissism.

Strangely enough, the Other is also an obstacle for the individual. The individual dislikes the Other, because it is in comparison to him that the individual’s self-perceived inadequacy is revealed, reinforcing his low self-esteem. “As this feedback process keeps reinforcing itself, each constitutes in the Other’s path a more and more irritating obstacle and each tries to remove this obstacle more and more forcefully” (Girard, 1996, p. 12). The Other’s role, however, is no more valuable than the individual’s role; theirs is a relationship of need. The Other needs the individual in order to remind him of his ‘trend setting’ position. The individual’s inability to trump the influence of the Other allows the Other to stay ‘on top’ of value construction, thereby continually feeding the Other’s ego; hence arises the Other’s narcissism. The individual and the Other are thus locked in a reciprocal relationship of dependency, hindering the personal development of both because each is unable to form any notion of identity or worth separate from one another, or separate from the object they mutually strive to assign value.

The Self/Other relationship has both benefits and drawbacks, and their desire to command the influence of value, in an attempt to influence Others, provides the momentum to try to influence each other. Girard’s mimetic cycle arises as an offshoot of this inequality, and a mistaken belief that the source of value in the Self lies in influencing the value for Others.



## Conclusion

In our time, a shift between paradigms is underway, with a rift opening between modernity and what has been termed post-modernity. Some argue that the shift between these paradigms has already ended, and we are ‘in’ post-modernity. This stance is promoted by Jean-Francois Lyotard’s *The Postmodern condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984), Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (1972), and Jacques Derrida’s *Of Grammatology* (1976), *Writing and Difference* (1976) and *Speech and Phenomena* (1973). Although their arguments are alluring, I suggest, however, that while traits of post-modernity are clearly present and on the rise,<sup>26</sup> modernity’s main means of interpreting the world still prevail. While post-modern theorists and coffee-shop philosophers provide an external critique that conceptualizes a new and viable direction for human thought and culture, two staples of modernity (an overconfidence in reason and a desire to influence others for personal gain) situate us firmly in the modern paradigm.

The central idea of this chapter was to describe the exterior and interior problems of the two chief problems of modern behavior that I have identified and illustrate how each is expressed. These two behavioral problems must be *significantly* minimized if there is to be a fuller development of human potential, and a final movement into a secure post-modern framework. The discussion of paradigms and paradigm shifts set the stage for an examination of the current modern paradigm and its two chief problems (over-

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<sup>26</sup> To name just two identifying markers of post-modernity: the view that multiple perspectives provide multiple, and equal views of reality and truth, and the exploitation of people for economic/social/political gain.

confidence in reason and a desire to influence others for personal gain). The topic of influence was shown to be heavily impacted by an individual's over-confidence in his reason. Influence becomes problematic when a person oppressively uses others to gratify his own desires. In modernity, this harmful influence takes the form of competition over value-creation. When people interact with one another, each person in the interaction assigns and promotes a distinctive value to the objects within their interaction. These 'objects' can even take the form of thoughts. This assignment of value forms opportunities for influence; as a person shows how the value he assigns is of greater significance, he (purposely or inadvertently) downplays the value the Other attempts to establish. The lens used to chart the development of this conflict is Girard's mimetic model. Girard's model illustrates the impending dangers that develop when a person's pursuits are defined by the values of Others. When the individual's desire for the object is fueled by the Other, and not the object itself, the individual cannot form an identity separate from the Other's labeling. As the following chapters will show, forming an independent identity-creation is crucial to the realization of full human potential, and in so doing will point the way to a solution to the two critical ailments of modernity focused on in this project.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **RESOLVING THE CRITICAL PROBLEMS OF MODERN BEHAVIOR: THE CONTEMPLATIVE WAY**

#### **Chapter Introduction**

Chapter II examines how contemplation can remedy what I have identified as the two most central modern problems of human behavior: an over-confidence in reason and a desire to influence others for personal gain. Certainly there are other problems that impact the modern individual, such as the deskilling of the labor force through advanced mechanization, disasters to the environment, severe violations to human rights, and the continuation of war throughout the world. Without question, these are major concerns as well; but, I firmly believe that these problems, and many others, have their origin in the two behavioral problems identified in Chapter I.

The term contemplation is presently popular in various secular and spiritual contexts; having taken on a variety of meanings; it has become quite an ambiguous term (Rohr, 2006, p. 82). Historically, contemplation has been divided into two categories: secular and spiritual. Each category retains a unique viewpoint and builds a specific knowledge around the term to assume and legitimize control of its meaning. As mentioned in the previous chapter, people aim to control how an object is defined in

order to gain control of that object;<sup>27</sup> the idea of contemplation is no different. Advocates of each viewpoint seek to define contemplation as one or the other, secular or sacred.

In a secular context, contemplation indicates a rational response to reality, whereas the term's spiritual usage indicates an emotional connection to something greater than the Self. In this way, contemplation is placed forcefully on opposite ends of a spectrum, relegating it to an either/or position: *either* contemplation is defined in terms of secular rationalism *or* contemplation is defined in terms of spiritual emotion (as witnessed through the concept of faith). While both perspectives have sound arguments for ownership and use of the term, neither side should claim exclusive rights. Either/Or scenarios place contemplation in an erroneous and unnecessary dichotomy by advocating only half of what the term is intended to symbolize. Such a dichotomy is an attempt to hijack the full richness of its meaning.

It should come as no surprise that people are fond of either/or scenarios. The common modern, western narrative reinforces the idea that an individual is led either by reason or by emotion in situations that require decision-making and action. This confusion carries over to one's conceptions of Self, forcing the individual to frame his identity in terms of a rational faculty and an emotional faculty.<sup>28</sup> When contemplation is employed divisively, a person is placed in an ontological conundrum, one that divides his own Being into a dichotomy in which he must (absurdly) choose one 'side' of himself

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<sup>27</sup> See the Chapter I discussion of Girard (1996).

<sup>28</sup> There is a long tradition in philosophy of seeing these two faculties not only as separate but in outright conflict with one another. Consider the Stoics, for example, whose influence reaches well into modern times.

over another. This false dichotomy forces him to endorse either reason or emotion, thereby overlooking the uniting traits of contemplation and the truly holistic nature of being human.

Reason and emotion are at the hub of how people define themselves and their world. The self-reflecting person recognizes that a mind and heart that work autonomously of each other are deficient. A mind can come to an intellectual understanding of a situation, define options for further action, and delineate obligations that result from ethical principles or laws. Emotion adds the proper weight to each factor weighed by reason, and provides motivation to act. Furthermore, both reason and emotion provide checks and balances for a person's experiences. For instance, now and again reason needs the passions of emotion to endorse what it knows is correct. Turning exclusively to one's emotions to cope with situations neglects the healing value of reason. Sometimes there is nothing that will heal a person more than a complete purging of emotions. However, the extreme side of emotions, like rage instead of anger, or depression instead of sadness, can be more destructive than therapeutic. In such instances, overzealous emotions need reason to provide restraint. As a result, not only does a person need to find a balance between rational and emotive behaviors, but also a balance within each faculty itself. Our emotions also 'get the best of us,' occasionally. When this occurs, reason can enter and offer an individual assistance by working as a tool that assists him in the process of cognitive restructuring, reframing and renaming a situation for more beneficial results. For example, if a person greets a colleague at a conference and the colleague simply walks past him without acknowledging him, that

person might feel slighted. If the two already have a history of interpersonal conflict, this feeling might intensify to anger and a desire for revenge. However, reason can intercede in this situation and offer alternative interpretations of the incident – perhaps the colleague did not see/recognize him, or perhaps the colleague had just finished a difficult presentation and was distracted by his own stresses. Alternatively, reason can offer an analysis of possible consequences of revengeful action that would be more painful than this public snubbing. In this manner, reason differs from emotion because reason aims to ‘figure out’ the meaning and significance of a situation based on observable criteria, whereas emotions are subjective reactions.

A better understanding of reason and emotion will make it easier for a person to handle the inevitable dissatisfaction that will creep into his life. Understanding is critical to the management of difficult situations. For example, if a person is told that he has a malignant tumor and his prognosis is grim, it is important to understand that any response given by the individual that is either too rationally based or too emotional can be potentially harmful to all those involved. If the patient approaches the situation only rationally, then he may neglect the emotional impact the situation has on him and on those who care for him. On the other hand, if the patient deals with the matter only emotionally, he bypasses or delays the need to accept his unalterable situation. Finding a balance between a rational and emotional response is most beneficial for the patient, care providers, and loved ones who must cope with the prognosis. It is only through balance that interior peace in individuals can be created. The development of interior peace is also important if the patient experiences anxiety or fear of his impending death. To attend to

the emotions that accompany such a prognosis with respect, but not allow them to overwhelm his mind so that he is incapable of taking wise action, prepares the patient for the best path for coming to terms with death.<sup>29</sup> Understanding this permits all involved to face the situation in an honest manner without trying to overanalyze or be hyperemotional about the prognosis. In short, understanding the situation is critical to a balanced response which enables all parties to accept the situation for what it is, thereby producing inner peace.

It would be hard to deny that at the heart of all people is a longing to be at peace with oneself.<sup>30</sup> To be dissatisfied with one's life circumstances is not unusual; all people experience 'ups and downs.' Dissatisfaction, then, becomes a standard motivator for seeking out the means to a more fulfilled life. Both inner peace and dissatisfaction are 'socially constructed' matters that influence how an individual judges himself and the world he inhabits. Inner peace and dissatisfaction can be thought of as social constructions because they are learned behaviors that originate from the worth others place on objects and ideas. For instance, people place value on an object or idea and others reinforce the dissatisfaction or the inner peace that the object or idea is thought to produce. Some travel through life filled with inner peace while others live dissatisfied. But for both groups of people, the contemplative life is beneficial, no matter the degree of

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<sup>29</sup> Consider Shakespeare's Hamlet, who deals with each aspect of death—emotional, rational, and physical—before successfully coming to terms with his fear of death and turning to face his end.

<sup>30</sup> Philosopher J. S. Mill (1861/2001), for example, found the longing for happiness so foundational that he deduced an entire ethical system (utilitarianism) from it. Aristotle gave happiness ("flourishing") a similar role in his *Nicomachean Ethics* (2001).

their conditioning. The reason contemplation benefits both those who embody inner peace and those that are dissatisfied is clear. For those who are at peace, contemplation reinforces the behaviors responsible for ensuring that they remain so. Now, what grants an individual inner peace varies, and determining what provides inner peace is an individual matter, but once it is pinpointed, contemplation reminds one of what does provide him with peace. And for the dissatisfied, contemplation brings an alternative way to frame one's personal experiences and views of the world. In both cases, contemplation works on managing one's preconditioned life. Contemplation sparks new wonders; it is built upon questions with impossible answers, lending no quarter to apathy—a quality that differs greatly from inner peace. Contemplation further reminds one that there are always more questions to ask. Still, the contemplative process is difficult to manage.

One reason modern people find contemplation so difficult is because our consciousness is 'thing' oriented, even our thinking about ourselves. A consciousness open to Being and to intuition and experience of Being, on the contrary, would prepare people for the way of contemplation. (Givey, 1983, p. 41)

Nevertheless, such difficulty should not lead to giving up. The benefits of contemplation far outweigh any drawbacks. To further clarify the myriad problems surrounding the term contemplation, we now take on the first of its two forms.

### **Secular Contemplation**

According to Wallace (2009),

The English word 'contemplation' derives from the Latin *contemplatio*, which corresponds to the Greek *theoria*. Both terms refer to a total devotion to revealing,



clarifying, and making manifest the nature of reality. Nowadays, ‘contemplation’ usually means thinking about something. But the original meanings of ‘contemplation’ and ‘theory’ had to do with a direct perception of reality, not by the five physical senses or by thinking, but by mental perception. (p. 7)

Current perspectives honor this position too, and imbue contemplation with qualities that sort, sift, and/or produce results that *must be*—that are logically validated. Because secularism aligns contemplation with thinking (or, more accurately, with rationality), contemplation is seen as a method used to attain a further end.<sup>31</sup> It is heralded as a framework that gives a person the time and space to exercise the operations of rationality so as to arrive at objective knowledge. When rationality is paired with contemplation, both promote rules that govern the validity of certain conclusions based on certain premises. Common phrases attest to this proposition: ‘I’m contemplating what that means.’ Or, ‘let me contemplate that.’ Or even, ‘don’t bother him, he’s contemplating.’ In such cases, contemplation is aligned with the thinker’s rational thought; in fact, the word thinking could be substituted for the term contemplation quite easily. As a consequence, the term ‘thinking,’ used in this way, becomes the activity of logical deductions and inductions.

Logic is as neutral as math, for just as  $2 + 2$  always equals 4, if I take A & B as a premise, I can derive A and B as true statements *if the premises are true*. The value of numbers is analogous to the truth-value of logical sentences (i.e., A). In logic, value is binary—one of two options must be: either A is true or A is false. Likewise, if A is true,

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<sup>31</sup> See current debates on instrumental rationality, such as those discussed in Wedgwood (2011).

then not-A is false. Thus logic sorts the contents of the mind into these two categories, branching out knowledge through the law of non-contradiction. Logic itself merely clarifies the operations of rationality; it does not have anything to say about the truth or falsity of our premises outside the mind. As a result, logic offers us two ways to argue. One, we can say using logic that someone's conclusions cannot be legitimately derived from their premises (i.e., if someone takes A & B as the sole premise of an argument, and then asserts the truth of C based on that premise, we can say their argument is invalid). Two, we can use logic to uncover their premises (which may be hidden or unclear). Then we would need to apply values and knowledge of the world to find problems with the premises themselves.

People employ the methodology of logic to produce 'rational' outcomes; however, logic itself is based upon sets of rules devised by people, who are in fact predisposed to be biased in their beliefs and interests. Thereby there is room to assume that the logic people utilize is too biased in its own right. Examples of these biased outcomes include Plato's belief that human reason could attain an intimacy with the Good, Descartes's mantra "I think, therefore I am" that confirmed the superiority of the mind, or Kant's trust in reason to formulate supreme ethical principles. In all of these examples, thinking is meant to produce a rationally-desired outcome. Secular contexts support attempts to make contemplation and thinking synonymous, and in doing so, value its rational characteristics more so than its emotional ones.

Lost through this secular conflation are the distinctive characteristics that distinguish contemplation from thinking. Rather than allow contemplation to exist *in, of*

and *for* itself, a secular view values contemplation for the alternatives it can produce. Consequently, the emotive view of contemplation is muted, though not entirely lost. Yet, we should not be so critical of secular contemplation, for it does offer at least a partial insight into the nature of contemplation. Likewise, spiritual contemplation offers another part of the complete picture, though not without its own biases.

### **Spiritual Contemplation**

Spiritual contemplation argues that all exterior states and appearances are transitory, and redirects the individual's focus back 'into' himself so he may find lasting contentment (Goldsmith, 1963, pp. 121–122). "The real secret of true and lasting interior peace lies in detachment from the passing realities and events of life that make up its superficial pattern" (A Carthusian, 1975, p. 29). Challenging these superficial patterns is the spiritual experience of emotion; spirituality itself is founded on faith, an emotional response that affirms what the rational mind does not know to be true, or is unqualified to grasp.

Spiritual perspectives also regard contemplation as an approach to arouse emotion. This is articulated most eloquently in the form language adopts when it describes the meaning, presence and/or influence of spirituality. One example of this use of language is seen clearly in the work of Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), above all in his commentary on the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac.<sup>32</sup> In Kierkegaard's analysis of the story, the reader's emotions, not his intellect, are summoned. The pages petition the

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<sup>32</sup> In brief, Abraham was 'commanded by God' to sacrifice his son, Isaac in order to demonstrate his unwavering faith in God.

heart rather than the mind. Kierkegaard's imagery moves the reader in ways that involve him in the personal and private longings of a man who finds as much trouble in himself as he does in attempting to know God. For example, Kierkegaard (1964) states:

Every individual ought to live in fear and trembling, and so too there is no established order which can do without fear and trembling. Fear and trembling signifies that one is in process of becoming, and every individual man, and the race as well, is or should be conscious of being in the process of becoming. And fear and trembling signifies that a God exists—a fact which no man and no established order dare for an instant to forget. (p. 89)

It is not only the reader's own emotions that are moved by a careful reading of the story; the reader is also drawn to consider the emotional disposition of Abraham. When a reader considers the position Abraham is placed in, the reader must recognize that Abraham must have doubted God's command, even if momentarily. How could any father think otherwise? Doubt is a trait that has always been paired with faith. Moreover, doubt and faith find common ground in that both are defined by emotion. Doubt itself is an emotion that works within the context of faith. Surely, doubt is not thought of as an emotion when a person doubts that  $2 + 2 = 3$ ; however, doubt can be seen as an emotional response when it is placed alongside a strictly emotional context, like faith. As Merton (1975) suggests, "Faith means doubt. Faith is not the suppression of doubt. It is the overcoming of doubt, and you overcome doubt by going through it" (p. 306). Any doubt that Abraham felt was because of his strong emotional ties to his faith. By working through his faith, Abraham worked through his doubt that God had his best interest in mind. We can only imagine the emotional turmoil Abraham must have experienced when God told Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Could any father ignore his emotions in such a situation?

Could any parent think only rationally about what seems like an irrational request? Would Abraham doubt his faith in God and choose not to sacrifice his son for the Lord?

Abraham's doubt was what enabled him to work through his confusion. His decision was emotionally rather than intellectually driven.

Contemplation is thought to extend beyond one's normal state of thinking—quieting the rational mind so that emotional connections can surface. This depiction is reminiscent of what the Lord claims to Samuel. “The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), in 1 Samuel, 16:7). Further, in The Holy Bible in Jeremiah 29:13, “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.” But, we need not turn exclusively to Biblical references. St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa of Avila, and the Christian Desert Fathers, for example, held an intimacy with the Divine that left no space for the uncompromising rational mind; and indeed, their language arouses not rationality but the deepest of human emotions. This intimate connection to the Divine is what makes the spiritual experience emotional. This intimacy is stoked by the heart and not by the mind.

Let us turn to one prominent example of this. Meister Eckhart,<sup>33</sup> a friend to the work and vision of Kierkegaard, understood the significance of love within the sacred experience<sup>34</sup> (Randler, 2010, p. 172). Randler explains, “The multivalent signifier of love

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<sup>33</sup> Randler (2010) reminds us of the uniqueness of Eckhart's position when she suggests that contemporary scholarship creates a false fissure in the relationship between the intellectual and emotional nuances of Eckhart's mysticism, suggesting instead that the importance of the contemplative experience lies with emotive responses to thought.

<sup>34</sup> This is not to say that love is the entirety of the sacred experience, but that Eckhart values emotion

lies at the heart of Eckhart's mysticism and constitutes a central topos that discloses the substance of his mystical theology" (2010, p. 171). The significance Eckhart lends to love is apparent in his *Sermon Five: How All Creatures Share an Equality of Being*, in which Eckhart discusses three expressions of love that the Lord sustains.<sup>35</sup> Throughout his writings, Eckhart's descriptions of mysticism evince his own commitment to producing a spirituality founded on emotion. In his own words, "The immensity of the sweetness which God inspires in us extinguishes all other delights" (Eckhart, 1936, IV 69–70). Such words are spoken by the heart to the envy of minds.

For added support, the primacy of emotion in spiritual contexts has been demonstrated in an assortment of evocative religious artworks, including Bernini's 1652 sculpture, *Saint Teresa in Ecstasy*; Michelangelo's 1499 sculpture, *La Pietà*; or countless images of Jesus's crucifixion, also called the *Passion of Christ*. Though some may argue that spirituality can be rationally defined, in view of the description of logic offered above, it can be deduced that an argument used to prove the rationality of spirituality actually begins with premises unestablished by logic or reason. As Kierkegaard has clearly demonstrated, faith is impossible to prove by logic alone, and faith is the primary truth of any spirituality. Returning to Kierkegaard (2006):

During all this time he [Abraham] believed; he believed that God would not demand Isaac of him, while he still was willing to sacrifice him if it was demanded. He believed by virtue of the absurd, for human calculation was out of

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among other aspects of the sacred experience.

<sup>35</sup> Sermon Five is reproduced with commentary in Fox, M. (1980). *Breakthrough: Meister Eckhart's creation spirituality in new translation*. Garden City, NY: Image Books. (pp. 91-101).

the question, and it was indeed absurd that God, who demanded it of him, in the next instant would revoke the demand. (p. 29)

Though the word faith is not specifically used, I suggest that faith is precisely what Kierkegaard is referring to. It is the balance between faith and an absurd moment (to take the life of one's son) that frames Kierkegaard's discussions concerning the story of Abraham and Isaac. And, without question, both faith and the absurd are unwelcome in the 'serious work' that logic sets out to accomplish. Indeed, the very absurdity Kierkegaard references here arises from a violation of that cardinal rule of logic, the law of non-contradiction. Palmer (1979) discusses this clashing relationship between spirituality and objective, logical truth:

Spiritual truth will often seem self-contradictory when judged by the logic of the world. Where that logic wants to separate and divide, the spiritual eye looks for what [Thomas] Merton called life's 'hidden wholeness,' the underlying unity of all things. Logic assumes that there is no truth which violates the rules devised by human mind. Faith assumes that those rules become less and less useful as our questions grow deeper. The spiritual life proceeds in a kind of trembling certainty that God's truth lies beyond all verities of logic. (p. 9)

While secular and spiritual perspectives of contemplation have clear differences, they are not without their similarities. They find common ground in their regard for contemplation as an epistemological activity: rationality is an activity of knowing and emotion is inevitably known by the thinking mind. Likewise, both perspectives aim to deepen one's knowledge of Self and world through the contemplative act—despite the fact that their methodologies differ. These varying perspectives should not be regarded as a conflict between a right or wrong interpretation. Spiritual contemplation is not 'better

than' secular contemplation; rather, their differences highlight the complexity latent in the meaning of the term. Each interpretation highlights important aspects of contemplation; problems arise when one definition is valued more than the other. In addition, both rational and emotive perspectives act as precursors to the contemplative path, not as actions during or products resulting from the contemplative path. However, if the identity of contemplation rests with neither approach, yet still retains elements of each perspective, can contemplation be clearly defined? The next section takes on this task.

### **Introducing and Defining Aneutral Contemplation**

Contemplation appears without effort or specific methods (Wencel, 2007). And, as I suggest, it occurs by neither reason nor emotion, and it is not a technique that methodically points towards solutions (as rational secularism or emotional spirituality would). In resolving the conflict between competitors as entrenched as emotion and reason, one might wish to characterize contemplation as a 'neutral' force. On the contrary, an alternative redefining of contemplation does not occupy a state of neutrality, because neutrality defines itself with reference to the sides of an either/or scenario; and, contemplation refuses to fix itself in a definite and definable position within this either/or continuum. Thus, 'something different' must be used to describe contemplation, given that the present frameworks whereby either rationality or emotion is privileged have been shown to be problematic. I have chosen to introduce the term *aneutral* to provide some clarity. This term highlights the non-partiality and continual movement of contemplation between reason and emotion. The term *aneutral* is also beneficial because it refuses to



position contemplation on either side, but instead denies the relevance of the spectrum altogether.

Contemplation cannot be placed into any one category; instead, it falls into a position of neither/nor; contemplation is *neither* rationally based, *nor* is it an emotional response. As Merton (2003) claims, “All thought, no matter how pure, is transcended in contemplation” (p. 72). Merton leaves no room for dividing contemplation decisively along rational or emotive lines. Aneutral contemplation transcends *the divide* between reason and emotion, and brings together the best of both rational and emotive standpoints by refusing to show partiality to either one. Defining contemplation in these terms places it in a continual state of movement; rather than seeing the person as a continuum with reason on one end and emotion on the other, contemplation is open to the interdependency of both faculties. Bearing this in mind, I offer the following definition of *contemplation: it is an aneutral behavioral process* (because it is partial to neither reason nor emotion) *that reveals possible actions and consequences, preparing the individual to act responsibly in fulfillment of his highest potential.* It is through such an experience that a person first finds an entryway into the authentic experience of Self and Other. To better appreciate this alternative view of contemplation, I turn to the insights of Thomas Merton. His musings will provide excellent references and substantiate the use of the term *aneutral contemplation*.

### **Thomas Merton and (Aneutral) Contemplation**

Merton (1915-1968) was a leading thinker and writer on contemplation.

Bamberger (2008) tells us that

He [Merton] achieved influence, not only in monastic circles and religious domain, but also in different spheres of human and general interest: political, artistic, literary, and social. Yet it was contemplation, as he forcefully stated, that remained his dominant focus and concern. (p. 391)

Merton belonged to the Cistercian Abbey of Gethsemani near Bardstown, Kentucky. He is part of a long, continual line of spiritual tradition, tracing itself from the first monks, represented by the Egyptian Desert Fathers (3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries), through Pseudo-Dionysius (6<sup>th</sup> century), Meister Eckhart (14<sup>th</sup> century), and Saint John of the Cross (16<sup>th</sup> century), up through his own involvement with monasticism in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (Lipse, 2010). Along with these important figures, Merton also studied and was influenced by Augustine, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, St. Teresa of Avila, St. Ignatius of Antioch, John Cassian, William of St. Thierry, Adam of Perseigne, and Gueric of Igny (Crider, 2008; Teahan, 1981). Merton philosophized about three forms of contemplation: infused, natural, and active. As Labrie (2006) states, Merton took this approach to explain the multiplicity of forms contemplation takes depending upon where one contemplates (location) and how one contemplates.

Merton describes infused contemplation as the most valuable form. Infused contemplation is a technical term that is sometimes placed synonymously with the term 'mystical.' Infused contemplation signifies the personal and supernatural experience of someone who witnesses the center of his Being permeated by the presence, knowledge, and mystery of God; without effort and through His grace, transcending all his human faculties of perception (Harvey, 1964; Labrie, 2006; Merton, 1971, 1976). To elaborate further, infused contemplation is an experience whereby an individual identifies the

essence of God within his own Being. Moreover, infused contemplation is the welcoming of God into one's heart. It is not experienced by sight, sound, touch, or hearing; instead it is a connection with God through one's recognition of his own Holiness. No divide exists between one's Self and God, the essence of God becomes embodied. Within the context of infused contemplation, even the descriptions just offered are inadequate representations, but through the experiences of others, people can imagine an inkling of its magnitude and meaning. The point of discussing infused contemplation is not to describe methods to attain it; such attempts are futile. Rather, the aim of descriptions is to illustrate the uniqueness of the experience so that others may be urged to open themselves up to the possibility of mystical, embodied experiences with God.

The second type of contemplation Merton discusses is *natural*. "*Natural* contemplation, Merton pointed out, was the sort of contemplation exercised by the artist and the philosopher, who contemplated being in its various religious and ontological manifestations" (Labrie, 2006, p. 479). Natural contemplation is not the area of mystics who aim at the indescribable and the sublime; rather it is the realm of the beautiful and the ones who aim to describe it. Merton was right to suggest that philosophers and artists are the ideal representatives of natural contemplation. Natural contemplation aims at a better understanding of the world and all that comes with it. Philosophers and artists question the meaning and significance of worldly matters. They wonder about life and try to recreate it in its entire splendor through words and images. People who experience natural contemplation witness the value of infused contemplation but cannot experience it

because they are unwilling to let go of worldly descriptions and their belief that their intellect can understand it.

Third, Merton discusses *active* contemplation. “*Active* contemplation exposes itself in daily life through intentions and acts where a person sacrifices his time and effort to benefit the lives of others” (Labrie, 2006, p. 481). Active contemplation is worldly contemplation, of being in its most concrete form. Such a contemplative brings the attention of the previous two types to the world, honoring the beauty and meaning of daily experience, of encounters for the other.

Merton is not the only thinker to divide contemplation along categorical lines. Academic theologians have also divided contemplation into categories; however, their divisions and explanations are quite different. Johnston (1998), for instance, explains that theologians “spoke of acquired and infused contemplation. Acquired contemplation is found through personal effort with the aid of ordinary grace: infused contemplation is that gift of presence that comes gratuitously and is identified with mysticism” (pp. 42–43). Johnston (1998) further states that this division “is no longer useful” (p. 43). I take Johnston to mean that it is time to abolish categories when discussing contemplation, to move beyond descriptions and focus more on actions that can lead people to contemplation. Although I identify the worth of this step, I still disagree with Johnston on this point. It is important to note that contemplation exhibits itself in a range of forms, with no form retaining a more valuable role than the other. Johnston may believe that this warrants abolishing the categories altogether, but categorical distinctions exist not to differentiate contemplation itself, but rather to highlight that contemplation is situational

and dependent upon the personal and spiritual growth of the contemplative practitioner. Also, contemplation is developmental, and categories help people better comprehend their degrees of development.<sup>36</sup>

Instead of defining contemplation in terms of either/or (which is likely to place contemplation in natural or active categories), Merton elects to use terms closer to neither/nor (aligning it more with infused contemplation). In doing so, Merton is cautious about placing limitations on the meaning of contemplation. He wants to ‘open’ its meaning, not restrict it. His descriptions of contemplation are more apt to tell the reader what contemplation *is not* rather than what it *is*. Crider (2008) supports this point, claiming that “Contemplation definitely is not captured in Merton’s writings. Instead his writings simply allude to contemplation” (p. 605). He, along with others, advises that the only way to ‘understand’ contemplation is by experience.<sup>37</sup> Still, to say that one can ‘understand’ contemplation following the experience of it, assumes that the qualities of contemplation can be brought to the scrutiny of one’s mind; this determination is incorrect. So, if contemplation cannot be understood by the mind, then the next plausible conclusion would be that it can be known through the emotions. Counter to expectations, this assumption is also incorrect. Fortunately, Merton recognizes this dilemma and works to resolve it.

Merton suggests that contemplation owes allegiance to neither reason nor emotion. He claims, at the opening of his 1961a work, that “contemplation is the highest

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<sup>36</sup> See Keating (2012).

<sup>37</sup> As Kline (1991a) reminds us, “by definition, experience is always subjective” (p. 4).

expression of man's intellectual *and* spiritual life" (p. 1, emphasis added). He rejects the notion of rational contemplation precisely because of its divisiveness: "For the contemplative there is no *cogito* ('I think') and no *ergo* ('therefore') but only SUM, I AM" (Merton, 1961a, p. 9). Put differently, Merton (1958) stresses that the "spiritual life is not mental life. It is not thought alone. Nor is it, of course, a life of sensation, a life of feeling—'feeling' and experiencing the things of the spirit, and the things of God" (p. 15). But, Merton does not stop there; he finds emotive contemplation just as problematic: "To describe 'reactions' and 'feelings' is to situate contemplation where it is not to be found, in the superficial consciousness where it can be observed by reflection" (Merton, 1961a, p. 6). Merton explains that division is inherent in the act of observation, although the framework of contemplation eschews such a division. When people observe in reality, it presupposes that some phenomena will be experienced by the senses while other phenomena will be overlooked. Furthermore, the phenomenon that people do identify with is ultimately differentiated from all other phenomena. People wind up placing phenomena into descriptive categories. Merton suggests that contemplation avoids these situations: it is not recognizable by the senses, describable, and it is not categorical. Keeping in mind these points of contemplation, we now examine how it becomes a viable solution to the two key behavioral problems of modernity introduced in Chapter I. From this point forward, the term *contemplation* will refer to the alternative, *aneutral contemplation* just discussed, unless otherwise indicated.

### **The Contemplative Response to Modernity's Over-confidence in Reason**

There is some benefit, not to be overlooked, that can come from reason's confidence. People need to feel a sense of certainty when dealing with a decision; such certitude is supplied by the confidence of reason given that it allows no room for the possibility of mistakes—reason is thought to be complete in and of itself. A problem occurs, however, when the individual places so much confidence in his own reason that his critical reflection diminishes. Allowing reason to become the default, an unquestioned arbiter of one's thoughts, leads to a narrowing of perspective and a hidden assumption of infallibility. Critical reflection, on the other hand, requires looking at a situation through multiple lenses (reason being only one), without automatically privileging just one.

### **Doubt & Resistance to Reason**

As determined in Chapter I, reason excludes the possibility of doubt and therefore renders resistance impossible. Doubt and resistance are the chief attributes that contemplation utilizes to combat modernity's over-confidence in reason. Contemplation strikes straight at the heart of the characteristic of reason because it *does* doubt and *does* resist; due to this, contemplation offers a counter-narrative that can dismantle the over-confident behavior of modern reason. Truth be told, contemplation does not reject reason entirely; it merely understands the potential dangers that follow a blind adherence to its motives. As Groeschel (1984) states, "The drives, senses, desires, thoughts and complex ideas of reason are not divorced from contemplation, but stand like foothills around this highest peak of human experience" (p. 81).

Doubt and resistance are recognizable in contemplation's persistent lack of certainty, to the point that contemplation resists even defining itself, electing instead to establish what it is *not* rather than what it is. Contemplation thus defines itself through 'negative' descriptions. Whereas rationality looks for clear and salient concepts, contemplation offers only hints about its meaning, remaining an inexhaustible source of doubt, subject to almost infinite definition, without ever reaching completeness. As Nemeck and Coombs (1982) describe, "What a person is usually conscious of in contemplation is a general, vague state of emptiness in which no-thing in particular is present" (p. 47). And, if "no-thing" is presented, than what is to be defined? Merton, too, places the responsibility for describing contemplation directly in the hands of the one who experiences it. Each time contemplation is approached, thought about, or experienced, it is up to the individual to recreate its meaning. The question then becomes, how does one describe the indescribable? The contemplative is left wordless in the face of contemplation; no standard descriptive pattern is capable of framing the experience. The contemplative path demolishes the tradition and language that have been historically produced to create either/or modes of being; with a contemplative awareness, rational and emotive 'Truth' claims are left mute, and the Self can 'just be.' This puts the process of contemplation 'outside' the individual's control, and "what is beyond human control is also outside our capacity to understand. What is beyond experience cannot be interpreted and explained in normal language. We have to learn to be content with unknowing" (Casey, 1996, p. 164). This impasse should not dissuade the practitioner from talking



about the matter, however. Words are still the best tools to express human conditions. They may be imperfect, but words still point in a direction.

While reason and emotion define themselves by responding to objects (e.g., I think X is . . . , or, I feel this way about X because . . . ), contemplation lacks any prescribed aim at all, is prompted from within, and has no object of focus. Contemplation favors neither rational nor emotional responses; rather, it recognizes the necessity of each in the totality of human response. Initially, reason and emotion can aid contemplative development, but in the end both attributes must be relinquished. While reason stresses its leadership, reacting to situations and attempting to dictate them, contemplation offers a space in which the individual can think more openly and freely about his options, a cognition that can be informed by reason and emotion without being overwhelmed by them. Independent of the situation, contemplation offers a space where multiple perspectives and multiple resources can counter the over-confidence in/of reason. We are now ready to address the second behavioral dilemma of modernity: a desire to influence others for personal gain.

### **The Contemplative Response to a Desire to Influence Others for Personal Gain**

A desire to influence others for personal gain is not a novel trait of modernity; in fact, history has recorded countless people stepping on the backs of others to gain advantage. What is new, however, is the strength and ubiquity of this desire, which in the modern age has a tendency to ignore restraint and become hard to control once initiated. A desire to influence others for personal gain is by its very nature immoderate, for it seeks to extend over others a control that is only proper to oneself. I suggest that

moderation, the archetype of self-control, is a direct antidote for the individual who desires to place himself before the well-being of others.

According to Webb and Walker (1962), moderation should be exercised in all things because it opposes the faults that always accompany excess. It is through cultivating a contemplative perspective that a moderate disposition is best achieved. By its very essence, contemplation grasps what it means to be moderate; for as we have noted, it works to balance itself between rational and emotive responses. Contemplation reveals that the path to inner peace lies in moderation, thereby offering people an antidote to the indulgence in overweening desire.

Moderation, however beneficial it is, is tough to achieve because it disrupts a common basis of self-worth. As an individual gains influence over others, his own value is reaffirmed, reinforcing his own sense of worth. This cycle becomes viciously self-perpetuating to the point that a person pays little attention to the consequences his behavior has for others, but thinks only of gratifying his own desire for self-affirmation. This connection between desire and influence is troubling to say the least. Understanding the relationship between these characteristics helps one identify their troublesome outcomes. Plato's *Gorgias* (1971) offers a metaphoric example of this connection, as well as sheds light on how contemplation might challenge the desire to influence others for personal gain.

In Plato's *Gorgias* (1971), Socrates engages Callicles about the need for everyone to master his pleasures and appetites/desires (491e). Callicles calls such men "simpletons" and claims: "Anyone who is to live aright should suffer his appetites to

grow to the greatest extent and not check them, and through courage and intelligence should be competent to minister to them at their greatest and to satisfy every appetite with what it craves” (492a). To counter Callicles’s argument, Socrates uses a metaphor distinguishing between “the temperate and the undisciplined” (493e). He states:

Imagine that each of the two men has several jars, in the one case in sound condition and filled . . . but that the sources of these liquids are scanty and hard to come by, procured only with much hard labor. Imagine then that the one after filling his vessels does not trouble himself to draw in further supplies but as far as the jars are concerned is free from worry; in the case of the other man the sources, as in the first instance are procurable but difficult to come by, but his vessels are perforated and unsound and he is ever compelled to spend day and night in replenishing them, if he is not to suffer the greatest agony. (493e- 494a)

Callicles declares: “the man who has filled his vessels can no longer find any pleasure, but this is what I just now described as living the life of a stone. Once the vessels are filled, there is neither pleasure nor pain anymore. But a life of pleasure demands the largest possible influx” (494b). In using this image of the jars, Socrates attempts to show Callicles that a life led by desire is in fact a life of struggle in service to a master that will never be satisfied. Callicles sees only the desire and its gratification, and focuses on that momentary satisfaction. However, he fails to see that such a life, giving desire full rein, leads only to the strengthening of desire. The unquenchable thirst of desire is itself suffering, which is relieved when it is indulged. And yet, when it is indulged it is strengthened, and so the cycle begins anew, with greater force (as in the jars with holes). This is why, to be experience inner peace and be more fulfilled, one must live a life of moderation, and place limits on desire (represented by the sound jars).

### **The Other**

Not to be overlooked in our understanding of moderation is the Other. When an individual enacts moderation he takes steps closer to contemplation, and once contemplation informs his outlook, it takes him away from his self-absorption, cultivating a wider lens on reality that identifies the Other as a person with his own rational and emotive faculties. When this realization occurs, the individual looks through ‘contemplative eyes’ at the Other, and his impartiality to reason and to emotion allows him to identify the significance of the Other; in turn, he becomes more known to himself, since the Other helps to reveal an important characteristic of his own identity.

In the inevitable encounter with the Other, the individual encounters the definitive unknown. As Miller (1992) claims, “from the beginning, without realizing it, we are in the throe of the absolute Other” (Miller, 1992, p. 193). If a person overlooks his participation with the Other, he is more likely to influence the Other for his own benefits, given that the Other is regarded as a means rather than an end in-and-of-himself, and a participant in the identity of *his* own Being. Further, the recognition of Other does not develop “from our knowledge of ourselves as beings; it derives from a knowledge of our nothingness which overturns our deepest presumptions about ourselves as beings” (Miller, 1992, p. 192). Without the Other the individual remains incomplete. The discovery of one’s own nothingness comes from understanding that his Being is not solely his. Thereon rests the paradox: his nothingness reveals the Being of the Other, which in turn reciprocates his own significance in the equation. An individual learns that both Self and Other exist and remain because each has Being. In short, the indivisibility

of Being establishes the indivisibility of the co-dependency of Self and Other. This realization is best recognized through the development of contemplation. Contemplation accomplishes this by shaping a new framework on which to base decisions, actions, and encounters with Others. As Zajonc (2009) states:

Contemplative practice and its accompanying moral development can move us toward the possibility of true human encounters, to meetings where the core reality of the person across from us is more fully present before and within us. When this occurs, something intangible is sensed and exchanged. We live for a moment together in the world formed by our mutual attending. (pp. 141–142)

### **Responsibility**

Zajonc (2009) describes an exchange of ‘Selves’ that establishes a “moral development” for the contemplative or what I suggest could be described as *a sense of responsibility for the Other*. And because a person recognizes his responsibility for the Other, he is less likely to want to influence him for the sake of Self. However, this conduct originates only when contemplation challenges the excessive self-serving behavior of modernity. By ‘tapping into’ contemplation, responsibility matures, and the Being of an Other individual is illuminated.

Like contemplation, responsibility does not pander to reason or emotion; it reaches beyond these features to acquaint itself with the Other *as he is*, prior to rational or emotive introductions that may taint how an individual perceives the Other. This should be deemed a responsible way of encountering a person, and is the type of relationship examined extensively in the work of Martin Buber. Buber (1996) claims that “Relation is reciprocity. My You acts on me as I act on it” (p. 67). Or, put another way, “only where

all means have disintegrated do encounters occur” (Buber, 1996, p. 63). I dare say we have all experienced this awareness of the Other and our responsibility for him, when out of the quiet come questions like: *Is it right that people should have to live that way? Where is justice when we need it? Or, what can I do to help?* Such questions promote inclusion, and illustrate to a person that he is not the only carrier of valuable perspectives on reality, nor the sole possessor of Being. Such questions move a person outside of himself, so he can witness the value of abstaining from trying to influence the Other for his own gain.

The responsibility that forms out of contemplation is uniquely driven. It is a product that has no empirical counterpart. It is neither of reason nor of emotion. The neither/nor expression of contemplation is what gives an individual enough distance from his own concerns and self-narratives to pinpoint his dependence on and responsibility to/for the Other. Contemplation is not so much concerned with promoting self-responsibility as it is with promoting Other-responsibility. This matter must not be overlooked. It is the Other who makes an individual who he is. Levinas (1985) states it concisely: “I understand responsibility as responsibility for the Other” (p. 95). As contemplation widens the focus of responsibility from Self to Other, more authentic connections are made. In this instance, *authentic connection* refers to a caring union between people that recognizes the Other as an integral part of Self, and negative thoughts and actions toward the Other are placed aside and substituted with responsibility.

Nhat Hanh (1987) calls this recognition of and concern for the Other “interbeing.”<sup>38</sup> It is a term taken “from the *Avatamsaka Sutra* . . . In the sutra it is a compound term which means ‘mutual’ and ‘to be . . . I am, therefore you are. You are, therefore I am. That is the meaning of the word ‘interbeing.’ We interare” (Nhat Hanh, 1987, pp. 86–87). The development of responsibility reshapes (or resets) the individual’s epistemological and psychological extension of Self in the world. It is analogous to the charge of the bodhisattva—a Buddhist of the Mahayana tradition who “refused to enter final nirvana until everyone was saved” (Olson, 2005, p. 146).<sup>39</sup> The vow of the bodhisattva, for example, does not come from reason or emotion, for the vow is not oriented to the Self (as reason and emotion inextricably are); the bodhisattva acts out of a sense of duty to all living things, including the Self. It is responsibility, then, that forms the connection between contemplation, knowledge (either rational or emotive), and the construction of Self and Other.

To provide evidence in support of contemplation’s ability to neutralize the second behavioral imbalance identified in modernity, I discuss several observations I experienced while living with the monks of Mepkin. But first, in order to understand the value and significance of my experiences, it is necessary that we learn a bit about the Cistercian monks of Mepkin Abbey.

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<sup>38</sup> The connection between Nhat Hanh’s interbeing and education will be discussed at length in the concluding chapter.

<sup>39</sup> The *Vimalakirtinirdesa Sutra* (Teachings of the Bodhisattva Unstained-Glory), with help from Nagarjuna—founder of the Madhyamika school of Buddhism, developed the notion of a lay bodhisattva. “It was no longer necessary for a bodhisattva to be a monastic person and renounce society and the world, . . . The message of the text was that the path of the bodhisattva was open to everyone” (Olson, 2005, p. 150).

### **The Cistercian Monks of Mepkin Abbey**

In 2011, there were 2,083 Cistercian monks living in 97 monasteries in 44 countries (Fitzgerald, 2011, p. 302). The Cistercians are cenobitic monks;<sup>40</sup> that is to say, they live in a single community devoted to worshipping God, rather than the eremitic tradition that is committed to the hermit's life of isolation. Cistercian monks divide their day into three parts: 1. keeping of the Hours (scheduled times for prayer), 2. Work, and 3. private meditation. Their day begins in darkness, waking before the sun rises, and gathering for their first prayers of the day at 3:00 a.m. And, while others may dislike the early hours, the monk welcomes it. "The monk is happy to give up part of his sleep in order to watch during the night" (Louf, 1989, p. 94). There is a reason for the monk's early rise. "He watches indeed lest Jesus come to visit him during the day which is dawning, but he watches also on behalf of the Church and the whole world" (Louf, 1989, p. 95).

The structured framework of the monk's life is founded on *The Rule*, written by Saint Benedict around 530 A.D. Benedict was born in 480 and died in 547. He is considered "the father of Western monasticism" (Louf, 1989, p. 24; Teahan, 1981, p. 97), while "St. Antony the Great is regarded as the father of Christian monks" (Kline, 1991b, p. 3; Louf, 1989, p. 24). Benedict's day-to-day guide includes procedures and musings regarding the spiritual, personal, and communal responsibilities at a monastery.

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<sup>40</sup> The father of the cenobitic movement is St. Pachomius (Louf, 1989, p. 27).



Benedict's work lays a foundation for each monk's daily schedule, from the novice monk to the head of the monastery: the Abbot.

### **A Description of Mepkin Abbey**

I was fortunate enough to spend 44 days observing and participating in the contemplative practices of the Cistercian monks of Mepkin Abbey. Established in 1949, the monastery is nestled on over 3,200 acres along the Cooper River in Moncks Corner, South Carolina. The setting retains its original beauty with its varieties of wildlife, vibrant flora, and towering trees draped with Spanish mosses. During my visits, I spotted blue herons, white storks, red-tailed hawks, opossums, deer, raccoons, loons, box turtles, and even two small alligators. A medley of flora spread across the grounds as well, including daffodils, pansies, Gerber daises, and phlox, to name a few. I also heard owls hooting, ducks quacking, squirrels chattering, and a variety of bird calls. Besides the flora and wildlife, a mixture of trees call Mepkin home. There are oaks, hickories, cedars, pecans, Japanese maples, and many others to enjoy. In the early morning, the sun rises, lending its image to the Cooper River, and so as not to become a stranger, in the late evening, the sun descends and the stars fall on the same water. Amid this stunning location, visitors will find pathways that wind and stretch to every nook of the monastery. And, to help set a relaxing mood, benches are positioned along beautiful vistas, inviting anyone who wishes to sit, be silent, and enjoy the solitude.

### **Ethnographic Description #1: The Death of Brother Gregory**

Of my many experiences at Mepkin, no event was a greater occasion to put into practice the contemplative balance between reason and emotion than the death of Brother

Gregory. No other event is able to stir the mind and heart more than a visit from death, and the death of Brother Gregory Krug forced those closest to him to examine their understanding and grasp on contemplation. Witnessing Brother Gregory's fellow monks, family members, and guests cope with his death in their own particular ways exemplified the value of exercising contemplation. There was an undeniable difference between how the monks at Mepkin and all others handled his passing. The following descriptions will make this difference discernible.

Brother Gregory Krug passed away on December 23<sup>rd</sup> 2011. He was 92 years old. Born in Detroit, Michigan on May 30<sup>th</sup> 1919, he entered Gethsemani monastery in Gethsemani, Kentucky on January 15<sup>th</sup> 1948 at the age of 29. On November 14<sup>th</sup> 1949, Brother Gregory, along with a few of his fellow monks, traveled to Moncks Corner, South Carolina to become the original founders of Mepkin Abbey.

At Mepkin, silence is expected, sound is the exception, and life is shared with others through prayer and fraternal communion. Brother Gregory involved himself in the life of his brethren not only through spiritual exercises, but also through pleasantries that others often discount: sunny smiles, sincere looks, and acknowledging head-nods as he passed others on the grounds in his wheelchair. Brother Gregory shared the same loyalty to the Hours, ate and enjoyed the same food, and rested under the same sunlit and starlit skies as his Brothers.

Decades had passed since Brother Gregory arrived at Mepkin, and his presence had become a part of everyone's daily and expected routine. Now, the monks' routine had been jolted. Brother Gregory's death was announced early in the morning immediately after morning prayers had concluded. The Abbot stepped down from his position in the

choir, and announced that the last remaining founder of Mepkin had died. The Abbot asked everyone to walk over to Brother Gregory's room so final prayers could be said for him. The walk from the church to the senior wing where his room was seemed longer and more silent than usual.

Upon entering his room, one could see his body was fresh with death. People do not typically see a dead body in this state; usually it is embalmed and prepared for display in its coffin, but this time, Brother Gregory was lying dead in his bed. He lay stiff on his mattress, supported by pillows; eyes shut, his mouth gaping wide, his skin showing a horrific pallor, his body lacking his typical peaceful movement. All those present stood in a semi-circle around the foot of his bed. I glanced around the room briefly because I was curious to know how the monks were responding to the loss of their dear friend and Brother.

Besides myself, there were two other monastic guests present. Each of them struggled to hold back tears, and I was no exception. The monks, however, remained steadfast, focused on their prayers, and obviously more in command of their emotions than the rest of us. If the monks were having a difficult time keeping rein on their sadness, each hid it well. At one point I thought, why don't the monks appear sadder? Why is everyone but the monks crying? Some of the monks had known Brother Gregory for decades, yet they seemed indifferent to his passing and surely not overcome with grief. It was not until later that evening that I figured out that the monks were responding to death in the same way they were taught to approach life: as contemplatives. It was

through Brother Gregory's passing that I had the chance to witness firsthand the powerful transformative qualities of contemplation.

On the day of Brother Gregory's burial, the funeral procession started outdoors on an incredibly windy day. Family members, monks, friends, and guests escorted the coffin by song into the church. Most of the laity present were unfamiliar with the words and melody of the hymns, but many appeared to find the music soothing and comforting nonetheless. Once settled inside, those that wished could approach the open coffin, dunk a fresh sprig into the fountain of holy water by its side, and sprinkle it above Brother Gregory's body. This was done as an offering of kind blessings to the memory of Brother Gregory. The church service was short, lasting only about fifteen minutes. It involved the recitation of a few Psalms, singing, prayers, and a homily, or spiritual talk, given by the Abbot. Following the ceremony, Gregory's body was to remain in the church for a twenty-four hour period, as is customary at Mepkin. Those who wished could sign up to 'sit with' Brother Gregory's body in the church.

Following the presentation of the body in the church, the burial took place. There is a plot of land that rests between two modest, ranch-style buildings where the deceased monks of Mepkin are all buried. Each grave is marked with a plain white, wooden cross; and like everywhere at Mepkin, the area is well-kept and lovely. As the coffin was taken outside of the church and escorted to its final resting place, gun shots echoed along the banks of the Cooper River as duck hunters set their eyes on morning fowl. The Abbot, who is a calm and well-centered man, made light of the situation, remarking that the

gunfire was a salute to Brother Gregory—people laughed. His comment was fitting, particularly since Brother Gregory served in the military when he was young man.

After the Abbot's words of prayer in front of the open grave, Brother Gregory's face was covered with a single, white handkerchief, and his body lowered into the earth. Unlike traditional burials, his body was not buried in a coffin; it simply lay flat on a wooden board. Next to the grave, there were a pair of shovels stuck into a mound of dirt. Those who chose to could take a shovelful of dirt and throw it into the grave on top of Brother Gregory's body. When the monks and other guests threw shovelfuls of dirt onto Brother Gregory, the weight of the dirt onto his body made a muffled and hollowed thud. It was a very peculiar sound. The majority of people present looked sad and were either crying or holding back tears. The monks, however, looked quite different. They did not appear overwhelmed or saddened by their loss. This is not to say that they were not sad, but it was apparent that they were handling the situation differently than their guests. The monks seemed to truly accept the situation, and they appeared to keep close watch over their emotions. Following the burial, the Abbott invited everyone to meet in the dining area for refreshments and fellowship. It was a time to reflect on the life of Brother Gregory; and, for me, an occasion to ponder the close bond that exists between contemplation and death.

### **Ethnographic Analysis #1**

#### **The Transformative Qualities of Contemplation and Death**

One cannot help but think about the significance of life when a death occurs. Death becomes a catalyst for wonder as well as an occasion to reflect on the subtle

transformations in life we all experience. People have no control over when their life begins and perhaps little control over when it ends. Yet, what happens in between is surely ours to live.

The death of someone is undeniably one of the most difficult and complex events to handle. It reveals the limits of human understanding. Death is delivered with precision and immoderation, it sweeps in and takes without asking—extinguishing ‘essence’ without permission. People approach and experience life in their own peculiar way, and death is no different. We are thrown into life much as we are thrown into death, not knowing what to expect from either, only knowing that both must be faced. People can, however, prepare for death, even if the final breath remains forever out of their hands.

Death is obviously a physical alteration of body and mind. And, depending on whom one speaks to, the spirit is also changed in death, although to identify a change in a person’s spirit is impossible: that experience will remain eternally personal. Thus, it is futile to ponder the impact of dying and death on the experiencer; instead, it is wiser to examine how death impacts the living—those who are left behind. This impact is detectable, and indeed, transformative. The significance of life comes when we stand back and witness its physical and psychological transformations. The physical transformation is easier to describe because it allows for empirical support, while the psychological transformation belongs to the realm of theologians, psychologists, and philosophers. The psychological aspects of death remain an inexorable mystery, for only by experiencing it can one truly know death. Those that witness the outcome of death are

left behind to struggle with immoderation themselves, confronted with overwhelming emotions and incessant thoughts about the loss.

Brother Gregory's death confirmed the transformative force of contemplation. Above all, contemplation aims to transform its practitioner, and witnessing the monks' handling of a difficult event proved the value of acquiring such a skill. His death gave the monks a chance to put a contemplative lifestyle to the test. Individuals may not describe coping with death as an instance of contemplation; however, a person's ability or inability to beckon contemplation is precisely what determines the type of response he will turn to during such an event. The reason is apparent when we consider what we have learned: neither reason nor emotion are given privilege in the life of a contemplative.

It is impossible to know precisely how contemplation impacts the lives of other people; and, in this way, contemplation carries a trait similar to death's. Only the one who experiences contemplation can truly know what it is and how it transforms the interior space of the Self. Still, a person can witness how contemplation transforms a person's exterior. Contemplation manages to alter a person's perception of the world, thus transforming how the individual acts and relates *in* the world. Keeping in mind our previous conversations regarding the characteristics of contemplation and its close ally, moderation, we can see its effects.

### **Moderation & Contemplation**

Prior to Brother Gregory's death, I had been studying the characteristics and effects of moderation and contemplation in preparation for writing this dissertation; it was not until his death that theories and models were given practicality –theoretical ideas

became grounded by personal experience and the witnessing of how others coped. The death of a loved one tested the monks' understanding of contemplation, and in each moment, they were forced to act on their understanding.

An event like death can easily cause one's reason or emotion to become imbalanced. If this does occur, then reason or emotion will spend all of their time wrestling with the other trait rather than working together to assist the individual during difficult times. The contemplative, however, has a finer grasp on his reason and emotion because he has moderation as his ally. The contemplative state exists in moderation. Moderation falls between the push and pull of the opposing perspectives of reason and emotion that attempt to monopolize the individual's attention and character. Webb and Walker (1962) state that in all circumstances, moderation opposes the faults that always accompany excess. Likewise, in exploring the apophatic and kataphatic veins of mysticism (that is, prayer that focuses on emptying the mind and prayer that focuses the mind on some content, respectively), Egan (2007) points out Thomas Merton's recognition that "it was too simplistic to designate any true mystic as simply apophatic or only kataphatic. . . . The apophatic and the kataphatic are the other side of each other" (pp. 70–71). He quotes Merton's *Ascent to Truth* (1951) in support of this claim: "some of the greatest mystics . . . describe both aspects of contemplation, 'light' and 'darkness'" (p. 70). Moderation, taking the form of recognizing the value of the extremes and holding an inclusive space for both in the middle, is therefore an entrance into the balanced standpoint of contemplation in addition to a central characteristic of it.



Initially, I found the monks' lack of physical emotion concerning Brother Gregory's death peculiar. I anticipated that monks versed in the contemplative life would be more distraught. I expected that their keen knowledge of Self would make them more expressive with their emotions, whether through tears or sadness. However, the more time I spent at Mepkin, the more I came to understand that their response *was* how a contemplative would respond. Perhaps the reason the monks seemed so at peace during a difficult situation was because they had learned how to let go of their sense of Self in the situation. Brother Gregory's death was not about them and how they felt; rather it was about Gregory. And for this reason, they were able to let him go. The monks did not need to think or feel in the situation, they just needed to experience it and not attach to any judgment regarding the event. If the monks did not find a space of moderation between their reason and their emotions, they would have made the event more about themselves than about Brother Gregory. The monks maintained a balanced approach throughout the events surrounding his death, and because of this, the monks were able to transition seamlessly back into their monastic routine, and normalcy at the monastery returned quickly.

In the midst of their quiet life of spiritual discipline death came, that great unknown . . . that which neither reason nor emotion can fathom clearly. Death challenges the mind as much as the heart . . . and the monks' of Mepkin walk up to greet it, spend a night's watch with it, and watch tranquilly as the body that was so recently a beloved friend is returned, with only a shroud, to the earth. In this response, the monks

demonstrate the unique gift that contemplation offers—a space to reevaluate both reason and emotion.

Another example of the monk's grasp of contemplative moderation revolves not around death, but with the equanimity they possess while among the guests at the monastery. Mepkin opens its doors to scores of visitors each and every week. Guests at the monastery are able to tour the grounds, and also sit in the church while the monks chant the Psalms. During the recitation of the Psalms, the monks must periodically face the guests where they are sitting as part of a formality. The monks did not appear at all fazed by the guests 'studying' them. The monks were able to remain fixed in a contemplative state where their minds paid little attention to the fumbling of their guests in their seats, coughs, sneezes, judging eyes, etc. The monks' lack of recognition signaled their contemplative state, a time when nothing distracted them from their prayers. If we take what we have learned to this point about contemplation and moderation, it follows that the monk's lack of response would make sense. If the monks were mentally or emotionally preoccupied with the guests, their reading and memorization of the Psalms and other prayers would have been disrupted and less fluid. However, their faces, bodies, and words remained calm and transfixed on the task at hand.

Spending their days in silence, the monks are able to turn inward to cultivate the proper balance between reason and emotion. Small challenges to this equanimity can be seen in their daily encounters with visitors and with each other, but these serve only to strengthen and refine their skills of contemplation.

## Chapter Conclusion

Chapter II examined how the attributes of contemplation are uniquely designed to treat the two of the critical problems of modernity identified and covered in Chapter I (an over-confidence in reason, and a desire to influence others for personal gain).

Historically, contemplation has been divided into secular and spiritual categories. Each category defines distinct characteristics of contemplation, controlling the meaning and use of contemplation for its own benefits. As a consequence, contemplation is *either* defined in terms of secular reason (supported by logical propositions), *or* it is defined in terms of spiritual emotion (supported by faith). There is, however, an alternative way to look at contemplation, one that does not fall victim to either/or scenarios. This new approach to contemplation is expressed best through a term I have introduced called *aneutral contemplation*. The thoughts and writings of scholars, and thinkers, particularly Thomas Merton, were used as support for this alternative view. Once adequately explained, each of the two problems of modernity was taken to task.

First, the contemplative response to an over-confidence in reason was investigated. Contemplation was shown to combat reason through doubt and resistance. Contemplation refuses to allow reason the chance to affirm itself as the primary authority on experience. Contemplation doubts and resists any certainties that reason wishes to advocate. Next, we looked into the desire to influence others for personal gain. Here, the impartiality of contemplation proved of value. Contemplation helps the individual see that he has a responsibility to and for the Other. The contemplative recognizes that it is more beneficial (to Self and Other) to work *with* rather than *against* another. The

*excessiveness* at which the desire to influence others for personal gain exists distinguishes it as a truly modern trait. Moderation aims to counter this imbalance through self-control. Contemplation, too, cultivates and relies upon self-control.

Next, a description of events surrounding the death of Brother Gregory was provided. This ethnography was meant to illustrate the transformative force that death can have on those who witness it. Moreover, the connection between death and contemplation was discussed through the lens of transformation. Both death and contemplation seek a transformation of the individual. And, this transformation is meant not only to advance one's personal development, but also to progress his interactions with others. Finally, in this chapter the reader found that contemplation presents the greatest potential to resolve the ailments of modernity, and the traits of contemplation were reinforced through actual experiences witnessed at Mepkin. The following chapters will provide commentary on how the individual can invite the contemplative state into his way of life so as not to fall victim to the lure of modern behavioral difficulties.

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **PREPARING FOR CONTEMPLATION: THE CISTERCIAN WAY OF SOLITUDE AND SILENCE**

Chapter III builds on our discussion of contemplation by turning to the contexts that encourage its production. For the sake of clarity, what we have learned about contemplation thus far can be summarized into five key points:

1. Contemplation can *only* be known through direct experience, not through mental or emotive faculties.
2. Contemplation creates a sense of responsibility for the Other.
3. Contemplation is both causal (generates situations) and reactive (responds to situations).
4. Unable to be forced, contemplation arrives only when the individual cultivates the skills necessary to welcome it.
5. Contemplation has a reciprocal relationship with moderation.

These five points offer great insight into contemplation, despite its essentially mysterious character. One person's contemplative experience is difficult to describe to another; like all human experience, it is ultimately unknowable except to the one who experiences.

While descriptions of the experience abound, these are at best reports mediated by language and do not offer the recipient direct access to the experience. This dilemma does not leave us clueless about contemplation, however. The issue can be approached from another direction: by focusing on observable phenomena attendant on the contemplative

experience. It turns out that the contexts that stimulate contemplative experiences, as well as their resulting effects, are identical, even though the individuated experience of contemplation remains uniquely personal. Thus, one critical question remains: What are the contexts that produce contemplative experiences?

Responding to this question is the primary task of this chapter. Much more can be learned about contemplation if we shift our attention from descriptions and definitions to contexts and effects. And this approach helps us provide a fuller answer to the question above, the primary task of Chapter III.

### **Experience**

All experience is independently unique, yet results can be indistinguishable. A helpful example comes from a Buddhist parable that describes “a person who is shot with an arrow and who before removing the arrow wants to discuss from what direction the arrow came, what kind of wood the bow was likely made of, and what kind of feathers were on the arrow’s tip” (Sniegocki, 2001, p. 532). The Buddha uses this parable to represent the metaphysical truths people chase in vain, suggesting that it is more beneficial for a person to resolve the problem at hand (remove the arrow) than to endlessly analyze the situation (Where did the arrow come from? What are the arrow’s characteristics? Was I the intended target?). In addition, this example explains how a person can best handle difficult situations, insisting that seeking solution-oriented, pragmatic methods is better than fumbling with enigmatic explanations. In other words, pull the arrow out! Analyzing the arrow’s ancillary traits wastes time, creating further riddles that delay one’s progress. The direct approach illustrates the method of our

discussion on contemplation. Instead of focusing on unanswerable questions about the content of contemplative experience, we will analyze what observable phenomena invite contemplation, and what effects such an experience generates. Just as a person who watches another flee from a tiger ascribes this attempt to panic and fear, imagining the content of the Other's experience to be the same as his own, so too will we analyze the context and its effects in regard to contemplation. In both situations, it is the stimulus and response that are crucial, not the purely subjective experience.

### **Contemplative Contexts**

The contexts of contemplation can be standardized, and context is the key to producing contemplative results. Through extensive research and personal experience, I have found two specific contexts that produce contemplative experiences: silence and solitude. These contexts are mandatory for contemplation, and are likewise interdependent. As MacCormick (1981) states, "Silence and solitude are complementary dimensions of one reality. At the deepest level, they merge so fully as to be scarcely distinguishable" (p. 118). The necessity of these contexts becomes clear as we further examine Cistercian monasticism. Cistercian monks spend their lives devoted strictly to cultivating solitude and silence in order to experience contemplation. Cistercians have been, and continue to be, the masters of these two contexts.

Helping to foster silence and solitude is the opus of the monk's daily schedule. The Cistercian schedule forms the cornerstone of their unflinching efforts to cultivate silence and solitude in their lives. Keeping with the traditions developed by Saint Benedict, the daily schedule at Mepkin is as follows:

3:00 a.m.	Rise
3:20	Vigils (Office of Psalms & readings, followed by ½ hour meditation)
4:30	Lectio Divina*
5:00-7:30	Breakfast
6:30	Laudes*
7:30	Eucharist (Mass) followed by Thanksgiving
8:15	Tierce* (Brief Prayer)

GRAND SILENCE ENDS

9:15-11:30	Work
12:00 noon	Sext* (Midday prayer)
12:10	Dinner
12:50	Prayer of None* (Brief prayer)
1:45-3:30	Work
5:00	Supper
6:00	Vespers* (Evening prayer)
6:30-7:30	Various individual & community activities
7:35	Compline* (Final prayer of the day)

GRAND SILENCE BEGINS

8:00	Retire
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Schedule for Sundays: same as above, except...

7:30 a.m.	Tierce* followed by Eucharist
5:00 p.m.	Vespers*
5:30 p.m.	Benediction
5:45 p.m.	Supper

\* (Laudes, Mass, Tierce, Sext, Prayer of None, Vespers, and Compline are all times when the community of monks gather to pray. Lectio Divina, on the other hand, is a special time reserved for private meditation.).

This strict schedule, along with the monk's exterior environment, acts as a haven for silence and solitude, and the close bond between these contexts creates the desired contemplative atmosphere. As Guitton (1964) states, "solitude always tends to construct an invisible monastery built out of silent stones" (p. 48). To further advance our



understanding of the two contexts, let us examine each independently. We begin with solitude.

### **Solitude**

To begin, we must understand that solitude carries with it both exterior and interior characteristics, each being necessary for the Cistercian lifestyle. Additionally, these contexts interdependently produce an environment that makes contemplation possible. As van Zeller (1960) explains:

Exterior and interior solitude have each to be considered elements of the monastic life. Each plays a part in the activity of contemplation: exterior solitude ensures the setting or condition, interior solitude provides the disposition. Exterior solitude is the physical state sought by the soul as a means most conducive to prayer. Interior solitude is an attitude of mind, brought by grace, which combines tranquility, detachment, and longing for union with God alone. (p. 115)

Contrary to van Zeller's description, most people think of solitude's exterior quality—the physical isolation from the company of others—as its defining (or even its only) trait.

Exterior solitude can be produced instantly: one need only remove himself from the physical location of others, and it is achieved. But, simply removing oneself from others does not guarantee the existence of interior solitude. An individual may be physically alone, but remain mentally occupied by a variety of thoughts running through his mind, beckoning his attention. In this way one's own thoughts become like another's presence, distracting one's mind into having a conversation with itself, unable to focus on any one particular thought. This running conversation not only evokes the presence of others (as the individual considers what others' opinions might be on a subject, or rehashes a recent encounter with someone) but also creates psychic noise. Thoughts that focus on secular

matters are not the only types of thought that establish psychic noise; spiritual thoughts may also cause mental distractions. In such cases, it is possible for a person to think too much about God, obsessing over the awe and mysteries of life and the unknown, desiring to ‘think through’ their meanings and purposes, although it is impossible to fully comprehend the meaning of God’s intentions (Gruen, 1999). In short, mental activity riles the mind, forming a flurry of judgments and interior noise that intrude on the individual’s ability to establish and cultivate the stillness required for interior solitude.

As difficult as interior solitude may be, it is essential for a contemplative life. This point raises an important question regarding the distinction between achieving interior solitude and a contemplative life. What is the difference between having interior solitude and having a contemplative life if both expressions originate ‘in’ the individual? The answer centers on causality. The establishment of interior solitude leads to the establishment of the contemplative life. To further clarify, interior solitude requires that one achieve a degree of stillness within himself. This stillness is a quieting of the ramblings of the rational mind and one’s overzealous emotions. When this control is achieved, one produces interior solitude—regardless of what is happening in the exterior world. Interior solitude is not simply produced in the individual just because he is alone. An individual must recognize its presence. Merton (1960) mentions that “No matter how alone one may be, if he has not been invited [to] interior solitude and accepted the invitation with full consciousness of what he is doing, he cannot be what I call a *monachos*, or solitary” (p. 196). As Merton here explains, merely being alone is not sufficient for interior solitude—one must find solitude within. Likewise, exterior solitude

is not necessary for interior solitude; one can cultivate this stillness of mind even in the company of others. Regardless of who experiences it, establishing and cultivating interior solitude is more valuable to human development than its exterior counterpart (Von Balthasar, 1986).

This emphasis on solitude does not imply disregarding others—indeed, the cultivation of respect for Others is a key element of the development of interior solitude. Turning again to Merton (1961a), we learn that “there is no true solitude except interior solitude. And interior solitude is not possible for anyone who does not accept his right place in relation to other men” (p. 56). This “right place” does not refer to a physical space; rather, Merton suggests that interior solitude is what allows an individual to witness the value of Others because it shows the need for one to act *for* the other. There is an enormous difference between acting *for* and acting *with*: acting *with* keeps the other person’s aims in mind, but elements of the Self—personal, private thoughts and actions—may still remain. Likewise, in this state, the mind is preoccupied, thereby obstructing the blossoming of interior solitude. Bauman (1995) says it well:

Being-with is a meeting of incomplete beings, of deficient selves; in such a meeting, highlighting is as crucial as concealing, engagement must be complemented by disengagement, deployment of some resources must be paired with withdrawal of others. The intermittence of revelation and secrecy is, as a matter of fact, the major building technique of the being-with encounter. When compared with a meeting of complete selves—a meeting that is neither fragmentary nor episodic—the being with type of encounter can be justly dubbed a mis-meeting. (pp. 50–51)

According to Bauman, being *with* implies an evaluation of what the Other’s aim *should* be, which rests on the assumption that the Self still maintains a sense of primacy

over that of the Other. Interior solitude, in contrast, allows one to recognize and interact appropriately with the Other as an end in himself, not a means only.<sup>41</sup> This in turn must arise from recognition of the Other's autonomy—the ability to set goals and make plans that are of equal validity and importance to one's own. This attitude can only flourish when the Self has been displaced as sole arbiter of truth and reality—a displacement only possible when a person's attachment to his thoughts and Self are put aside (as they are in interior solitude). When the focus on Self is abandoned, the Other as a Self is highlighted more readily and solitude becomes more accessible. As Merton suggests, "solitude allows no room for self-preoccupation" (Simsic, 1994, p. 52). Once a person admits the inherent worth of another, he ceases continual judgment of the Other; consequently, the person's interior noise subsides and he simply witnesses the actions of the Other. It is when this type of situation is fostered that an authentic connection between people surfaces. Again, I quote Bauman (1995) at length to clarify the difference between 'being-with and being-for':

Being-for is a leap from isolation to unity; yet not toward a *fusion*, that mystics' dream of shedding the burden of identity, but to an *alloy* whose precious qualities depend fully on the preservation of its ingredients' alterity and identity. Being-for is entered for the sake of safeguarding and defending the uniqueness of the Other . . . the self is not absolved of responsibility . . . Being-for is the act of transcendence of being-with. (pp. 51–52)

When an individual acts *for* another individual, he respects that person's individuality. He recognizes and honors the thoughts and actions of the Other; thus, a more authentic

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<sup>41</sup> For a more complete discussion, refer to Arendt (1958, pp. 155–159). See also Kant's Categorical Imperative.

encounter develops because two ‘beings’ come in full contact with one another in order to be *for* one another. For example, if person A wants to enter into a relationship *for* person B, then A must be willing to place his own interests aside, which essentially means putting aside any thoughts on behalf of Self; otherwise, the value of B’s contributions are polluted by A’s focus on himself. Person A should not be thinking about what person B ‘ought’ to do or think (this is acting *with*, not *for*). Instead, A should quiet his thoughts so that he can listen and be fully present *for* B’s benefit. When this is accomplished, A achieves interior solitude and contemplation is put within the grasp of A. Let us look at this relationship a bit more by turning to a quote by Merton.

Merton (1961b) follows the line of reasoning above when he states that “contemplation is the highest and most paradoxical form of self-realization, attained by apparent self-annihilation” (p. 18). According to Merton then, contemplation permits an individual to see the value of his Being, but only because contemplation requires him to lose all sense of his Being; this is the paradox. Contemplation does this by demonstrating that one’s Being is important, but that simply Being is not the greatest value. The importance of Being is only fully recognizable through the act of contemplation. Without contemplation, Being never identifies the full extent of its worth. And so, the self-realization of Being comes but then goes as contemplation tears down a Being’s self-interest. This is the self-annihilation present in contemplation, and it is similar to the form of self-annihilation that is present in Bauman’s *being-for*. In order for a Being to *be-for* an Other, he must first recognize that his Being is able to offer something of value to the Other. Thus, in any *being-for* relationship, there must first be the self-recognition of the

value of Being so that he can identify that there is something of value (himself, his actions) that can be of value *for* the Other. Paradoxically, he must then let go of valuing himself, and begin to value the Other more if he is to be able to give his *being-for* to the Other. And so it becomes the Other who shatters the ego of a person's Being, because it is the Other's being that shines a light on the value a Self can have *for* an Other. Hence, this shattering of ego is neither an event caused strictly from within or without; rather Merton and Bauman each identify the importance of Self and Other in the make-up of Being.

To summarize, *being-for* relationships are formed when an individual annihilates self-preoccupation. This type of relationship places the Other at the pinnacle of importance; thus, the relationship is characterized by selflessness. Without interior solitude, a person is limited to *being-with* relationships. This type of relationship places selfish thoughts and actions at the forefront, neglecting the value of the Other. In comparison, interior solitude creates the experience of contemplation which causes *being-for* relationships. As Casey (1994) reminds us, "Solitude is both the occasion for contemplation and its result" (p. 153).

### **Why the Solitary Life?**

Moving beyond the characteristics of interior solitude, we are left wondering why a person initially seeks a life of interior solitude. Merton (1960) offers some insight: "Those who are to become solitary are, as a rule, solitary already" (p. 178). I take Merton to mean that there are individuals, for whatever reason, that have experienced an inkling of interior solitude, witnessed its benefits, and aim to make it part of their daily existence. Some are attracted to interior solitude because it reacts against features of modern culture

that they find harmful or ridiculous—some who take up the monastic life do so for this reason. Considering this, interior solitude is an act of resistance, a refusal and withdrawal from the secular world and the typical way of living in the modern world. A withdrawal from the world can express itself in two ways: mentally and physically. The monk is an example of a person who withdraws in both ways. But as for secular individuals that lack the ability or convenience of physical withdrawal, mental withdrawal is still possible. Such a withdrawal may happen for a number of reasons. One may wish to occupy their time more often with spiritual matters than with secular concerns. These matters are not necessarily exclusive of one another. For example, there are plenty of readings on spiritual matters that can assist a person in becoming more spiritual; Merton's work is one such instance. Another reason one may mentally withdraw from the modern world is because he finds greater value in issues concerning spirituality and/or God rather than what he may deem as the frivolous concerns of secularism. Such a person may be tired of 'the rat race' of life. As Merton advises, "no man who seeks spiritual freedom, can afford to yield passively to all the appeals of a society of salesman, advertisers and consumers" (1961a, p. 84). The person who seeks an alternative way of experiencing the world must actively refuse its lures, according to Merton. A withdrawal does not necessarily mean a person is a misanthrope or abhors the world; it may suggest only that a person takes greater pleasure in other pursuits.

Then again, there are those who view a contemplative life as a waste of time and a distraction from more pressing, worldly concerns. There are some who even scoff at the monk, viewing his solitary life as a drain on modern culture. Merton (1957) explains why

this view persists: “In a materialistic culture which is fundamentally irreligious the monk is incomprehensible because he ‘produces nothing’” (p. viii). A person who maintains this negative perspective towards the monk’s pursuits frames the world with different lenses; such an individual respects the material productions of the world more than a phenomenon that cannot be explained or made. In this framework, quantifiable results mark the value of any activity; when these are absent, no value is recognized. Naively, he supposes his beliefs and means of employment can be placed in the same category as the monk’s, but this is not the case. Their interests, values, beliefs, and ‘employment’ are incomparable.

The monk, or any solitary who pulls away from the world he is born into, elects to define himself by his own terms. His withdrawal, however, should not be viewed as selfish or hostile toward his fellow man. As Merton (1977) advises, “this withdrawal should not be a rejection of other men; but it may well be a quiet and perhaps almost despairing refusal to accept the myths and fictions with which social life is always full” (p. 152). The solitary does not refuse the people of the world, he refuses their mindless, selfish pursuits and actions. With his resistance and withdrawal, the solitary becomes a mirror back onto the world and the relationships its agents form, forcing it to reflect critically on itself. “What he renounces is the superficial imagery and the trite symbolism that pretend to make the relationship more genuine and more fruitful” (Merton, 1960, p. 186). The monk reminds the modern world that an alternative way to live and act is possible, and that change is ultimately an individual endeavor. Even when people scoff at the monk’s life, they are still forced to respond, and their response may potentially turn



into their first movements toward change. Merton does not only have advice for the ‘people of the world,’ but he also has sound advice for his fellow monks. Merton reminds them “to be open to the world and aware of its problems, suggesting that monasteries themselves might become a haven of solitude and sanity for those seeking an alternative to the pressures and alienation of mainstream society” (Labrie, 2006, p. 491). To complement this, MacCormick (1981) suggests that “Not everyone is called to be a monk, but everyone is called to some species of solitude” (p. 122). However, solitude alone does not produce contemplation—a second context is necessary: silence. It is the intermingling of these two that stimulates an environment ready for contemplative experiences.

### **Silence**

Sound and silence continually impact each other and are defined in opposition; one cannot be understood without reference to the other. They are involved in a recurring relationship based on opportunity: when one is absent, the other is present; as one concludes, the other begins. In his discussion on the nature of silence, Sorensen (2009) quotes the conductor Leopold Stokowski addressing an unruly audience: “A painter paints his pictures on canvas. But musicians paint their pictures on silence. We provide the music, and you provide the silence.” Sorensen explains, “The whole point of refraining from making sounds is so that the musicians can fill the hall with music” (p. 141). Sorensen also discusses the importance of silence for punctuating language, indicating impending danger or signaling respect or a state of mourning. Sound and silence, like solitude, take two forms: exterior and interior, with the mind as the arbiter of

that relationship.<sup>42</sup> The mind is flooded continually by stimuli, creating what Broadbent (1958) refers to as a “bottleneck.” This forces people to select, identify, and interpret what their senses detect. The mind identifies various stimuli from the exterior environment that can either become psychic noise as a person thinks about what his senses have detected, or the exterior noise can immediately prompt an individual to speak, thus generating exterior noise. The mind is the arbiter of this relationship because it determines, by way of the individual, whether it will take time to reflect on the exterior stimuli (creating interior noise, i.e. thinking), or determine there is no need to reflect on the issue and respond verbally (creating exterior noise; i.e., speech).

There are both conscious and unconscious elements to attentiveness and resultant action; Strack and Deutsch (2004) discuss how the conscious and unconscious systems work together. Most relevant for our purposes, they argue that some human action occurs habitually (unconsciously), and other action is conscious: “The reflective [(conscious)] system generates behavioral decisions that are based on knowledge about facts and values, whereas the impulsive [(unconscious)] system elicits behavior through associative links and motivational orientations” (p. 1). I am here discussing behavior of the first kind. For instance, let us consider two people engrossed in a ‘deep’ conversation that requires the full attention of each. The complexity of the conversation, either by the themes raised, or by the sophisticated oration of the discussants, determines the degree of listening that

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<sup>42</sup> For further discussion, see Broadbent’s (1958) discussion of how competing stimuli are filtered so that the mind is not overwhelmed, and Treisman’s (1964) qualification that certain stimuli are muted, but not totally filtered out, by the attention system. This attenuation would account for a person’s hearing his name in a crowd of people, though he was not ‘paying attention’ prior to hearing it.

is needed by each person. ‘Small talk’ is relatively automatic—consider, for example, in highly-practiced interactions like those between colleagues passing briefly in the hall: if either participant deviates from the ‘script’, the chance for the other participant to make an error greatly increases. The typical greeting is something like “how are you?” and the typical reply is “fine.” If someone asks a substantially different question, or responds with more than a one-word, basically positive answer, the other participant has to shift to a more deliberate mode of participation.<sup>43</sup>

The modern bias toward production lends subtle support to these noise habits, for silence is thought to produce nothing and therefore be useless. And, because silence is one of a monk’s defining features, it follows that some would look unfavorably on the monks also. Keating (2012) discusses the importance of interior silence to combat the “cacophony of voices” within the human soul in preparation for unity of Self and God (p. 317). In his article on developing interior silence in seminary students, he argues that exterior silence is crucial for this development; it both encourages “sustained interiority” or self-reflection and teaches the habit of interior silence (p. 311). He describes an experiment by Jamison (2010) that was conducted at a Benedictine abbey in which lay people spent several days in silent retreat: these people, unused to exterior silence, experienced it as “pain” (p. 312). Citing participants’ own reports, he explains that this pain arose from having to “commune with the self” instead of being distracted from their

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<sup>43</sup> Langer (1978) discusses this phenomenon in detail and provides experimental data to substantiate these claims.

“affective pain” by their “noisy daily routines” (p. 312). He concludes that silence must be practiced first as exterior, then be internalized.

It is no surprise that the majority of people chase after material items (money, cars, houses, clothes, etc.), because they assume personal rewards derive from their acquisition. In the case of silence, its rewards are neither immediately recognizable nor is it materially tangible; and so silence is seen as a worthless investment, but this could not be farther from the truth. Silence itself is not an exclusive phenomenon purported by people (animals utilize silence as well). Humans, however, use silence to spur two of our greatest evolutions: self-reflection and critical thinking. These human traits are indeed special, but silence should not be valued only because it helps produce these outcomes. Silence is valuable for what it is itself: a marker of time, a generator of patience, a creator of pause to emphasize care for someone, a friend to patience, and a reminder to look for the beautiful and the sublime. Silence, like sound, moves all around us, yet silence is less intrusive when it is present. It does not ‘bully’ one’s attention the way sounds can, instead it waits for us to notice it. Let me take a moment here to simply suggest for your consideration how silence should be prized in peoples’ lives. Silence is never passive, it is always a conscious act because the mind selects its arrival or dismissal and so it is a situational aspect, it slows people down, it is a characteristic of calculated moves, silence is an instigator and a mark of complicity. It has been an act of passive resistance throughout history, silence allows one to remember, and acts in the service of nonverbal communicative acts seeing that it takes attention away from words. These are but a few of the myriad characteristics that comprise the ontology of silence. Further these

examples serve to illustrate the close relationship the mind and silence maintain. These examples not only demonstrate the importance of silence in peoples' lives, but also the potential of silence to have further employable uses.

Silence does not occur naturally or immediately in the modern world; in fact, achieving any form of silence in the modern world is a grand accomplishment. The chaos of modern life makes silence the exception and sound the standard, thereby limiting the chance for silence to happen. As a result, people today lack exposure to either exterior or interior silence, for silence lacks support structures in modern culture. More time is spent organizing and attempting to know the objective world, while less time is expended on learning and improving the subjective Self. A gentleman, referred to only as a Carthusian,<sup>44</sup> describes this modern focus:

We live at the most superficial level of our being. We act as if our ordinary conscious life were our only life. We reduce it even more to conscious life conceptualized by our cultural conventions, excluding everything that is not quantifiable or contained within a rationalist agenda. History, art, the wisdom of millennia of so many other civilizations, show us that there is infinitely more in the human person and in reality. (1995, p. 92)

There are too many exterior distractions and noisy interior habits to assume otherwise. For the modern individual, silence must first be introduced, then slowly phased into a habit. Habits establish normalized behavior, and in the case of sound, its repetition can become so integrated into the physical landscape that it becomes hidden, so normalized that people expect to hear it. In turn, people become oblivious to their noisy

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<sup>44</sup> A Carthusian is an eremitic monk, a hermit isolated from others and devoted to actions for God alone.

environment, so that whenever the sound does disappear, something seems amiss. This is the case in all repeated actions, from the intellectual who follows a standard line of discussion, to the hockey player who uses the same mechanics before each slap shot, or the baseball player who readies himself in the same defensive posture time and time again. These routines are chosen because they are known, comfortable, and have proven results. Silence is no different. Individuals in the modern age have noise habits that are hard to break, but it is necessary to do so to welcome contemplation.

The modern world focuses almost exclusively on the outer image of a person's worth and happiness, so inner rewards (such as those garnered through contemplation) remain unnoticed. Likewise modernity and its propensity to quantify results, has little patience, expecting instant, visible results from any effort, but the rewards of silence take time to experience. Noise is believed to be the sound of progress, the sound of 'doing.' When it is absent, people tend to believe that production and progress are idle and time is wasted pointlessly. Even actions of relaxation and leisure, such as reading a book or shopping, encourage the attainment of a goal (finish the book, find a good bargain) and thus encourage interior noise. Little seems to be done in the name of silence, for its own right and rewards; however, if silence is given precedence, and time to work, it can transform a person's interior landscape in ways that manifest externally. The most notable reward triggered is listening.

### **Listening**

As noted in Benedict's *Rule*, "silence is intended to foster listening" (Vest, 1994, p. 17). Or, as Kleiner (1985) states, "Silence is, therefore, an interior attitude of listening"

(p. 164). Listening begins when interior monologues are turned off. When a person stops the running commentary of judgment, identity-creations, and ego-reinforcement that make up his inner chatter, only then is he finally capable of listening to another. This is not to suggest that conversations are the problem—indeed the world is incapable of functioning or evolving without them; but, when conversations are clouded by interior distractions, difficulties abound. In such conversations, participants remain overly focused on their own thoughts and agendas, seeing the Other as a rival in the struggle to control the interaction. The participant becomes ever-watchful for breaks in the Other's speech so that he can seize the opportunity to speak himself, instead of attending to the Other's speech. As Placa and Riordan (1977) attest:

How much we learn from the person who has the confidence to be silent in the presence of others. How shallow and filled with fear is the relationship which can never bear a moment of silence. In the presence of those whom we do not know and love we produce a flood of words and noises to fill the empty void of our own fear of not being accepted. We listen halfheartedly, looking for the opportunity to speak, to 'keep the conversation going.' (p. 94)

In this passage, the Other's speech becomes a time of preparation for one's own subsequent comments, rather than a time devoted to appreciating the contributions of the Other. Unfortunately, the majority of interactions operate in this manner. Rather than being opportunities to build relationships, such encounters become less meaningful, bordering on triviality because their conversation lacks complexity. People in the midst of communication are seldom attentive to the situation; instead, their interior dialogue disrupts their ability to be present and to listen fully. Nemeck and Coombs (1985) mention:

Silence is far more than the absence of talking. Silence, in essence, is listening. There is always something going on within the human spirit. It is never totally blank or static. If we are not doing, we are receiving. If we are not chattering, we are listening. This is true exteriorly. It is especially true interiorly. (p. 199)

Nemeck and Coombs remind us that noise not only impacts the interior spaces in people's lives, but their physical worlds too.

When the physical landscape is forged by noise, and no space is provided for silence, people also fail to realize the potential of their words. Merton (1960) explains it well:

For language to have meaning, there must be intervals of silence somewhere, to divide word from word and utterance from utterance. He who retires into silence does not necessarily hate language. Perhaps it is love and respect for language which impose silence upon him. (p. 195)

Silence is a reminder of the importance of words and conversation, too. It fosters good quality conversations because it permits people to truly attend to Others, formulating thoughtful responses that move conversations forward in meaningful ways. We have all felt frustration when a person does not give us their full attention when we speak to them; rather than paying close attention to the conversation, the person gazes over our shoulder to look at someone who entered the room, looks at their watch more than our eyes, or periodically checks and sends text messages on their phone. Such a person undervalues the interaction he is involved in because he attends to events that have no bearing on the conversation at hand. When a person fails to listen fully, his ideas are likely to become scattered because he misses important information that the Other relays. His interactions also become shallow since he has fully absorbed neither the Other's intentions nor the



direction the conversation is taking; thus, his words mirror this shallowness. Further, he interjects superficial and trite words and phrases into the conversation. In the end, his interior chatter harms rather than assists the conversation, preventing a fuller sense of human intimacy.

Solitude implies a degree of silence, because the absence of exterior factors correlates to the reduction of noise; and, with a decrease in noise, there is a greater potential that an individual will discover solitude. This is the case because the mind is presented with the time required so one can reflect on matters. It could also be stated that the mind is given time to slow down. This pause in noise works to form interior peace in an individual.<sup>45</sup> While it takes greater effort and skills to make it happen, solitude can still be found in the midst of noise. However, if a person's exterior world remains noisy, then it is likely that his interior world will mimic this condition. Therefore, the value of exterior silence cannot be overestimated. It is exterior silence that leads a person to inner silence (Simsic, 1994, p. 57). Or, as Kleiner (1985) notes: "Exterior calm, the practice of silence, ought especially to lead us to interior silence" (p. 164). After one's initial encounter with exterior silence, it is up to the individual to promote the interior habits required to transform his perspective, thereby producing exterior silence. If, however, he has exterior silence, yet has not taken control of his interior/physic distractions, then he will remain noisy regardless of the silence his exterior environment lends. Comparatively, when interior silence is established, whether or not the individual's exterior environment

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<sup>45</sup> Again, see Keating (2012).

is silenced, he himself will remain silent because he attends to exterior events with focused precision and any exterior distractions are rendered invalid. In short, if interior silence is adopted, exterior distractions become like strangers, no matter the degree of chaos the exterior distraction presents. When this happens, pre-determined and wandering thoughts are abolished, and listening is given top priority. Thus it becomes clear that the relationship between exterior and interior silence is reciprocal. To examine the above discussions of solitude and silence more completely, we further consult the monks of Mepkin Abbey.

### **Prayer**

Prayer is the archetypal category that oversees all actions at Mepkin and works to situate the monk on the contemplative path; therefore, prayer works closely with the contexts of solitude and silence. A monk's time is structured by the rhythm of prayer, whether spoken aloud or whispered in his mind. If a monk did not allow prayer to guide him, then he would no longer be a monk. Prayer frames the way a monk confronts all situations and actions. The monks at Mepkin continue the long desert tradition of monasticism that puts prayer at the center of all situations. This process is exemplified in the monk's dedication to The Hours. The Hours are specific times throughout the day when the monks gather in their communal church to worship God. These times are also referred to as The Divine Office. "Among all the occupations of the monk, among all of the obligations of the community, the Divine Office holds first place" (Kleiner, 1989, p. 111; Merton, 1971, p. 4). It would seem that the demands of the monastic schedule, which consist of seven communal meetings each day, allow little time for solitude and

silence, but this is far from true. The monastic day is designed specifically to maximize the monks' exposure to each, with the Hours retaining the utmost importance, reminding the monk to keep prayer and community as his top priorities.

The distinctive living conditions of the monks make solitude and silence their steady companions. "One of the most characteristic monastic practices, stressed from the origins of monasticism and perhaps over-stressed in some traditions, is silence" (Cummings, 1986, p. 94). The monk has an intimate relationship with solitude and silence, and this relationship is strengthened most by the depth of his prayer. Prayer, words spoken aloud or in the mind, expresses the monk's gratitude for his many gifts, enhances self-respect, and acts as praise for God, rather than a means of petition for the fulfillment of personal needs.

No event escapes the influence of prayer, and prayer guarantees that silence and solitude remain at the center of the monk's life, thereby ensuring the centrality of contemplation. "Silence and contemplation have a purpose: they serve, in the distractions of daily life, to preserve permanent union with God. . . . Silence and contemplation . . . help us find this profound, continuous union with God" (Benedict XVI, as cited in Keating, 2012, p. 309). There are infinite ways prayer can be expressed. The monks of Mepkin, in addition to keeping The Hours, also work, meditate, and even spend leisure time within a fundamental structure of prayer.

### **Work & Leisure**

The majority of life's affairs fall into one of two categories: work or leisure. A monk's life is no different. His work comes in the form of physical labor, much like the

day-to-day tasks we all face in the secular world. The difference, however, is that work provides the monk with another opportunity to be alone with God in a special way. St. Benedict's *The Rule* stresses the need for monks to remain focused on their worship while performing manual tasks. Merton (1971) supports this position. "No one better than a monk realizes the dignity and meaning of manual labor—not because labor is penance, an ascetical exercise, a means of livelihood or something else like that; but because labor is itself worship" (p. 3). Put another way, Funk (2001) comments that "the desert tradition recommends doing ceaseless prayer as we work so that when we work this very work becomes our prayer and our prayer becomes our work" (p. 68). Both Merton and Funk call attention to the inseparable connection between worship, prayer, and work.

Following this reasoning, the monk considers himself a part-time worker and full-time prayer. He begins and ends his day with prayer, because all aspects of his life are directly or indirectly impacted by prayer; it is a habit the monk assumes gladly. He expresses prayer itself during acts of leisure, and yet it can also infuse itself seamlessly in his labor.

As mentioned previously, people think and act based on habits. Their days and evenings typically follow the same routine. During leisure, people watch the same shows, talk and play with the same people and pets, and go to bed around the same time. For work, they perform the same tasks, follow the same patterns of thinking, and even converse and eat with the same people each day. During prayer, people recite the same requests, pray the same prayers, go to religious services on the same days and times, and the services even follow a generally identical routine. In short, people walk through life mimicking the same patterns. Furthermore, when there is a wrinkle in their expectations,

people are thrown off kilter—and only a return to their repetitive routines will reduce their anxieties. Repetition provides comfort for people because it provides predictability and familiarity.

A monk's familiar and often habitual work detail frees his mind to pray while his body toils. During his toil, he discovers that hard work provides him with a physical, mental, spiritual, and financial bounty. He further recognizes how his work provides the lay community with quality goods in addition to helping his fellow brothers. Experiencing contemplative opportunities is possible because the monk's prayer acts as an arbiter and defining feature between his work and his leisure. In this way, the monk's prayer moves beyond traditional means (as a request for something) to include every activity he engages in. I was a witness to such a prayer-structured life in my stay at Mepkin Abbey, and will now detail the experiences I had with silence and solitude to further support my claims.

### **Auto/Ethnographic Description and Analysis**

#### **Description #1: The Labyrinth**

My first visit at the monastery lasted for 30 days, followed by a second 14-day visit. I was fortunate enough to be at Mepkin when they observed their second-ever 'desert day.' A desert day is a twenty-four hour period devoted to avoiding all unnecessary verbal exchanges and manual labor. It is a time for each monk to be more by himself, pray by himself, and enjoy extended moments of solitude. There are only two

mandatory obligations on the desert day. Mass is held at 7:30 a.m. and, at 7:30 p.m., Benediction (presentation and adoration of the Holy Eucharist<sup>46</sup>).

The atmosphere at the Abbey felt much different during this time. The desert day provided a nice change from the usual schedule followed at the monastery. And on this particular day, the weather was remarkable. The clear, cobalt blue sky and the pleasant temperature insisted that I spend the day outdoors. Having extra time and lovely weather provided an ideal opportunity to walk through the Abbey's labyrinth. In a labyrinth there are no barriers and no choices to be made. In this regard, they differ greatly from mazes. In a labyrinth, all paths are correct and directional decisions are predetermined for the individual. The lack of decisions allows the walker to forgo the use of reason, therefore allowing his mind to be silent and enjoy the process. A maze, on the other hand, is designed to make a person choose a right or wrong pathway. If one chooses incorrectly, he confronts a barrier; if he chooses wisely, his walk continues uninterrupted. Needless to say, the philosophy behind a labyrinth suits the Abbey well.

On the desert day, I decided to spend the majority of my time in the labyrinth. The path of the labyrinth is wide enough that two people can walk comfortably side-by-side. The path is also outlined on both sides by tall, brittle winter grasses. My walk in the labyrinth was very quiet and relaxing. I was by myself and I tried to 'let my thoughts go.' Each time a random thought would come, I recognized it and then placed my focus back on my steps. As I walked, tiny birds flew occasionally from one side of the grasses,

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<sup>46</sup> The Holy Eucharist represents the transfiguration of the body of Jesus Christ into a 'living symbol' for Catholics.

across the path at my feet, and entered the grasses on the other side. I thought how incredible it was that such tiny birds could negotiate the grass obstacles so quickly. As I strolled along, there were many tall, broken reeds of grass resting across the path. Each time I would step on one, it would crackle and cause it to move other grasses that were resting on its stalks. When I stepped on them, it sounded similar to snow crunching underfoot. The sound also caused small grasshoppers and other insects to dart around in the grasses. All-in-all, it took roughly seventeen minutes to walk at a leisurely pace from the outside of the labyrinth into its center and then return to the beginning. Once I reached the center of the labyrinth, I sat and reflected on one of the five wooden stools located at its center. It was so wonderful to be alone among the silence.

### **Description #2: Work Detail**

The monks at Mepkin maintain several enterprises: they grow mushrooms and micro-greens, harvest timber from time to time, rent sections of their 3,200 acres to farmers to grow crops, operate a store located at the monastery, and maintain a recently-built columbarium (a free standing structure that houses the ash remains of loved ones).

At Mepkin, all monastic guests are assigned a job during their stay. Their labor offsets the cost of their room and board, allows guests to experience another side of the monks' lives, and gives the monks much-needed help. Given the expanse of the monastery, and the aging population of the monks, help is desired, appreciated, and welcomed. A typical work day is divided into two blocks. The first ranges from 9:15-11:30 a.m. Following this time, the monks and their guests break for supper, then return

to work for their second block which lasts from 1:45-3:30 p.m. Taken together, the work day is roughly four hours.

During my first 30 days as a monastic guest, I mentioned to the work supervisor that I preferred work that was physically demanding: he obliged. I was assigned to work with one monk (sometimes two) on the production of oyster mushrooms. The initial phase of the process is quite labor-intensive and takes place in massive, weather-worn chicken houses that rest on a remote portion of the property. These chicken houses were once used as living quarters for tens of thousands of chickens when the monks' principal business was the sale of eggs. After shifting their business model, the chicken houses were converted into facilities to accommodate their mushroom business. Now, these structures, each close to a hundred yards long, are known as 'cook houses.'

During the morning work hours, my major task was to help prepare and mix various organic materials together to create a substrate that the oyster spores would feed on until they grew into mature mushrooms; it was incredibly labor intensive. A monk and I would get on our knees at opposite sides of the room and stuff the mixed substrate into 5' reinforced black contractor bags. The 'columns,' as they are called, resembled gigantic sausages once filled and tied off. We would continue working until we met in the middle and all of the substrate had been packaged. The work was done mostly in silence, with the silence only disrupted by the sounds of tools working, or the occasional directional remark.

Next, the bags of substrate were transported to a small truck, then hung on metal bars suspended perpendicular to the sides of the truck and bolted in place. Following this,



multiple holes were poked into and around the sides of the columns, providing the mushrooms with lots of openings where they could emerge and grow. The columns were then transported by truck to larger tractor trailers where the columns were suspended from the ceiling once again. These trailers were equipped to guarantee temperature, moisture, and lighting ideal for the mushrooms to thrive. They remained hanging until the mushrooms matured and were ready to be picked. Combined, these tasks took the majority of the morning to complete. Any additional time was spent doing various sanitation and preparatory tasks for the afternoon work hours.

Following lunch, Prayer of None, and a collaborative clean-up in the kitchen, there was a short time for rest before work reconvened. Work started again at 1:45 and lasted until 3:30. Any unfinished tasks from the morning were attended to first. Afterward, I was responsible for weighing out straw and cotton seed husks, and then stuffing each into their own mesh bag or metal basket. This material would be pasteurized in big metal drums resting over a propane flame in order to kill any contaminants in the substrate that might jeopardize the healthy growth of mushroom spores. This pasteurized material was the substrate we would use the following morning to stuff the 5' columns. Many of my tasks in the afternoon were done alone, while other monks saw to different tasks. Any additional time in the afternoon was, once again, divided between clean-up and preparations for the following day. These tasks were done independently of any other monk, amplifying the vastness of my remote location and providing me with ample time to be alone.

Every afternoon during work hours, one monk would stop whatever he was doing at 3:00 p.m. to pray. This was not one of the obligatory breaks for prayer at the monastery, this was an extra time for prayer of his own choosing. His wrist watch would chime softly, then he would walk slowly toward the back of the cook house, kneel on a tattered, folded piece of cardboard and pray. Ten to fifteen minutes later, he would return and resume his work. This was not the only occasion when I witnessed monks removing themselves from the company of others to pray alone. While walking around the monastery, I would find monks sitting quietly alone in one of the smaller prayer chapels, spot a monk walking the grounds by himself, or standing still peering upward at the day or starlit night.

On my second visit I was assigned to work again with mushrooms, but instead of handling oyster mushrooms this time, I worked with shitake mushrooms. The method to cultivate shitakes is very different and less labor intensive. The shitake 'logs,' as they are called, are ordered from an outside distributor. They are sent to the monastery with the spawn (what ends up growing into the mushroom) already embedded in the substrate. The shape and size of the logs resemble an extra large fresh loaf of bread pulled out of a bread maker. Before use, each log is soaked in water in order to provide ample moisture for the spawn to use for growth. Once removed from the large tub that the 'logs' were soaking in, the next step was to transport them to a tractor trailer identical to the ones where the oyster mushrooms were kept. Like the oyster mushroom trailers, these trailers are also outfitted with a watering system, recirculation fans, and an air conditioning unit to maintain ideal growing conditions.

Preparing and caring for the shitake mushrooms is largely maintained by one monk. I worked with one monk during the first week to learn the procedures and techniques essential for growing shitakes. I learned what was expected of me by watching and imitating his actions. However, during the second week, I was left to care for the mushrooms on my own while the monk left the Abbey to attend a scheduled retreat for novice monks. The first and second weeks of work were not much different, besides the fact that I was solely responsible for the operation. I was flattered that I was given such a big responsibility. All in all, I would say that I handled my responsibility well.

### **Description #3: Eating**

What surprises the casual visitor to a monastery is the density of the silence which (to use figurative language) reigns there. Silence is not present in these cloisters as a guest or a servant; it is a master, it rules in peace and fullness, like a sovereign. Silence counsels a sacred respect for the interiority of one's neighbor; a single word would violate it. Silence brings us directly into the heart of the other, while conversation makes us pass through long and tortuous detours on the surface. That is why in monasteries that really observe silence it is always possible to converse although one may never speak. (Guitton, 1964, p. 49)

The reign of silence permeates all activities at Mepkin, including meal time. Silence is particularly overwhelming during meals. After a brief set of prayers in the communal church before lunch (referred to as Sext), everyone proceeds single file over to the refectory where meals are prepared and served. When everyone walks through the meal line, the only sounds heard are the clinking of silverware, dishes, trays, and the shuffling of serving spoons. Once a person has finished gathering his meal together, he takes his seat in an adjacent room and waits until everyone is also seated. Then, the 'Lord's Prayer' (also referred to as the Our Father), is recited and everyone eats. The clinking of

silverware, the clank of a cup hitting the table, or one of the monks shuffling his body in his chair, are all amplified due to the reduction of noise. The only voice heard comes from a monk who sits by a side wall. He reads a religiously inspired work over an intercom while everyone else enjoys their meal. The reading is meant to provide material to meditate on while one eats. One monk seems either interested in all of the readings or continually locked in prayer. He sits directly across from me and hangs his head low over his food. When he chews, he places his elbows on either side of him with his palms facing upwards. He continues this habit at all his meals. He appears to be careful and mindful of the way he chews, deliberately choosing to take his time.

Bearing in mind the above explanations of the labyrinth, work detail, and communal eating, we now turn our attention exclusively to analyzing the significance of these experiences as they pertain to inviting instances of solitude and silence.

### **Auto/Ethnographic Analysis**

While witnessing and participating in the monk's daily routine, I found that the monks created varying levels of, and opportunities for, exposure to exterior solitude and silence. I take this insight to be one of the most important lessons that can be learned from the monk's life. With this knowledge, those in the secular world learn that they too must create varying degrees and opportunities for exterior solitude and silence if they are to develop their Being more fully.

The varying degrees of solitude and silence can be identified on the 'desert day,' the walking of the labyrinth, daily work, and communal eating. The desert day and the labyrinth allow for the *greatest exposure* to exterior solitude and silence, while working

permits *moderate exposure*, and eating creates the *least exposure* to exterior solitude and silence. Each of these degrees and activities is obligatory in the quest for advancing human development. The greatest exposure allows a monk to reach interior solitude and silence, building the habits of mind that make this accessible. Then, he is challenged to maintain this state in the more active state of work. Mealtime provides the greatest opportunity for growth, as the temptations to speak are many and varied, and the habits of most lend themselves to conversation at this time (as meals are usually seen as social events). Each instance constructs its own unique environment for the practice of interior solitude and silence.

The ‘desert day’ and the labyrinth offer the greatest amount of exterior solitude and silence. If one chooses, he can be alone and among silence. The desert day is meant to provide the monk’s with an extended period of isolation. While walking around the monastery, I never ran into another monk. It seemed that each of the monks was determined to be by himself. Also, not having to pray all of the usual times gave me a chance to reflect more on my experience at Mepkin. One way I did this was by walking in their labyrinth.

The exterior solitude and silence of the labyrinth gives a person time to ‘be alone’ with his interior thoughts and feelings. This is an opportunity to ‘practice’ interior solitude by means of exterior solitude, as Keating (2012) described. When I walked the labyrinth, the only sounds I heard were the sounds of nature: the wind and the animals who call Mepkin home. Also, I was completely alone with myself. The combination of these two features allowed me a chance to work with my internal dialogue. In the

beginning of my walk, my mind was processing all of my surroundings, and I kept saying to myself how still and alone the labyrinth made me feel. However, as time and my walking continued, I paid less attention to my interior dialogue and simply enjoyed what I was doing. Along with this, I stopped making judgments of my situation. No longer was I thinking, “This is so amazing, it is so quiet;” instead, I allowed the time and process to evolve by its own accord. As I made my way through the labyrinth at my feet, I also found a way through the labyrinth of my thoughts. Finding the center, I took my seat.

Recall that Merton and others stated that exterior solitude and silence must occur before interior expressions can happen. If the exterior environment is established first, and if an individual has the desire to develop his character more fully, then his ‘interior Being’ (his sense of Self) will develop in stride. The individual will have no choice but to develop a genuine care for his fellow Others as he begins to develop more care for himself. Furthermore, the individual *must* establish new routines that allow him more exposure to exterior solitude and silence, otherwise his thoughts and feelings of *being-for*—to use Bauman’s (1995) words—will not last. Only by reinforcing exterior habits will interior habits emerge. Because a monk is largely able to live continually among exterior solitude and silence, and has the desire to develop more fully, he is able to experience interior solitude and silence more than others outside the monastery. Fortunately, one does not need to construct a labyrinth in his backyard. It is not the labyrinth itself that creates interior solitude and silence, it is simply being in any environment that establishes solitude and silence. The monk’s work day is also

responsible for developing interior solitude and silence, but the work day provides a more challenging context.

The idle chatter that often accompanies secular work is largely absent during the monk's work hours, thus making the work itself a type of prayer –an outward expression of gratitude to God for his physical ability to work. When I worked alone, I felt a great deal of solitude. Having to experience the exterior solitude and silence every day at work allowed me to ingrain this characteristic into my understanding. When one of the monks was close by, even working side-by-side, my interior solitude and silence remained unmoved. Similar to walking in the labyrinth, I was able to silence my psychic ramblings, and simply did the task at hand, focusing on nothing else. Towards the end of my stay, I was able to remain 'locked' in a continual state of present moments during work. There were, of course, times when I or a monk had to speak in order to clarify the meaning or instruction of a task; but, these instances were rare. Thus, the exterior solitude and silence was not as present as it was on the desert day or when walking in the labyrinth. This situation, however, allowed me to practice cultivating interior solitude and silence although my exterior surroundings occasionally were shared with another working monk, or words had to be used moderately. As such, work provided a moderate degree of exterior solitude and silence to practice developing my interior solitude and silence.

I passed no judgments on anything, I was simply me. I found that once a person has taken control of his interior/psychic space, he is in command of himself to the point that any degree of exterior disruptions will not compromise his interior stillness. This is why the monks continue their habits of exterior solitude and silence even at work. The

monks have learned that exterior solitude and silence must be reinforced throughout the day. Work, then, is not a time to ‘slack off’ on interior development; work is another time to practice the contemplative life. As I came to find out, eating meals with the community of Brothers provides the most challenging opportunity to practice interior solitude and silence.

Before coming to Mepkin, I read that the monks kept strict silence during mealtime, but I was not prepared for how this practice would ‘feel.’ Eating at Mepkin is a peculiar exercise in the contemplative life. Sharing meals with everyone provided the least amount of exterior solitude and silence. I was acutely aware of the absence of sounds while we all ate. Oftentimes, sharing meals with others is characterized by lively conversation, debate, and laughter; but, at Mepkin, these features are absent.

I attempted to take the lessons I had learned from the desert day, the labyrinth, and the work day, and incorporate my understanding into the occasion of eating. Everyone stands in line and works their way past the serving trays to select what foods they wish to eat. Everyone is standing right next to one another; the sound of serving spoons and trays sliding fill the room. As everyone begins to eat, the noise continues as others sit closely by. I found mealtimes to be the most difficult time to cultivate interior solitude and silence. As I looked around at other monks, however, many of them seemed content in their own minds, unfazed by the sounds and the limited space between one’s self and another. I surmise the monks were used to this atmosphere, and were able to create the necessary mental habits to remain unfazed by the least amount of exterior



solitude and silence. I, on the other hand, would need more time to become indifferent to my exterior surroundings.

**CHAPTER IV**

**IMPACTING EDUCATION FROM THE INSIDE OUT:  
CONTEMPLATION AND THE OTHER**

The outward social structure is the result of the inward psychological structure of our human relationships, for the individual is the result of the total experience, knowledge and conduct of man. Each one of us is the storehouse of all the past. The individual is the human who is all mankind. The whole history of man is written in ourselves. (Krishnamurti, 1969, p. 13)

In this work, I have identified and examined what I believe to be the two most debilitating factors modern individuals face (an over-confidence in reason and a desire to influence others for personal gain). My interest has not been to develop or advance specific practices to manage these problems; this task will require further research of a more pragmatic nature. My interest and efforts have instead been more theoretical: to demonstrate how the traits of contemplation can disentangle and lessen these two primary obstacles of modernity, while simultaneously advancing the modern agent's understanding of Self and Other, and the necessary relationship between them. It is by understanding this relationship that a human's potential can be developed more fully. To further understand these connections, our attention is now called to the process of education. In doing so, it can be shown how education is open to and capable of framing its practices in a contemplative framework.

The type of education we are examining is not the sort of education preoccupied with transferring knowledge or skills from a teacher to a 'waiting' pupil. The work of

Henry Giroux, Michael Apple, Paulo Freire, and many other critical, cultural theorists who research and reflect on education have warned of the social, economic, and personal dangers of such an educational model. Therefore, the type of education we will examine is a process whereby an individual's sense of Self, or Being, is transformed by actions *between* a teacher and pupil and *for* the psychological development of both parties involved. I refer to this type of education as *transformative education*. It could be called 'contemplative education' or even 'mindful education,' but naming it one or the other privileges one set of characteristics over the other. In other words, contemplation and mindfulness each carry with them unique qualities that can be beneficial to education. I want to take the best of both and apply them to a new context. For these reasons, I believe the more inclusive term is *transformative*; plus, seeing as the transformation of consciousness is a primary aim of both contemplation and mindfulness, the term seems fitting.

Education and its transformative quality echoes the discussion covered in Chapter 1 on paradigm shifts. Old paradigms must transform into new ones when the structure they provide is no longer valuable, or does not adequately describe and account for the reality that individuals and institutions face. Paradigms do not shift on their own; however, recall that those who participate in the paradigm bring about the shift. For example, in the case of the Protestant Reformation discussed in Chapter I, Martin Luther was by no means the first person to feel dissatisfied with how the Catholic Church was developing. The amazing new technology of the printing press allowed Luther's ideas to spread through Germany, galvanizing people into action faster than had ever been

possible before. Luther gave articulation to an idea that many felt but did not say; once they heard his idea, they recognized its truth and found others who felt the same, leading to the beginning of a fresh paradigm. During such shifts, education serves a variety of functions: it presents the ideas of the current paradigm, it encourages critical reflection on these ideas, and it eventually transforms both the exterior landscape of the world and interior thought patterns of individuals thereby leading to different behavioral patterns. The end result is intellectual growth and the arrival of a new paradigm through questioning and wondering about the current significance of the paradigm in operation.

### **Mindfulness**

Great attention in the East and West has been placed on the skill of mindfulness. It has been shown to share *similar qualities* to contemplation—to such a degree that their qualities are *indistinguishable in purpose*, as both aim to alter the development of consciousness. “Thomas Merton realized that ‘you can hardly set Christianity and Zen side by side and compare them. That would almost be like trying to compare mathematics and tennis’” (Thurston, 1988, p. 17). This statement is true if one were to reflect solely on large philosophical understandings of Christianity and Zen, then indeed one would be hard pressed to identify commonalities. On the other hand, if a person places parts of each system of belief side-by-side—such as contemplation for Christianity and mindfulness for Zen—then similarities can be identified.

Historical Buddhism does not mention the term mindfulness directly, although it could be said that its qualities are present throughout its historical lessons. Still, mindfulness is a common theme explored in contemporary Buddhist works. Nowhere is

its influence more recognizable than in the work of Zen master, Nhat Hanh. Nhat Hanh (1995) states, “In Buddhism, our effort is to practice mindfulness in each moment—to know what is going on within and all around us” (p. 14). Also, in his 2004 work, Nhat Hanh defines mindfulness as “the energy that makes it possible for us to be aware of what is happening in the present moment” (p. 53). Others offer a different perspective of mindfulness: “One of the first ‘modern’ definitions of mindfulness was provided by Jon Kabat-Zinn, who described mindfulness as ‘paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present-moment, and nonjudgmentally’” (Chiesa & Malinowski, 2011, p. 406). Bishop (2002) adds that

Mindfulness has been broadly conceptualized as a state in which one is highly aware and focused on the reality of the present moment, accepting and acknowledging it, without getting caught up in thoughts that are about the situation or in emotional reactions to the situation. (p. 71)

Finally, Jha, Stanley, Kiyonaga, Wong, and Gelfand (2010) state that “Mindfulness is a mental mode characterized by full attention to present-moment experience without judgment, elaboration, or emotional reactivity” (p. 54). In addition to the characteristic present-mindedness, Bishop (2002) and Jha et al. (2010) mention the muting of intellectual and emotional aspects of mindfulness. I argue that the present-mindedness they discuss ensures reason and emotion are held under control, without eradicating them, which is also one of the chief attributes we accredited to contemplation in an earlier discussion. Dreyfus (2011) adopts this view when he suggests that mindfulness is “not the present centered non judgmental awareness of an object but the paying close attention to an object, leading to the retention of the data so as to make sense of the information

delivered by our cognitive apparatus” (p. 47). In his description, Dreyfus does not stress the indeterminate judgment of mindfulness, instead he emphasizes the “retention” of information that accompanies one’s focus. This is an important addition because it points to the value of remembering the object of mindfulness. To further support his position, Dreyfus (2011) offers the following lengthy description of mindfulness.

The idea of mindfulness as a retention of information may come as a surprise given the almost universal acceptance of the definition of mindfulness as a present centered nonjudgmental awareness. And yet the idea of mindfulness as a holding rather than a merely passive attending fits quite well with the classical Buddhist descriptions found in the *Abhidharma*, which all concur in presenting mindfulness as the ability of the mind to remain present to the object without floating away. I would like to argue that it is this retentive ability of the mind that should be taken as defining mindfulness, not its alleged present-centered nonconceptuality. It is this retentive ability that allows the mind to hold the object in the ken of the attention as well as remember it later. . . . I would also argue that this retentive ability is central to account for how mindfulness operates cognitively and goes a long way to explain the cognitive transformations brought about by this practice. (p. 46)

There are a number of key insights in Dreyfus’ quote. First, he challenges the “nonjudgmental” character of mindfulness, opting instead to advance the idea of a “holding” place within the act of mindfulness. This “holding” space turns mindfulness from a “passive” act to an active one, hence Dreyfus’s use of the term “remember.” To remember presupposes an activity of the mind. This argument counters the common descriptive measure put forth by others that mindfulness is a series of present-moments. Dreyfus’s mention of remembrance is a valid point, particularly since it is *impossible to simultaneously remember and be in a present-moment*; these two practices necessarily conflict. Lastly, Dreyfus connects “transformation” to mindfulness, once again adding a

new dimension to the definition of mindfulness that is absent in the other descriptions. According to Dreyfus, when a person is mindful, he attends to the object, but *not* in a “nonjudgmental” manner. The person creates a psychic “holding” for the judgment of the object, “remembers” it, and then can “transform” how he acts toward the object in future circumstances.

When we consider the comments by Dreyfus, a connection can be made to the concept of aneutral contemplation introduced in Chapter II. To review, aneutral contemplation highlights the non-partiality and continual movement of contemplation on an either/or continuum of reason and emotion. The term does not value reason or emotion exclusively, instead it identifies the benefits latent in both expressions of human behavior. This characteristic of aneutral contemplation pairs well with the act of mindfulness. Through further inspection, we find that “nonjudgment,” “holding,” and “remembrance,” are all qualities of aneutral contemplation too. Thus, the evidence for the many commonalities between contemplation and mindfulness are ever-mounting. Dreyfus’s additional descriptions do not discount the common themes between contemplation and mindfulness that have been established; the balance between secular reason and spiritual emotion is still upheld, and the second-hand indescribability of each still lingers. Merton’s (1961a) claim still rings true even after adopting Dreyfus’s views.

Contemplation cannot be taught. It cannot even be clearly explained. It can only be hinted at, suggested, pointed to, symbolized. The more objectively and scientifically one tries to analyze it, the more he empties it of its real content, for this experience is beyond the reach of verbalization and of rationalization. (p. 6)

Attempts to explain (in words) the experience of contemplation are doomed before they commence, for the only genuine knowledge of it comes by way of direct experience. Cupitt (1998) analyzes Meister Eckhart's mystical writing, a phenomenon that would seem to contradict my claim that one cannot communicate the experience of contemplation. As Cupitt (1998) explains it, Eckhart's descriptions do not communicate the content of the experience, but rather enact the mystical experience by "play[ing]" (p. 100) with language:

Language itself being just a system of differences, it cannot operate in a region where *ex hypothesi* there is no difference [(this is the realm of direct experience with God)]. Language only begins to engage with anything if we come forward, into the outpouring Fountain of be-ing in the present moment. Here, there is nothing *but* an outrushing play of difference, pure secondariness. . . . Be-ing, life, the outpouring play of secondariness in the Now-moment: that is as close as Language, or we, can ever get to God. (p. 100)

Just as he points out Eckhart's "dazzling games with language" in juxtaposing doctrine-oriented ideas of his contemporary St. Thomas Aquinas with his own radical, mystical emphasis on the present moment (which eschewed the "calculative" vein prominent in Aquinas and the majority of the Church in his day), Cupitt (1998) himself plays with language in an attempt to reach for the ideas he is discussing, knowing that he will not communicate but might otherwise convey them (p. 98).

Describing the experience of mindfulness is also problematic. Like contemplation, the framework, or contexts, of mindfulness can be described, but they require first-hand experience if one is to understand what their presence *means*, how it feels, and how one *responds*, to them.



Lipsey (2010) recalls that

Merton was confident, and knew from reading and from direct encounters (for example, with Vietnamese Zen monk, Thich Nhat Hanh), that the inner experience of mature contemplative practitioners of East and West would prove to be wholly or very nearly the same. (p. 190)

These eastern and western practitioners have contemplation and mindfulness as their highest practices. The inability to fully describe them should not be perceived as a limitation; quite the contrary, it is one of their greatest strengths because the inability to describe keeps a person in a state of questioning and wonder. Mindfulness further shows how it generates interior silence and solitude. The themes of silence and solitude were discussed as key contexts for contemplation in Chapter III. We once again take time to look at silence and solitude, this time to show how the act of mindfulness is a perfect reflection of contemplation.

### **The Silence and Solitude of Mindfulness**

Recall from Chapter III that interior silence and solitude can aid the formation of contemplation in an individual; however, whereas contemplation *initially requires* exterior silence and solitude to develop *interior* silence and solitude, mindfulness is possible *regardless* of whether exterior silence and solitude are initially present. Exterior silence and solitude are necessary for the individual to practice for and develop interior silence (see Keating, 2012), but the individual can practice mindfulness in the normal course of daily life. Indeed it is the very activity of daily life that provides the best training ground for mindfulness. This is the major difference between the two. But, once

interior silence and solitude are embodied by the individual, then both contemplation and mindfulness can exist, *whether or not* exterior silence and solitude are present.

Mindfulness works with a practitioner to manage the cacophony of exterior and interior noise in his environment. This ‘noise’ is any exterior sound or interior thought that works to distract the individual from the moment at hand. Mindfulness helps first by focusing a person’s attention on the present-moment. “Mindfulness is a complex phenomenon involving the self-regulation of attention and present-moment awareness. The facet structure of the construct itself includes observing internal and external experiences, describing internal experiences, acting with awareness, non-judging of inner experience, and non-reactivity to inner experience” (Baer et al., 2008, as cited in Napora, 2011, p. 65).<sup>47</sup> Muting out attention on the past or future reduces mental inputs dramatically, giving a person more space to attend to each thought or exterior stimulus more fully. According to Goleman (1988), “in the way of mindfulness, the meditator’s mind witnesses its own workings, and he comes to perceive increasingly finer segments of his stream of thought” (p. 110). This comment by Goleman echoes, in part, the descriptions made by Dreyfus (2011) above, in that it is absorption, not separation, that is sought. So, with increased attention to the stimuli (both exterior and interior), a person becomes more aware of his own interior responses to these stimuli. Consequently, mindfulness allows a person to ‘step back’ from exterior and interior noise, which in turn fosters greater understanding of both.

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<sup>47</sup> Recall Nhat Hanh (2004) from above.

With introspection, you note whether your mind has fallen into laxity, and as soon as that happens, you may counteract it—arousing your attention by taking a renewed interest in awareness. When through introspection you notice that your mind has become caught up in distracting thoughts or other stimuli, immediately relax and let go of those objects of the mind. (Wallace, 2009, p. 73)

This understanding is what enables a person to gain control of his own responses to such thoughts or stimuli, so that he is not emotionally or intellectually carried away by these provocations, but instead attends to them in the present, with the open attention they warrant. In this state of mindfulness, the practitioner is fully participating in the exterior reality, rather than being a victim or reaction of it. Likewise, he is fully in tune with his inner life, so that his mental chatter does not carry him away. In this way, the mindful person can reach a contemplative state without exterior silence and solitude, for he creates these contexts of contemplation within himself. Plus, the act of remembrance reminds him what to expect and how to respond if a similar situation transpires in his future.

To further demonstrate how interior silence and solitude are presented through mindfulness, I turn to perhaps an odd, but revealing example: the musical genre of jazz. Jazz combines a variety of the descriptions of mindfulness discussed previously. Jazz is an example of present-moment behavior, Dreyfus's "holding" and "remembering" explanations, an honoring of silence and solitude, and non-judgmental approaches. When a person listens to a jazz composition that requires multiple players, the independent playing of each jazz musician is sufficient in-and-of-itself; each musician's sound forms its own complete musical piece. Still, the overall musical piece and melody are enhanced when each individual part unites to form a cacophony of dynamic sound. When this

happens, a more complete melody and experience is provided for both the players and listeners. There are 'jazz standards' that have become famous, and when played, are oftentimes played in the same manner time and time again. This could serve as an example of Dreyfus' "remembering." When a jazz musician oscillates between independent and interdependent playing with the other members of the group, each jazz musician must be mindful of what actions are required of him for the particular piece, this forms a 'holding' space for the player. Each musician exists in a series of solitary and silent moments, where the acts of "remembering" and "holding" are critical practices to the identical re-production of the standard jazz piece.

Additionally, a jazz musician also alternates between silence and noise. The jazz musician is a solitary player and a player of the group. Because the sound of jazz is both the sound of a solitary player as well as a mutual production, each musician must be aware of how his individual part impacts the entire song; plus, he needs to be able to remain fluid enough to alter his musical playing in order to fit within the independent playing of the other solitary musicians. As such, a musician must be mindful in order to anticipate where another player in the group is taking, or is willing to take, his sound. This is when the free-flowing, adaptive, and moment-to-moment creation of jazz presents itself. Mindfulness allows a person, in this example a musician, to be present at every anticipation of or end of a note for what it is. "In mindfulness, we experience the thing but we do not add or take away by interpretation" (Riner, 2010, p. 101). The musical notes are surrounded by silence and noise. Each musician learns to interject his own noise

when there is enough break in the sound of another player for him to enter the song from silence.

A jazz musician must be ever-mindful. His mindfulness ensures that he does not always calculate what must happen next with his play, but is calculating enough (through his “remembering” of his past playing that is kept in his own unique “holding” space), that he can anticipate when there is a break between noise and silence for him to enter the melody. This technique is possible because of the musician’s non-judgmental behavior that characterizes mindfulness. Adopting a calculated mentality would be detrimental to the overall production of the musical piece. However, it should not be assumed that since it is harmful for the musician to calculate his play, then it must be right and proper for him to ‘feel’ his way through the song. This would also be ill-advised. If a musician solely thinks or solely feels, then he does not take into account the benefits of having both qualities exist when they are invited by the other playing musicians. In other words, a musician cannot help but think when he is playing, but he must also ‘feel’ what notes work and ‘feel’ where the other musicians may direct the song. Thus, *both thinking and feeling* burst out of the present moment of the play. “For Thich Nhat Hanh, the practice of mindfulness is a path to reconnect the mind and the body in the present moment . . . Body and mind should be experienced as one thing, not two” (Cassidy, 2012, p. 172). This is beneficial because “By being fully present and being fully aware one gradually comes to perceive more and more the true nature of reality [(or the song, in this case)], reality which is otherwise clouded by the incessant chatter of our minds and self-centered thoughts” (Sniegocki, 2001, p. 541). Mindfulness breaks down the contention that solely

thinking or solely feeling is better, and instead demonstrates that both are needed. In the case of jazz, honoring both thinking and emotion makes the musician recognize when it is time for him to play his solo, time to be silent, or time to play with his fellow musicians.

“Silence is first of all the art of being present, of giving oneself unreservedly to the moment” (Gruen, 1999, p. 59). There is no questioning the value of silence in music. It provides transitions between notes, players, and songs. For a musician, neither silence nor noise is more valuable than the other while he is playing. When a jazz musician plays his trumpet, for example, the alternation of silence and noise occurs moment-to-moment. Some think of noise as the more productive element in this dyad (silence and noise), but silence is needed. Silence both concludes noise and calls attention to its coming; as a result, silence is imperative if noise is to be valued. Also, because of the dual nature of silence (it both anticipates and concludes noise), it exists in incremental present moments. Finding a similar interest with interior silence, noise, and solitude is the acts of questioning and wonder.

### **The Foundations of Education: Questioning and Wonder**

Describing the thoughts of Bernard Lonergan, Hughes (2003) says that “questioning—as wonder, as curiosity, as concern—is what prompts our engagement with experience and propels human development through all types of discovery, assimilation, affirmation, evaluation, and decision” (p. 18). The motivation to search beyond one’s epistemological and psychological comfort zones is part of what makes a person human. The work of Maslow (1970) takes this issue head on. He formulates a structured

hierarchy of needs that frames how individuals operate in the world. At the foundation of this hierarchy are physiological needs, followed by safety needs, belonging and love needs, esteem needs, and finally culminating in the highest of aspirations: self-actualization. Put simply, Maslow offers a sequential physical and psychological framework for the needs of individuals. His framework provides a standardized place to metaphorically position individuals to determine their particular stage of personal development and potential. The final stage of Maslow's hierarchy (self-actualization) is the point when a person's development begins to ask questions of great significance and complexity. While everyone questions, the types of questions asked vary. Maslow's work illustrates that some pursue 'lower order' questions that relate to issues of survival, while others are preoccupied with questions of 'higher orders,' such as calculations and abstractions. The 'order' of questions, however, does not determine the value of the questions or the value of the person who asks them: no matter where one searches (lower or higher orders of questions), the answers relate somehow to where one is on the spectrum, and his line of questioning roots him in the process of 'becoming' –the process of being human. As Lear (1998) makes clear, "Whatever 'higher' or 'deeper' meanings there may be, they do not transcend human life, but lie immanent in it" (p. 166). Thus, the types of questions people ask reflect how their lives are lived. As answers are found, and parts of life understood, the questioner may, for a time, experience comfort and complacency. This may lead him to take refuge in the idea of his 'correct' knowledge, holding it beyond criticism. But, challenges to ways of thinking are inevitable, whether from exterior sources or through interior "boredom and irritation" (Lear, 1998, p. 36).

Given this, movement along the ‘intellectual spectrum’ is key, and it is the task of education to determine where people fall on this spectrum so that educators can champion on behalf of their student’s transformation of consciousness—pushing each beyond where he believes his intellectual threshold to be.

### **Education**

As mentioned by Napora (2011), “The relationship of the mindfulness construct to facets of learning and academic success has yet to be explored fully; research of this nature is just beginning to emerge” (p. 65). It is my intention to add additional insights to this developing area of research. Plus, I am interested in turning attention to the transformative quality of mindfulness instead of measuring solely its objective and empirical effects on the mind. I feel this course of research is valuable, but also maintain that there are characteristics within mindfulness that are not quantifiable. Durckheim (1987) explains what I mean. Commenting on students who study Zen, he states,

One way of leading the student on the path of Zen is to destroy all the concepts and images he uses to ‘grasp’ the truth. This prevents him from confusing the image with the thing—the finger pointing at the moon with the moon itself—and it also prevents him from resting complacently on fixed ideas. (p. 82)

Some educators push only an ‘objective agenda’ in education. When this is the only focus, a student’s personal development is jeopardized. “‘Objective’ teaching and learning, the norm in most of our educational endeavors today, has sadly meant almost the direct opposite of transformation” (Lichtmann, 2005, p. 5). Surely this statement is problematic for some, most notably those who view reality in terms that privilege objectivity. This objective ‘vision’ of the world and Self forces any sort of individual



transformation to be superficial because it categorizes any development in words/terms and descriptions rather than changes to Self essence. “When we *can* say what a thing *is*, or what we are doing, we think we fully grasp and experience it. In point of fact this verbalization—very often nothing more than verbalization—tends to cut us off from genuine experience and to obscure our understanding instead of increasing it” (Merton, 1961a, p. 136).

In agreement with Merton, Hayakawa and Hayakawa (1992) remind us how insufficient objective views of reality are—given that words themselves are inadequate measures. “The symbol is *not* the thing symbolized; the word is *not* the thing; the map is *not* the territory it stands for” (p. 19). Agreeing with Hayakawa and Hayakawa, Chandler (2002) adds,

The academicians adopted the philosophical stance of naïve realism in assuming that words simply mirror objects in an external world. They believed that ‘words are only names for things’, a stance involving the assumption that ‘things’ necessarily exist independently of language prior to them being ‘labelled’ with words. (pp. 55–56).

Leeds-Hurwitz (1993) adds additional support when he points out that “multiple interpretations, multiple realities” exist for the same phenomenon (p. 37). And “presumably only the legacy of the physical sciences, where it is assumed that the focus of study is objective reality, leads to the assumption that there should be one and only one right interpretation of human behavior” (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1993, p. 38). In sum, when reflecting on the significance, ‘essence’ and/or purpose of Being, one should not honor

the objective stance of existence alone; for Being is, and will forever remain, a matter that passes far beyond the reaches of intellectual description.

Great emphasis is placed on the transfer of objective knowledge and its results in education. This leads to an atrophy of its partner, critical reflection. This problem is not insurmountable, however. Any over-emphasis on objectivity in education can be remedied by negotiating the space between the known and the unknown by encouraging wonder in students. Wonder is not a practice that can be objectively quantified, so for educators, they will find that by encouraging their students to wonder, they too bring each student one step closer to contemplative and mindful experiences. When education stresses the need for students to wonder, it provides the student with a clearer picture of situations by informing him of what 'is,' and at the same time inviting him to wonder what else is possible. An educator must pass along his collected 'givens' in order to equip students with enough critical reflection that they can develop their own set of 'givens.' These givens present themselves through various objects that exist outside of the learner, constructing and organizing an objective world to be interpreted. The ability to shape one's interior world derives from one's interaction with the outer world, in the form of both other people and objects, arising out of the contrast between interior and exterior, given and unknown.

To preserve an authentic process of development, the impetus to forge ahead into the unknown must take the form of an invitation by the educator rather than an imperative; that is, the motivation must come from within the individual himself. It is wonder that brings this about. As Miller (1992) claims, wonder "projects us toward the

unknown, and animates our desire to know it” (p. 130). Coming to know requires that a person give life to the desire to know, and this happens as a result of wonder. It is wonder that overcomes the fear of the unknown and allows the individual to move from a given position to the realm of the uncertain. Miller (1992) suggests, “Insofar as we are wonderers, we are always already situated in between the presence of what is present to us in the present [the given], and the unknown of which wonder makes us conscious” (p. 147). Moreover, Laird (2006) states that “when our awareness loosens its arthritic grip to reveal a palm open and soft, awareness is silent and vast in the depths of the present moments” (p. 18). No longer does knowledge remain solely objectified in the presence of wonder; rather, it becomes an acknowledgment of potential, both for the world and the development of the Self.

Regardless of how much one might try to maintain an illusion of knowledge, an illusion of comfort and security, a person is constantly propelled into the unknown. Indeed, it is the very ‘given,’ the known world, that evokes wonder: “It is precisely the given which is mysterious to us, no matter how completely it is given to us” (Miller, 1992, p. 147). The exploration prompted by wonder can expose one’s dissatisfaction with his current state of Being, giving the individual a choice between keeping his status quo or finding a novel way to live. Wonder further determines if one ‘moves up’ within Maslow’s hierarchical framework. This shows that wonder not only sports a theoretical agenda, but is also dedicated to actual movement, actual development. As Saint Thomas once remarked, “sicut enim maius est illuminare quam lucere solum, ita magis est contemplata aliis tradere quam solum contemplari (II II 188 a.b.)” (Hume, 1981, p. 74).

Translated, Saint Thomas's passage reads: "as it is a greater thing to illuminate than just to shine; so it is a greater thing to pass on to others those things which have been contemplated, than just to contemplate" (Hume, 1981, p. 74). Wonder acts upon people because they chose to permit it, much like an educator can only invite a student into conversations, but cannot force learning and transformation onto the Other.

### **Role of the Other in Education**

Wonder invites people to work toward remedying the divide by delving into their own inner world and the foreign worlds of Others. Though this divide is ultimately unbridgeable, the call of wonder ensures that the dialogue continues, to perpetuate the 'becoming' of the individual; it is the responsibility of educators to initiate and cultivate this process. As Heschel (1951) states,

To our knowledge the world and the 'I' are two, an object and a subject; but *within* our wonder the world and the 'I' are one in being, in eternity. We become alive to our living in the great fellowship of all beings, we cease to regard things as opportunities to exploit. (p. 39)

Here surfaces the responsibility of education, for education not only gives one insight into his own beliefs, but it also exposes him to the beliefs of Others, which in turn creates a "fellowship" of 'Selves.' Indeed, cultivating an appraisal of the Other as something worthy of acknowledgment (i.e., I must listen to the Other) is a prime concern of any responsible educator.

There is no escaping an encounter with the Other, notably within education. Whether he is a fellow student or a teacher, the Other provokes one to wonder about situations and new types of knowledge; therefore, the Other acts as a marker and guide

for the individual. Still, while the encounter is inevitable, to learn from an Other requires effort and a great amount of trust, for it requires exposing one's inner world to an Other. This trust cannot simply be a latent force that rests on the sidelines of education; it must exist as a functioning device within the conscious mind of both guide and Other. The importance of trust cannot be overstated. It is not enough for each participant simply to say that they trust the Other; rather, trust must be identified in the practices of their relationship, or else one's questions and wonder cease to develop further because he becomes suspicious of the Other's intentions. It is trust that makes intimacy possible, as Weber (2003) claims: "intimacy with another is only possible with the capacity to surrender ourselves" (p. 172). This intimacy makes one's wonder more likely, for it persuades a person to drop his guard and expose his inner world to examination (by himself and by the Other). This development of trust and intimacy is a staple characteristic of education that enables the progress and self-development that remains the ideal aim of any transformative education. If the individual is able to recognize the sincerity of the guide, then he is more likely to accept the guidance of the Other. However, if any of these characteristics falter, transformative education is impossible. Each of these three characteristics (trust, intimacy, and sincerity) are prerequisites of an ideal educational relationship, one where guidance is a reciprocated experience that allows each vested party to develop in his own time. "Just when we give up on the need to convert them, they become converted—transformed—in their own way and time. Right there in that space and time, transformation happens" (Lichtmann, 2005, p. 114).

This triad of trust, intimacy, and sincerity, blossoms a transformation that fashions an intersubjective relationship between teacher and pupil.

### **Intersubjectivity**

I define intersubjectivity as a relationship built on intimacy, trust, and sincerity, whereby each person is concerned and held responsible for the development of the Other's Being. It is through an intersubjective relationship that people allow their guards to diffuse enough so that transformative education can take place. When intersubjectivity falters, one is left only with opportunities to understand the world and experiences objectively because an individual is not seen as its 'essence,' but rather as an object and as a thing that produces. A type of intersubjective relationship that does not judge the individual in such harsh terms was referred to in Chapter II when Nhat Hanh's (1987) "interbeing" was mentioned. "Central to Nhat Hanh's conviction is the concept of *interbeing*, a word he created to express the radical interdependence of all things" (Parachin, 2000, p. 258). Interbeing is a term taken "from the *Avatamsaka Sutra* . . . In the sutra it is a compound term which means 'mutual' and 'to be . . . I am, therefore you are. You are, therefore I am. That is the meaning of the word 'interbeing.' We interare" (Nhat Hanh, 1987, pp. 86–87). This form of relationship is not unique to Nhat Hanh. Krishnamurti (2006) recalls the same idea when he states,

You are the world and the world is you. You are the result of your culture, of your society, of your religion. You have been nurtured in the society, in the culture which you have built, and therefore you are part of that. You are not separate from the culture, from the society, from the community. (pp. 165–166)

Intersubjectivity is not something that people develop as time continues and people grow, it is what originally frames the human experience of one person *with* an Other.

Intersubjectivity is, therefore, something more to lose than to gain. Intersubjectivity can be misplaced during an individual's development. Perhaps he loses it because his personal, familial, and/or social relationships do not honor or model intersubjective behavior. In these unfortunate times, education must transmit this value, or else nothing will. "A good education cannot be had without a more intense association with certain people and a kind of separation from others" (Kleiner, 1985, p. 167).

Reed-Danahay (2009) claims that

Education is a sphere that deals with both the cultural transmission and the institutional arrangements in which this [cultural transmission] takes place. Education is also a site of power and conflict in stratified human societies, in which competing claims for dominance are enacted. (p. 42)

In this quote, Reed-Danahay points to the 'social capital' that education provides, and how this capital is used to sort and divide society. She also claims that education retains traits of 'Self capital.' "At the same time, educational institutions are potential locations for intellectual growth and discovery, as many of us employed as professors hope in our own teaching activities" (Reed-Danahay, 2009, p. 42). Reed-Danahay reminds us that education is a *social institution* (responsible for the transmission of collected knowledge, with an influence on relationships of power) and a place of *Self creation and development* (education is an intellectual and creative force). Thus, education acts both to transfer and to create knowledge, thereby being a multi-faceted process concerned as much with social as with Self capital. These two aspects of education are interdependent, for the

transmission of knowledge is necessary to equip learners with the raw material upon which their critical intellects can work, while critical reflection fuels the desire to know more by making that knowledge important to the learner. If either aspect of the interdependent dyad of education (social/Self capital) is altered, then there must also be an alteration to the character of the other aspect. Education thus provides a powerful tool to address the two main problems of modernity I focus on. These self-imposed limitations (an over-confidence in reason and a desire to influence others for personal gain) can be overcome by education precisely because of its dyadic character—because it presents the exterior value systems to the learner, and also encourages reflection within the Self. Thus, education can provide an ideal medium for a person to understand both himself and his relationship with the Other.

The intersubjective relationship also leads a person to reconfigure the way he defines himself. This reconfiguration redirects one's attention to forming a new, fresh identity of Self by supporting the efforts of education to challenge psychic obstructions. When this recasting commences, and intersubjectivity is deemed paramount to the development of Self, one has no choice but to recognize and take steps to abolish the two modern obstacles highlighted. This happens because by its own claim, intersubjectivity pushes aside the boundaries of Self and Other, begging people to identify that they are interwoven into similar circumstances brought on by their common situation, whether in experiences of life or experiences shared in a classroom. Either way, intersubjectivity sets out to dismantle the psychic barriers that impede individual development and communal connection as borders between Self and Other tumble. Once the commonalities between



Selves are established, space is made for both ‘sides’ of the intersubjective relationship to guide one another. In the classroom, the abolishment of boundaries impacts the teacher-student relationship too. Their mutual rapport causes both ‘individuals’ to become both a teacher and a student for one another. Put differently, education becomes a reciprocal exercise. As Trungpa (1970) suggests:

teachers must be prepared to learn from pupils, that is very, very important. Otherwise there is really no progress on the part of the students, because in a sense one would be too keen and interested in the process of making the pupils receive the expansion of one’s own Ego and wanting to produce another you, rather than helping them to develop ability of their own. So teachers must be prepared to learn from their pupils, then there is a continual rapport. (p. 42)

This is the mark of a true intersubjective relationship and a marker of transformative education. It is a context of care, both for Self and for Other. As Krishnamurti (1991) notes: “The world is my own extension, and to understand the world I have to understand myself” (p. 5). Learning about the Self teaches a person about the Other. This is because one learns the significance the Other plays in defining his Self; he learns that without the Other his ability to develop behaviorally is stunted, and his chance to define himself is limited too. On the other hand, if intersubjectivity is at the heart of education, the individual can begin the process of moving beyond the two primary problems I have identified in modernity.

### **Chapter Summary**

Chapter IV set out to advance our understanding of contemplative principles by turning to alternative examples not mentioned in the previous three chapters. The theme of mindfulness was introduced, and its commonalities to contemplation expounded upon.

Of special note, the descriptions of mindfulness explored by Dreyfus were turned to. He introduced a fresh way to look at mindfulness that not only varies in character from other descriptions of mindfulness, but works well to pinpoint locations where the characteristics of contemplation and mindfulness merge. Their commonalities include: retention and “remembrance,” “nonjudgment,” a “holding” environment for one’s behavioral responses to exterior objects, and arguing for a mindfulness that is active instead of “passive.” Then, it was suggested that these traits lead to fundamental transformations in the “essences” of people. Following this discussion, the interior aspects of silence and solitude were also shown to be characteristic of mindfulness, and their impact on one’s exterior environment was considered. To help further this point, I introduced the genre of jazz. Jazz served to show how the contexts of interior silence and solitude establish an equilibrium between thinking and feeling. This conversation echoes earlier discussions pertaining to a neutral contemplation, once again seeking to establish common behavior between contemplation and mindfulness.

The final series of thoughts in Chapter 4 revolve around education. The term *transformative education* was introduced to express a finer description of the type of process education ought to aim toward. Two of education’s fundamental contexts are questioning and wonder, which are required for education to transform individual consciousness. Taking up the role of the Other in the process of education, I claimed that trust, intimacy, and sincerity were the three traits that blossomed from a belief in the intrinsic value of the Other for who he is. Establishing this notion led us to recognize the beginnings of an intersubjective relationship (in our case, between teacher and pupil).

This understanding pushes one beyond recognizing *the value* of the Other to affirming *the need* of the Other. Finally, we returned briefly to the two modern obstacles of human behavior identified at the onset of this project, to show how the traits discussed in this chapter aim at their abolishing.

## CHAPTER V

### EPILOGUE

I find it interesting that one of my earliest memories was forged in the confrontation with death; as I complete another chapter in what has become my life's work, I again feel its impact on thought and ways of being. My response to the death of my pet bird, Bosley, was a desire to exchange places with him, to give my life for his. Though it was a childish response, in a way I think it does make sense for an adult. This coming to terms with death, this recognition of one's mortality and that of an Other—of your shared mortality—is the essence of connection, of compassion, and ultimately of meaning. The recognition of your shared contingency motivates treating the other with care, as well as appreciating the moments you have. The deliberate chaos of the modern world seems nothing more than contrived veils for the essential truth that we all will die, and we don't know when. The monks, in contrast, have chosen to remove themselves from the modern world, to face and come to terms with death. They arise early to wait for the coming of Jesus, which in Christianity will bring the Day of Judgment, the death of the physical, and transcendence into the spiritual. They arise early, then, to await death itself. Interestingly, the monks bury their dead in the bare earth. Brother Gregory, who passed away during my stay at Mepkin, was lowered into his grave on a board, dressed in his habit, with a cloth just covering his face. In the modern west, we have elaborate funerary rituals and accoutrements designed to sanitize the concept of death: the sealed

stone vault; the polished, satin-lined coffin; the body itself, carefully embalmed to prevent decay. Even approaching the gravesite any hint of dirt is obscured by carpeting, drapery, and other such artifice. Our culture's discomfort with death is manifest in these artifacts, these ways we push any thought of death's realities out of our minds. Ironically, however, it is this very reality that we must mine for insight, which can anchor us within ourselves, and can enable us to forge the connections we desire with others. As Hamlet says, "the readiness is all." In both Brother Gregory's burial and my Bosley's, the body was laid in the earth with little ceremony and little separation; ultimately death is not a matter for the body, but for the mind and the soul, and it is here that the good work of death is to be done.

As we reflect back on this project, I believe we have come to more beginnings than conclusions. Rather than closing off terms, this project has opened them more. Fortunately for us, this conversation can continue at both formal and informal levels. Ready to provide a forum for this way forward is education—both at the formal, institutional level, and at the informal level of daily learning. Focusing in specifically on the process of education, in the preceding work I have identified three different characteristics that education must have in order to be truly transformative: intimacy, trust, and sincerity. When these three characteristics are established within an interactive situation between teacher and pupil, we maximize the chances of truly changing things for the better. These characteristics encourage both teacher and pupil to self-reflect on the significance of each in the life of the other, in an ever-widening web of human interaction. Thus, it cultivates the habit of being with others in meaningful ways, of

regarding both oneself and others as contributing crucially to a larger whole. Because of this, one of my unstated goals has been realized: this project does not rest in passive words, but encourages the reader to act. Thus, it is a living text that calls for a response.

It has been a pleasure to write the preceding work. I learned a great deal more about topics that have fascinated me over the years. I have done my very best to encourage you to reconsider the ways you think and live. Surely, there are many points in this work you disagree with, but I do hope that you have found it engaging and thought-provoking. I mentioned in my prologue that there would be terms and themes that would be difficult to explain; but, just as I am not finished thinking and reading about these topics, I hope you are not either.

I have had glimpses of understanding silence and solitude, but even in my extensive reading and extended stays at the monastery I have only achieved an introduction to these complex phenomena. If there is one thing I know for sure, it's that once interior silence and solitude are achieved, the categories of what is interior and exterior collapse. This is vitally important in the modern paradigm, for within it we are more likely to be busy and loud than quiet and still. Interior silence may be the only kind of silence available to us in such an environment, but once we have experienced it, exterior noise falls away. Thomas Merton, the monks of Mepkin, and others in the spiritual contemplative tradition have adamantly maintained that exterior solitude and silence must exist before their interior counterparts can be achieved. It seems we are at an impasse, given that exterior solitude and silence is so hard to achieve in this modern world. This is where we can learn from the East in the practice of mindfulness. Thich

Nhat Hanh and other masters claim that inner peace, inner tranquility is possible even in the midst of a perpetually chaotic external environment. Ultimately, in this project, I have shown the similarities between contemplation and mindfulness; thus, we can collapse the boundary between them and in so doing, resolve the obstacle of exterior noise. We can use the techniques of mindfulness to achieve the inner tranquility of contemplation no matter what the external environment brings. I think that Thomas Merton himself recognized the deep connection between his contemplation and Thich Nhat Hanh's mindfulness as he forged a friendship with Nhat Hanh at the end of his life.

The difficulty with language is that it always points to something rather than handing the thing in-and-of-itself directly to you. I still don't know what it means to be quiet inside, still, or balanced in my emotions. But, I feel that I am closer to knowing than I ever have been in my life. If anything, this project has rekindled my desire to work to make the world a better place. I hope in reading it that you are likewise inspired. We can do more together than we can alone. Hopefully this has been a lesson you recognize in the previous work. I know that I still pray more than most; while I have desired to retreat into a monastic life, my circumstances kept me from that path. I have learned through writing this that I can achieve many of the same things outside the monastery as I could within its walls, and I have learned to be content with this. I have always been a reflective and thoughtful person; however, I have recognized that this is not enough—one must also act. This dissertation will stand as a reminder of the responsibility and agency we both share.

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