ABSTRACT

Saints and Moral Philosophy

Sean A. Riley, Ph.D.

Committee Chairperson, Michael D. Beaty, Ph.D.

Starting with William James's lectures on saintliness in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, twentieth and twenty-first century moral philosophers have attempted to understand the relationship between moral philosophy and Christian saints. James sees the saints as exemplars of creative love, who draw their loving capacity from their relationship to the divine and whose pragmatic value derives from their melioration of the world. James believes that the saints are imitable and that the world would be better if everyone strived to be like them. I argue that though James's attempt to see the saints as exemplars of demand-satisfaction consequentialism fails, his rich account of saintliness is pregnant with insights that later philosophers develop in service of their own non-consequentialist moral theories. With the exception of J. O. Urmson's utilization of the saints to argue for supererogation in moral theory, philosophical discussion of saintliness dwindle until Susan Wolf astonishingly argues in her "Moral Saints" that saints (as construed by Utilitarian and Kantian moral theory) are ugly, boring, and unattractive. Robert Adams's response to Wolf in "Saints" exposes the problem with reducing saintliness to moral exemplarity and neglecting the religious dimension. Adams argues

that the saints are good insofar as they faithfully resemble God, display the virtues of the allies of God, and obey God's callings and commands. Like James, Adams rightly connects the moral goodness of the saints to their relationship with the divine. I endorse Adams's key insights but also indicate deficiencies in his account. Linda Zagzebski argues that the saints are morally good because they share God's motives. Though her account of the virtues of the saints improves upon a lacuna in Adams's account, I argue that it remains deficient in important ways. I then develop my own creative account of saintliness that draws on insights from the role-centered moral theory of J. L. A. Garcia and Sarah Harper and the moral philosophies of Thomas Aquinas and Alasdair MacIntyre. I argue that the saints can best be characterized as the friends of God and that doing so illuminates both the religious and moral aspects of saintliness.

Saints and Moral Philosophy

by

Sean A. Riley, B.A., M.A.

A Dissertation

Approved by the Department of Philosophy

Michael D. Beaty, Ph.D, Chairperson

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
of
Doctor of Philosophy

Approved by the Dissertation Committee

Michael D. Beaty, Ph.D.

Robert B. Kruschwitz, Ph.D.

Darin H. Davis, Ph.D.

Stuart E. Rosenbaum, Ph.D.

Perry L. Glanzer, Ph.D.

Accepted by the Graduate School
December 2011

J. Larry Lyon, Ph.D., Dean

Page bearing signatures is kept on file in the Graduate School.

Copyright © 2011 by Sean A. Riley

All rights reserved

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments vi

Dedication ix

Chapter One: Introduction: Saints and Moral Philosophy 1
  1. Aim and Outline of the Project
  2. The Variety of Recent Accounts
  3. Consulting the Tradition
  4. Establishing a Data Set
  5. Expansive and Restrictive Definitions
  6. Some Corollaries
  7. Criteria of Adequacy

Chapter Two: James's Account of Saintliness 28
  1. Starting with James
  2. Characteristics of the Saints
  3. Assessment of James's Account of Saintliness

Chapter Three: James's Account of the Moral Goodness of the Saints 75
  1. James's Moral Philosophy
  2. Critique of James's Moral Philosophy
  3. How James's Account of Saintliness Improves His Moral Philosophy
  4. Criteria of Adequacy
  5. Conclusion

Chapter Four: Recent Accounts of Saintliness 115
  1. Susan Wolf on Ugly, Boring Saints
  2. Robert Adams's Holy, Devoted Saints
  3. Linda Zagzebski's Divinely Motivated Saints
  4. Criteria of Adequacy
  5. Conclusion

Chapter Five: Friendship with God 179
  1. Summary of Insights
  2. A Role-centered Approach
  3. The Roles of the Saints
  4. Friendship with God
  5. Friendship with God and Other Roles

6. Imitation of the Saints
7. Criteria of Adequacy
8. Conclusion

Bibliography 254

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I developed an interest in saintliness almost immediately after I started studying philosophy. Perhaps imprudently, I signed up for a senior and graduate level course at Penn State University in Philosophy of Religion with Douglas R. Anderson soon after switching majors from architecture. I had neither the requisite training nor the intellectual humility to take on such a course, and I recall struggling through James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*. Dr. Anderson assigned me the task of presenting James's lectures on saintliness to the class. Preparing for that presentation, I was vexed by the question "Is it even possible to be a saint anymore?" When I posed the question to the class, the universal response in the affirmative by my religiously diverse peers perplexed me even more. Thus began a decade of inquiry, the fruit of which is this dissertation.

I must thank Doug Anderson for his guidance during my first years of philosophical study and for his recommendation that I continue my studies at Baylor University. Later studies of James with Stuart Rosenbaum and John McDermott refined and challenged my reading of James, and I am thankful for their careful and candid responses to my work. As I transitioned from studying primarily American philosophy to studying contemporary philosophy of religion and virtue theory, Michael Beaty provided sage guidance and encouragement. He guided me through the process of developing a plan for the dissertation and for putting together a committee. During the writing process, he and Robert Kruschwitz offered me excellent advice and incisive feedback on my very long and disorganized drafts. I especially want to thank them for their patience with me as the process has taken almost five years to complete.

My work here reflects my philosophical journey from American philosophy to contemporary analytic philosophy of religion and virtue theory to Aquinas and MacIntyre. It is part analytic, part historical, and part theological, and I would have it no other way. I am deeply grateful to the Baylor University philosophy department for allowing me to pursue my studies in this way. I am certain I could not have found a more encouraging intellectual community in which to flourish in a way so conducive to my disposition.

The reason my work took so long is because after completing drafts of two chapters I took a teaching and coaching position at The Stony Brook School, a Christian boarding college preparatory school on Long Island. My work there during the school year has been all-encompassing, so I have had to chip away at my dissertation during holiday breaks and summers. Robert Gustafson and Keith Singer were gracious enough to offer me a coaching and dorm duty reduction my first year and to provide me with a faculty incentive grant for my first two years to make possible the completion of this project. Jane Taylor also approved funding for a few conferences to test out my ideas and for my oral defense. Teaching literature and history these past four years at Stony Brook and interacting with my friends and colleagues have richly blessed me and my work, and I must thank especially Judy Oulund, Tim Belk, and Erik Johnson for their guidance as I learned how to teach outside of my discipline. David Hickey helped me with my final revisions, taking on the herculean task of making sure all of my footnoting and formatting met the specified guidelines. While for some stretching the writing process over the course of so many years could become burdensome, I have enjoyed the process of putting my writing aside to teach, coach, and mentor and then to pick it up again when the students go home. Having the time to reflect and mature has, I believe, improved the quality of my work, and looking back, I would not have written it any other way.

Finally, I must extend my deepest gratitude to my friends and family. Most of my intellectual growth is attributable to my interactions with my brothers and sisters in Christ from Penn State, especially the men of "the Brillo," my wonderful graduate student friends at Baylor, especially David Alexander, Jay Bruce, Mike Cantrell, Dan Johnson, Lewis Pearson, and Jonathan Sands-Wise, and with my friends, colleagues, and students at Stony Brook with whom I have shared a unique semi-monastic life. At every stage of my adult life, I have experienced genuine community as I believe few people have, and my growth is in large part the result of my immersion in these communities of grace. My parents, siblings, and in-laws have all provided encouragement, prayer, and in the case of my incredibly generous in-laws, a computer, a quiet place to work, and a helping hand with the kids during the past two summers. My incredible wife and mother of my soon-to-be four children, Emily, has been my rock during these years, encouraging me, caring for me, and making sacrifices for me beyond the requirements of human love. She has carried the bulk of the burden at home while I have worked on this dissertation, changing the diapers and refereeing the disputes I would have been handling had I not been at the keyboard. My wife and children have provided me immeasurable joy and the impetus to finish so that I can spend more time with them has driven me to complete this project, and it is to them that I dedicate this project.

DEDICATION

For Emily, Aidan, Liam, and Honora

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: Saints and Moral Philosophy

Starting with William James at the beginning of the twentieth century and continuing through the beginning of the twenty-first century, a number of mainstream academic philosophers, somewhat surprisingly, began exploring the nature of religious saintliness in hopes of drawing some connection between the lives of the saints and their own accounts of moral action, of the formation of the moral self, and of moral psychology. Though diverse in their beliefs concerning the nature of saintliness, their moral theories, and their ideas about the connection between religious saints and the moral life, these philosophers are united by their reliance upon the category of saintliness, which had been abandoned by most philosophers as hopelessly outmoded.[1] Such a turn to the saints comes on the heels not only of philosophical neglect of the saints but of strident critiques of the saints and of the moral ideals they enact or are thought to enact from figures like Nietzsche, Sartre, and more recently, Susan Wolf.[2] The resurrection of philosophical analysis of saintliness is thus not simply a matter remembering an old category that has faded out of philosophical parlance, but is rather a deliberate response to those thinkers who attacked the very use of the category in moral theory. We find this explicitly in James's writings against Nietzsche and in Robert Adams's response to Susan Wolf.[3] While agreeing with James and Adams in wanting to restore the category of saintliness to a place of importance in ethical thought, I will argue that the ways they and other recent thinkers like Linda Zagzebski attempt to revitalize the specifically Christian concept of saintliness, though promising, are incomplete or misguided for various reasons and that my account is able to incorporate the good in their accounts without being burdened by their shortcomings.[4]

---

[1] "Saint," on my view, can plausibly be added to the list of terms noted by Anscombe in "Modern Moral Philosophy" as having once made sense when understood in the context of the Judeo-Christian tradition but has now lost its meaning when used in the modern secular sphere. MacIntyre expands upon Anscombe's argument in his *After Virtue*, chs. 1-3. G. E. M Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33 (1958): 1-19; Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

[2] In the *Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche writes, "What do ascetic ideals mean?–…among saints…a pretext for hibernation, their *novissima gloriae cupido*, their rest in nothingness ("God"), their form of madness. Later, on asceticism he writes, "It forms, can form, the *path* to all kinds of mental disturbances, to 'inner lights,' for example, as with the Hesychasts of Mount Athos, to hallucinations of sounds and figures, to lustful effusions and ecstasies of sensuality (story of Saint Theresa). The interpretation given to conditions of this kind by those who are afflicted with them has always been as fanatically false as possible, this goes without saying: but do not fail to hear the tone of the most convinced gratitude that resounds already in the *will* to such a manner of interpretation. The highest condition,

1. Aim and Outline of the project

The purposes of my project are first to tell the story of how philosophical treatment of saintliness first went into decline but is now experiencing something of a renaissance, second, to set forth the variety of approaches taken by twentieth-century

---

redemption itself, that final achievement of total hypnotization and stillness, always counts for them as the mystery in itself, for the expression of which even the highest symbols are insufficient, as a turning in and returning home into the ground of things, as becoming free from all illusion, as 'knowledge,' as 'truth,' as 'being,' as escaping from every goal, every wish, every doing, as a state beyond good and evil as well." "Finally, he says, "[Asceticism] means–let us dare to grasp this–a *will to nothingness*, an aversion to live, a rebellion against the most fundamental presuppositions of life; but it is and remains a will!" Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality: A Polemic*, trans. Maudemarie Clark and Alan J. Swensen (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 1998), 67, 95, 118. More harshly, Sartre writes in *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr*, "I am not as fond of shit as some people say I am. That is why I reject Saintliness wherever it manifests itself." Jean Paul Sartre, *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (London: Heinemann, 1988), 246. Susan Wolf, "Moral Saints," *The Journal of Philosophy* 79, no. 8 (August 1982): 419-39.

[3] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: New American Library, 1958), 311-5. Robert M. Adams, "Saints," *Journal of Philosophy* 81 (1984): 392-401.

[4] I argue in sections 3 through 5 below that the philosophers I discuss are in fact articulating a Christian concept of saintliness rather than a more general concept.

philosophers to understanding saintliness and its relation to moral philosophy and to critique the available approaches, and third to propose an alternative account that incorporates the best of the available ideas while overcoming their inadequacies. In each chapter I discuss the account of saintliness offered by different philosophers and then explain the use to which they put the saints in their moral philosophies. I then critique the account given and the use to which the saints are put. Since all of the philosophers I discuss believe the saints to be morally good and that their moral goodness is a large part of what makes them saints, a substantial part of my project in understanding what these philosophers mean by a "saint" involves understanding what each means by "morally good." On the meaning of both terms, the philosophers I cover disagree with each other and, to varying degrees, with my account. My attempt to revive saintliness in the arena of moral discourse will have to grapple with both sides of the equation: the meaning of saintliness and the meaning of moral goodness. What I hope to establish is that those who try to rejuvenate the philosophical use of the saints struggle to do so because either their account of saintliness is lacking in some way, their account of moral goodness is inadequate, or their account of each is off the mark.

In this chapter I set the grounds for the discussion of saintliness first by telling the story of philosophical neglect of the saints followed by a recent revival. I then survey the variety of accounts of saintliness available and argue for a more restrictive definition of saintliness than some of my interlocutors employ. Next, I establish a data set against which to test each account and establish criteria of adequacy for comparing the merits of various accounts. Then in chapter two I analyze William James's seminal work on the saints in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. In chapter three I evaluate the merits of

James's account of the moral goodness of the saints by connecting *Varieties* to some of James's works in moral philosophy. On my reading of James, he improves upon his original demand satisfaction consequentialism, as found in 'The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life," by invoking the saints to overcome some difficulties with his theory. When one attempts to make sense of James's views after he has added the saints to his moral philosophy, one finds a number of viable interpretations, many of which are in the neighborhood of the theories of the more recent philosophers I discuss in this study. James can thus be seen as the trunk from which later branches of philosophizing about the nature of saintliness emerge conceptually. In chapter four I analyze the various recent approaches, focusing on the work of Wolf, Adams, and Zagzebski. I argue that Wolf's approach misunderstands saintliness because it neglects the relationship the saints have with God. Adams and Zagzebski, by emphasizing the saints' closeness to God, improve upon James's insights, though their accounts are ultimately incomplete. In the fifth chapter, I argue that Aquinas and MacIntyre fill in the gaps left by Adams's and Zagzebski's otherwise illuminating accounts. MacIntyre's work suggests that a role-centered understanding of morality might be able to unify the various insights we find in James, Adams, Zagzebski, Aquinas, and MacIntyre and do so in an appealingly simple way. In chapter six I argue that this is so, relying primarily on the work of J. L. A. Garcia and Sarah Harper. Thinking of morality as role-centered and of the saints as exemplary friends of God provides us with a richer and fuller account of saintliness than does any of the other accounts on their own.

2. The Variety of Recent Accounts

While the tradition presents a fairly united account concerning what makes the individuals they call "saints" saintly, twentieth-century philosophers offer divergent accounts of the saintliness of the same individuals. The sampling in the next few paragraphs of the definitions of the key figures in my investigation should make this point clear.

My investigation of the competing accounts starts with William James at the beginning of the twentieth century. According to James, the saints are characterized primarily by a harmonious relationship with an Ideal Power, manifesting itself in freedom, loss of self, and certain rare emotional dispositions towards asceticism, strength of soul, purity, and charity.[5] James's account attempts to hold onto both the moral exemplarity of the saints and the religious aspect of their goodness, but he does so in a way that severs important ties with the traditional meaning and usage of the terms "saint' and "good." After James, thinkers tend to emphasize one of the aspects James points out to the neglect of the other. Some take the saints primarily to be moral exemplars and exclude the religious aspect of saintliness. Others emphasize the close relationship the saints have with God and then either deny that they are moral exemplars or try to draw a connection between their closeness to God and their virtue.

On the moral exemplar side of the divide are Susan Wolf, J. O. Urmson, Andrew Michael Flescher, A. I. Melden, and Linda Zagzebski (insofar as she limits herself to secular ethics in the first half of *Divine Motivation Theory*). Wolf describes the saint as

---

[5] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: New American Library, 1958), 235-6.

"[a] person whose every action as morally good as possible…a person, that is, who is as morally worthy as can be." She later writes that "[a] necessary condition of moral sainthood would be that one's life be dominated by a commitment to improving the welfare of others or of society as a whole."[6] She uses the saints to make her point that morality is only one value among many values that ought to be pursued in this life and that morality is not a "comprehensive guide to conduct."[7] Urmson describes the saints as exceptionally altruistic persons, and he uses them to prove the necessity of the category of supererogatory acts in moral theory.[8] According to Flescher, "What is important about saints...is their complete and uncompromising devotion to promoting the welfare of others. So construed, the term 'saints' refers primarily to charismatic, moral, and spiritual paragons."[9] He proposes six stipulative criteria for saintliness, not necessary and jointly sufficient conditions, including that 1) they are "maximally disposed to feel, desire, and act altruistically" to the extent that they substitute their welfare for the welfare of others, 2) they see "no limits with regard to what is morally required of them," 3) their never-ending vocation of altruism is proactive, not reactive, 4) they hold no distinction between needs of others and needs of self; find self-fulfillment in serving, 5) they embody ideal character and can influence character development of non-saints, and 6) they function as visionaries and prophets to inspire us to do more than we think possible.[10] According to Melden:

---

[6] Wolf, "Moral Saints," 420.

[7] Ibid., 434.

[8] J. O. Urmson, "Saints and Heroes," in *Essays in Moral Philosophy*, ed. A. I. Melden (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1958), 198-216.

[9] Andrew Michael Flescher, *Saints, Heroes, and Ordinary Morality* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2003), 179.

> What is of central importance to an understanding of what it is that distinguishes the saint from the rest of us [is] that what he takes to be his distinctive moral status is not simply a matter of what he, unlike others, is morally bound to do, a matter concerning which differences of opinion might arise, but one that pertains to what he takes to be his unique relation to others, a relation that colours the whole character of his life – his thoughts and feelings about himself and others – in ways that are radically different from those of ordinary human beings.... To see the saint in this way is to see a being who is a radically different sort of man.[11]

Finally, Zagzebski, in the first half of *Divine Motivation Theory* argues that saints are moral exemplars, meaning that they have emotions that "fit" the world.[12] For her, the saints provide the starting point for her exemplarist version of virtue theory.

The other accounts take the saints to be primarily religious exemplars. Of this group Robert Adams and Linda Zagzebski (in the second half of *Divine Motivation Theory*) figure prominently, though Lawrence Cunningham, Peter Brown, John A. Coleman, and John Stratton Hawley serve as important interlocutors. Robert Adams says that saints faithfully resemble God[13] and that "sainthood is an essentially religious phenomenon."[14] He writes, "The substance of sainthood is not sheer will power striving like Sisyphus (or like Wolf's Rational Saint) to accomplish a boundless task, but goodness overflowing from a boundless source."[15] Again, he writes, "Saints are people in whom the holy or divine can be seen. In a religious view they are people who submit themselves, in faith, to God, not only loving God but also letting God's love possess them, so that it works through them and shines through them to other people. What interests a saint may have will then depend on what interests God has, for sainthood is a participation in God's interests."[16] According to Zagzebski, what makes the saints good is that they share God's motives. For Lawrence Cunningham, *"A saint is a person so grasped by a religious vision that it becomes central to his or her life in a way that radically changes the person and leads others to glimpse the value of that vision."*[17] He also argues that they are conveyers of "transparent goodness, deep holiness, and a broad and encompassing charity."[18] Peter Brown describes them as "re-presentations of Christ," "living classics," "flashes of signal light," wholes in cultures of fragments. They are forces within their communities, bound by love to their disciples.[19] For Coleman, "Sainthood is primarily not about ethics...[and is rarely] generated in a search for virtue, heroic deeds, or ethical goodness."[20] According to him, it is "more frequently an aspect of a thrust toward union with God, and virtue...flashes forth from that union."[21] Coleman also argues that we ought to think of the various saints as bearing only family resemblance to each other and that they serve diverse functions in their communities. Some are exemplary models of virtue, others are great teachers, others perform miracles or display the divine power, others are intercessors or possessors of a special and revelatory relation to the holy.[22] Finally, Hawley simply points out the two sides of the debate, claiming that saints can be examples in two senses. They can illustrate what is understood by their contemporaries to be moral goodness, or they are function as paradigms of a new understanding of moral goodness, either by critiquing or expanding the notions of their contemporaries. In addition to serving as examples, they provide an image of divine society. They also offer aid to the needy by drawing on divine power.[23]

---

[10] Ibid., 219-20.

[11] Melden, A. I. "Saints and Supererogation," in *Philosophy and Life: Essays on John Wisdom*, ed. Ilham Dilman (The Hague; Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 1984), 61-79.

[12] Linda Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 40-95.

[13] Robert M. Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 52-6.

[14] Adams, "Saints," 395.

---

[15] Ibid., 396.

[16] Ibid., 398.

[17] Lawrence S. Cunningham, *The Meaning of Saints* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1980), 65.

[18] Ibid., 7.

[19] Peter Brown, "The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity," in *Saints and Virtues*, ed. John Stratton Hawley (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), 3-9.

[20] John Coleman, "Conclusion: After Sainthood?" in ibid., 207.

[21] Ibid., 212.

3. Consulting the Tradition

To overcome the difficulties presented by my study of the twentieth-century philosophical accounts of saintliness we must go back to Aquinas for insight into the true nature of saintliness. Using a MacIntyrean approach, I argue that the typical user of ordinary English language is also an inheritor of the Western Christian philosophical and theological tradition. Out of that tradition emerged both a concept of saintliness and a concept of moral goodness. These concepts remain operative in the meaning and usage that ordinary English language users employ, even though later concepts that will surely undermine the traditional ways of thinking have become embedded in our patterns of thought and speech. If MacIntyre is right that the Enlightenment left traditional moral precepts and virtues largely intact but tried to give them a non-teleological and non-theological grounding, then the heirs of both the Christian medieval tradition and the Enlightenment ought to be able to pick out a morally good person relatively consistently and reliably.[24] Again, if MacIntyre is right, then disagreement about who counts as a morally good person only really emerges at the advent of Nietzschean and emotivist thought, both of which reduce assertions of moral goodness to expressions of personal preference. "X is a morally good person" becomes elliptical for "I approve of X, do so as well." As such thinking takes root in the minds of ordinary English language users, the ability to identify those who in the past would have been called morally good or saintly diminishes. The traditional conception of the saints, openly criticized by Nietzsche, becomes trivialized and eventually falls out of usage both in ordinary life and in moral discourse. The recent resurgence of the concept of saintliness in modern philosophical parlance represents a reaction against such trivialization, and it comes at a time when (because the older ways of thinking and speaking about moral goodness and saintliness still have cachet) its resurgence remains possible. Ordinary English language users can still (and may always) distinguish between a person of whom they simply approve and one who is morally good regardless of their personal preference. The class of individuals generally picked out by ordinary language users as being morally good, then, can function roughly as a set of data to be analyzed to discover the nature of moral goodness, and the same applies to the concept of saintliness.

---

[22] Ibid., 214.

[23] John Stratton Hawley, "Introduction: Saints and Virtues," in *Saints and Virtues*, xiii.

---

[24] MacIntyre's discussion of taboo in Polynesia is instructive here. Prior to Queen Kamehameha II's abolishment of the taboos, people could still identify what was taboo even though they had lost the capacity to explain why it was so. Similarly, we can still pick out saints and examples of moral goodness somewhat reliably, but we are losing or have lost the ability to explain what makes them saints. *After Virtue*, 111-2.

Our usage of “moral goodness” and “saintliness,” then, finds its legitimacy in our having inherited the concepts from a coherent tradition, one in which at least some ordinary language users not only knew that X was morally good but also what made it such that X was morally good. Such a way of thinking about our usage of these terms differs significantly from that proposed by direct reference theory, for direct reference theory holds that one can pick out examples of something without knowing the true nature of that thing. As the standard example goes, ordinary language users could reliably distinguish water from non-water before they knew that what made it water was its chemical nature H_2O. While direct reference theory works for cases like water, as I will argue later, using direct reference theory on “moral goodness” fails because P. T. Geach is right that in all the cases that matter for my project “good” is an attributive adjective, requiring that we know the nature of the noun it modifies before we can understand what it means to call that thing “good.” If I am right that we have inherited our concept of a morally good person from a tradition of using the term “morally good person” with an relatively homogeneous understanding of the nature of both moral goodness and persons, then our investigation into the nature of the morally good person becomes not one of discovery (as was the case for those who discovered that water was H_2O) but of rediscovery and of deepened understanding. Our situation is in fact the reverse of the one supposed by those who would use direct reference theory. It is not that we are starting from exemplars to discover their hitherto unknown nature. We are not doing, as it were, a science of saints, but rather our work must be historical, working backwards from the artifacts to discover what was known to be their nature in their original context, the context in which they were made exemplars in the first place.

On my view then, when ordinary English language users say that the saints are morally good, they typically mean that the saints are morally good regardless of their personal preference for or against the saints, and they typically pick out the same sort of people as saints as would have been picked out by their medieval predecessors. To a lesser extent, they select those exemplary individuals according to some of the same criteria as their medieval counterparts, though without fully understanding their reasons for using those criteria. Those who wish to assert that the saints are morally good, as all of the philosophers in my study do, are thus philosophizing with borrowed capital because the original context of intelligibility is lost. Cutting tethers to the Christian West comes at a cost, though, for to lose the original context of intelligibility entirely means losing the saints. Nietzsche and Sartre saw this clearly and were willing to abandon the teleological and theological foundations of morality in the West by daring to create a new table of values. For them, the saints became the enemies, the icons of the slave revolt in morality that kept everyone else back from reaching, for Nietzsche, the Übermensch or, for Sartre, authenticity. Those philosophers who believe rightly that that road leads not to liberation and gaiety but to chaos feel obligated to find a place for the saints in their a-teleological, a-theological moral theories, but the purpose of this study is to show that that task is unlikely to succeed. Camus' Tarrou rightly asks, "Can one be a saint without God?"[25] If my argument is right, then the answer to Tarrou's question must be "no."
In chapter six I propose an account of saintliness that is consistent with the Thomistic teleological and theological approach to moral philosophy and includes the important insights of P. T. Geach and J. L. A. Garcia. My approach takes the saints to occupy a set

---

[25] Albert Camus, *The Plague* (New York: Vintage International, 1991), 253.

of important social roles, the most important of which is follower of the Christian God. The other roles they play are determined by their vocation within their particular social-ecclesiastical and historical-eschatological contexts. The virtues they possess should be understood as the qualities they need to discharge their social roles well. The saints serve indirectly as both moral and religious exemplars for non-saints, but their imitability is limited by the extent of their vocational and contextual differences with the imitator. Such an approach best captures the nature of saintliness and its relation to morality and advances the tradition of thinking about saintliness without cutting ties to essential aspects of saintliness, aspects which to varying degrees my interlocutors in this study diminish or ignore entirely to their detriment.

4. Establishing a Data Set

Since my approach is one that attempts to move from the set of agreed-upon saints back to the nature they were supposed to have when initially deemed saints, I must establish the set of data with which I will be working. Deciding on what set of data the term "saint" refers to, however, is highly problematic; indeed much of the disagreement in the literature I am interested in revolves around the issue of deciding exactly who it is we are talking about. The disagreement, however, is understandable because many of those writing the literature bring with them developed philosophical notions of moral goodness that then color who they consider to be saints. A Kantian surveys the moral landscape and picks out those people who best exemplify qualities Kant praises. A Utilitarian naturally calls someone who generates the greatest happiness for the greatest number a saint. Others apply a filter of spirituality so that some scholars point to mystics of all religious traditions while others pick out charismatic leaders of religious movements. Still others limit their usage of the term to those in a particular established religious tradition. Adjudicating between the competing data sets is such a monumental task that most philosophers prefer to stipulate their selections rather than defend them though argumentation.

If all the philosophers writing on the saints straightforwardly and consistently used the term “saint” simply to refer to the exemplar of their particular moral theories, then arguments about the nature of saintliness would be illusory because the philosophers would simply be using the same word to name different concepts. The literature on saints could not then be characterized as a genuine debate, but rather as a series of misunderstandings or as a series of miscommunications based on ambiguity. In other words, if the philosophers writing on saints were using the term “saint” functionally in this way (i.e., the definition of saintliness being merely a function of one’s moral theory) and thus were talking past each other, then a project of this sort would be of limited value. However, while some of the supposed disagreement in the literature involves no real disagreement, there is a genuine debate going on in much of the literature. The common ground on which the battle is being fought is the set of extraordinary individuals each philosopher is attempting to understand. The philosophers I will be evaluating share as a goal the explanation of the saintliness of a core group of Christian saints. They all refer to specific individuals, with the most referenced individuals being Francis of Assisi, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Teresa of Avila, Thomas Aquinas, Ignatius Loyola, and Paul the Apostle. The literature I am working with also gives special attention to Gandhi, but he is typically labeled along with Martin Luther King, Jr. as a political saint to distinguish him from the other figures.[26] Gandhi is by far the most referenced non-Christian, and he is usually the exemplar figure for authors who want to extend saintliness beyond the Christian tradition. In describing Gandhi as a saint, though, they do so by pointing out his similarities with the Christian saints who set the standard of saintliness before him.[27] The most frequently referenced saints tend to be individuals canonized by the Roman Catholic Church, though many authors include Protestant figures such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther King, Jr. Philosophers exploring saintliness also include the Buddha as often as they include such Christian figures as Benedict, Anthony of Egypt, and Terese of Lisieux, though the Buddha stands out as the exception to the rule in their studies in a sea of Christian saints.[28] With the exception of a few figures, according to the literature, the core set of individuals in question are overwhelmingly Christian.

Given the common ground of frequently referenced individuals, comparisons and evaluations of the comparative merits of each philosopher's usage of the saints becomes possible, and it is on this common ground that I hope to establish my thesis that the modern usages of the saints by the group of philosophers I am considering all fall short in some significant way.

---

[26] Political saintliness differs from saintliness proper in that it does not seem to require personal sanctity. Rather, it involves some major political or social accomplishment, often at the expense of one's life. Martin Luther King Jr. fits this model of a political saint well, as his personal life was far from saintly but his political and social accomplishments and his willingness to embrace martyrdom for their sake are indisputable.

[27] It may also be plausibly argued that while Gandhi's theology was hardly orthodox Christian, he did consider himself a follower of Christ and studied him extensively. Viewed in this light, Gandhi is less an anomaly than he first appears.

[28] In the lectures on saintliness in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James refers to 51 saints. Only Muhammad and Buddha come from outside some branch of Christianity. In *The Meaning of Saints*, Lawrence Cunningham refers to 73 saints, all of whom are Christian except Buddha and Gandhi. Edith Wyschogrod refers to Buddha, Gandhi, and the Bodisattva among 26 references to saints in her *Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

Though the philosophers I'll be discussing refer to a shared set of individuals they deem saintly, they do not do so for the same reasons. Instead, they typically try to fit the saints onto their pre-established theoretical grid. So while the philosophers will presumably be talking about the same Francis of Assisi, they will describe Francis as a moral exemplar of their own moral system. For William James, Francis exhibits asceticism, charity, and humility, a desire to leave the confines of institutional religion, and an ability to overcome the strong men of the world through supernatural goodness.[29] According to Susan Wolf, Francis is an unattractive example of "undiscriminating love."[30] For J. O. Urmson, Francis provides examples of supererogation.[31] For Linda Zagzebski, he is an exemplar of moral goodness, recognizable as good prior to our understanding of what makes him good.[32] For Robert Adams, he could "envisage and do, and show others how to do, things that no one else had thought of doing" and thereby "expand the human repertoire, and in ways that may never seem entirely natural," because he exhibits transcendence more than moral exemplarity.[33] Francis, for Adams, proves that saintliness is about creatively exhibiting God's infinite goodness in a finite way.[34] Not all of these accounts exclude the other accounts, but enough of them are in conflict to raise concern that perhaps the real Francis is cloaked rather than illuminated by at least some of the accounts. N. T. Wright recounts how the East German Stasi used to include as part of their IQ testing for new officers a task that involved quickly matching myriad differently shaped pegs into their corresponding holes. Most of the applicants completed the task in the allotted time, but upon further investigation, the Stasi found that the test proved not that the applicants were especially intelligent bur rather that they were especially strong and determined. They had managed to get all the pegs into a hole, but not necessarily into the corresponding hole.[35] The same seems to be true of those modern philosophers who would attempt to fit the saints into categories that are incompatible with them. By starting with the data, I hope to prove that this is so and explain why this is so.

---

[29] James, *Varieties*, 244-5, 263 footnote 41, 272, 284-6, 315-6.

[30] Wolf, "Moral Saints," 423.

[31] Urmson, "Saints and Heroes," 204.

[32] Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, 46.

[33] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 56.

[34] Ibid., 368.

5. Expansive and Restrictive Definitions

It may be argued that proceeding in the way I have proposed is biased against more expansive definitions of saintliness and biased in favor of the most restrictive. By an expansive definition I mean a definition that would be able to accommodate a high percentage of those individuals called "saints" by anyone involved in the discussion. By a restrictive definition I mean a definition that include only those individuals deemed saints by a high percentage of those involved in the discussion. In other words, an expansive definition would attempt to cover most of the union of the proposed sets of data, while a restrictive definition would only attempt to account for the intersection of the proposed sets of data. At first glance, arguing for a restrictive definition would seem to be mistaken. If we were to change the topic from saints to human beings, it would certainly be inappropriate to survey the full range of positions on who counts as a human being and then to take only the most restrictive definition, one that, for example, excludes minorities, women, the elderly, and children under a certain age from counting as full human beings. The restrictive approach opens the possibility of mistaking attributes shared by all adult white males for attributes essential to human beings. One might argue that by starting with a set of Christian saints, I might mistakenly assume that being a Christian or, even more restrictively, being canonized is necessary for saintliness. A disanalogy exists, however, between the case of the saints and the case of human beings, for whether someone is or is not human can be decided by consulting biology. Biology will tell us that not only are women and non-Caucasians human, but so are those who cannot argue for themselves about their status, such as those who are mentally or physically handicapped or unborn. The question of who counts as saints cannot be solved this way.

---

[35] N. T. Wright, *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 31.

In fact, I am not convinced that the problem is one that can be solved. Rather, one can take one of two approaches to bringing unity to the accounts. The first approach involves attempting to generate criteria for saintliness that would satisfy everyone involved in the debate. Those involved in the debate have attempted to take that first path, but they have only created more disagreement. I will take a second path, which aims to find unity in origin rather than in destination. In other words, my approach consults the tradition from which the divergent accounts arose to find the place at which the disagreement first arose. If such a time exists during which there was general agreement about the nature of saintliness, then one can investigate the reasons the split emerged and determine if that split was itself necessary or not. If it turns out that the divergence was unnecessary or misguided, then one can argue that we need to return to something very like the definition in play before the split and then creatively extend the tradition so that it matches the present historical context while avoiding making the same mistake that led to the disagreement. This historical approach will not remove the disagreement if those in disagreement are unwilling to accept the conclusions of the historical inquiry, but it does open up a new possibility for unity, whereas the other approach appears to be fruitless.

What do we find when we consult the tradition? The terms for saints in Greek (*hagios*) and Latin (*sanctus*) originally were used to describe a wide range of holy or revered people, dead or alive. When adopted by Christians, these terms took on a more refined meaning. At first, "the saints" referred to all believers, as evidenced by most Scriptural references to the term.[36] Once the persecutions of Christians began, the term gained even more specificity, referring to those who were martyred and were considered by Christians to be with God in Heaven.[37] It was at that point that veneration of the graves, physical remains, and possessions of the saints began. Then, with the end of systematic persecution of Christians by the Roman Empire in the fourth century, the qualification by martyrdom transformed into various forms of asceticism and monasticism. The social context changed, but the impulse behind attributions of saintliness did not. People were as comfortable ascribing saintliness to Anthony of Egypt and Benedict of Nursia as they had to Stephen and Paul the Apostle.[38] The opportunities for martyrdom continued in areas in which Christians were persecuted minorities, particularly on the mission field and in areas of Muslim influence, but in medieval Europe, most saints expressed their devotion to God through various expressions of charity, obedience, and poverty and through evangelism, mysticism, and scholarship. More recently, with the advent of modern totalitarian regimes, genocide, and political persecution, saints have again taken the yoke of martyrdom to demonstrate their devotion to God. With the growth in disparity of wealth between the developed world and Third World, many recent saints have followed in the footsteps of their charitable predecessors by devoting their lives to humanitarian causes. The line of evolution from the early martyrs to the modern humanitarians, from Perpetua to Mother Teresa is coherent and understandable. The core of it consists in the love of others flowing from devotion to God.

---

[36] Cf. 2 Chron. 6:41; Ps. 16:3, 30:4, 31:23, 34:9, 37:28, 85:8, 97:10, 116:15, 132:9,16, 145:10, 148:14; Prov. 2:8; Dan. 7:18, 21-22, 25, 27, 8:24; Matt. 27:52; Acts 9:13, 32, 41, 26:10; Rom. 1:7, 8:27, 12:13, 15:25-26, 31, 16:2, 15; 1 Cor. 1:2, 6:1-2, 14:33, 16:1, 15; 2 Cor. 1:1, 8:4, 9:1, 12, 13:13; Eph. 1:1, 15, 18, 2:19, 3:8, 18, 4:12, 5:3, 6:18; Phil. 1:1, 4:12, 22; Col. 1:2, 4, 12, 26; 1 Thess. 3:13; 2 Thess. 1:10; 1 Tim. 5:10, Philemon 1:5, 7; Heb. 6:10, 13:24; Jude 1:3; Rev. 5:8, 8:3-4, 11:18, 13:7, 10, 14:12, 16:6, 17:6, 18:20, 24, 19:8, 20:9. The references to the saints in Revelation refer to the saints in Heaven, some of whom are described as having been martyred.

[37] See Richard Kieckhefer's "Imitators of Christ: Sainthood in the Christian Tradition" in *Sainthood: Its Manifestations in World Religions*, eds. Richard Kiekhefer and George D. Bond (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988) and Peter Brown's *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981) for an account of the emergence of the cult of the saints.

At some point historically, however, those who used the word “saint” began to do so for different reasons. While for most of the history of the usage of the term people used it to refer to those figures whose love for others flowed out of their devotion to God, the term began to be used on the one hand to describe those who are incredibly devoted to God and on the other to describe those who self-sacrificially love others. These two definitions, originally of one cloth, become separated from each other. Now, with extreme altruism as the core feature of saintliness in some philosophers' definitions, devotion to or even belief in God becomes unnecessary.[39] Such philosophers are quick to refer to Christian individuals as saints, but they see the Christian devotion of those figures as largely incidental to their saintliness. Or, they may recognize the importance of the saints' religious beliefs in their motivational structure, but they deny the importance of their specific theology, arguing that all faiths can and do motivate sanctity.[40] Emerging from the non-theistic branch of accounts of saintliness is another group of philosophers who characterize saints merely as self-denying mystics and ascetics and reject them as moral exemplars accordingly.[41] On the other hand, those who believe devotion to the Triune God of Christianity is necessary for saintliness reject the saintliness of altruistic atheists, agnostics, or individuals from non-Christian religious traditions. Thus, from what was once a consistent and coherent definition of saintliness emerges a debate over the meaning of the term.

---

[38] Indeed there is historical overlap here in the fourth and fifth century where both martyrs and ascetics were deemed saintly by their Christian contemporaries.

---

[39] Wyschogrod, Flescher, Urmson, and Wolf are all examples of this way of thinking of saintliness.

[40] Such is the impulse that motivates Hawley's and Kieckhefer and Bond's pluralistic anthologies.

[41] See fn. 2 above for Nietzsche and Sartre. Voltaire rejects the ascetic life, claiming "We live in society; there is therefore nothing truly good for us but that which does good to society. An hermit will be sober, pious, and dressed in sackcloth: — very well; he will be holy; but I will not call him virtuous until he shall have done some act of virtue by which men may have profited Whilst he is alone, he is neither beneficent nor the contrary; he is nobody to us If St Bruno had made peace in families, if he had assisted the indigent, he had been virtuous; having fasted and prayed in solitude, he is only a saint. Virtue between men is a commerce of good actions: he who has no part in this commerce must not be reckoned. If this saint were in the world, he would doubtless do good, but whilst he is not in the world, we have no reason to give him the name of virtuous: he will be good for himself, and not for us." *A Philosophical Dictionary*, Second Edition, Vol. 6 (London: C. H. Reynell, 1824), 320. Hume similarly writes in his *Enquiries Concerning The Principles of Morals*, "celibacy, fasting, penance, mortification, self-denial, humility, silence, solitude, and the whole train of monkish virtues; for what reason are they everywhere rejected by men of sense, but because they serve to no manner of purpose; neither advance a man's fortune in the world, nor render him a more valuable member of society; neither qualify him for the enjoyment of company, nor increase his power of self-enjoyment? We observe, on the contrary, that they cross all these desirable ends; stupefy the heart, obscure the fancy and sour the temper. We justly, therefore, transfer them to the opposite column, and place them in the catalogue of vices; nor has any superstition force sufficient among men of the world, to pervert, entirely these natural sentiments. A gloomy, hair-brained enthusiast, after his death, may have a place on the calendar; but will scarcely ever be admitted, when alive, into intimacy and society, except by those who are as delirious and dismal as himself." David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751), ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), Section IX, Part I.

Since I am searching for a set of individuals that most interlocutors can agree upon and the conversation includes traditionalists, I must side with the traditionalists whose lists are more restrictive at the outset. While some of those in my study would disagree about the saintliness of Gandhi, none would disagree about the saintliness of Francis of Assisi; so, my account should be based on an attempt to understand the saintliness of Francis and not initially of Gandhi.[42] Those who insist on counting non-Christian moral or spiritual exemplars as saints will be more likely to admit that their usage of the term is analogous or loose than those who insist on disallowing the possibility of non-Christian saints on the basis of the distinctiveness of Christian saintliness and on the basis of Christianity's tradition of using the term. Even a pluralistic compilation like Hawley's *Saints and Virtues* makes my point clear, for those who most want to draw parallels between non-Christian moral or spiritual exemplars insist on using other words such as *tsaddiqim*, patriarchs, prophets, *arahants*, *walis*, *shaykhs*, *sufis*, *pirs*, and *bodhisattvas*, which do not translate straightforwardly into the word translated into English as "saint."[43]

The best way forward, then, is to search the Christian tradition for how "saint" has been used and then determine the meaning of saintliness in the present. A clear account that is consistent with the tradition can then help clarify the extent to which exemplary figures of other religious traditions or no religious traditions can be likened to the Christian saints.

---

[42] For an argument in favor of Gandhi's sainthood, see Mark Jurgenmeyer, "Saint Gandhi" in *Saints and Virtues*, ed. Hawley, 187-203.

[43] Hawley, "Introduction," xi.

6. Some Corollaries

I have argued that there is an attributive concept of saintliness that all saints exhibit. My interlocutors' use of overlapping (though not entirely identical) lists of saints suggests that they share a concept of saintliness, even though their moral theories and other biases distort or limit their understanding of it. This suggests two corollaries. First, it is possible to misapply an attributive concept like saintliness. One might claim that some individuals have the property of saintliness when they do not, or deny that they possess that property when they do. I need not be committed to accepting as saints every person my interlocutors deem saintly. Second, though the careful canonization processes invoked by various ecclesiastical institutions are designed to correct for the misapplication of the attributive property of saintliness, it is possible that such institutions could mistakenly canonize someone who is not saintly, and it is likely that such institutions will not canonize individuals who are indeed saints. Some canonized saints like Christopher and George, and others who enjoyed saintly status prior to the enactment of more stringent canonization methods and policies, we know far too little about to know if they were indeed saints.[44] People like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who is not eligible for canonization by the Roman Catholic Church, and Mother Teresa, who has been beatified but not yet canonized, are likely saints. Other saints may be hidden or only locally recognized.[45]

---

[44] David Farmer points out that particularly in the Celtic Church in the Middle Ages prior to the Council of Trent we find a proliferation of people called saints about whom we know almost nothing. Cf. David Farmer, "Introduction" in *Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, xviii. His accounts of Christopher and George also indicate that while we have records of their deaths and a tradition of referring to their deaths as martyrdom, the rest of what we know about them belong to the realm of pious legend. Farmer, *Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, Fifth Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 105-6, 213-5.

7. Criteria of Adequacy

After I have established an account based on the most frequently referenced traditional Christian saints, then my goal is to be more expansive in its application to other people referred to as saints. So while my starting point may be narrow, my hope is that my finished account will be much more expansive, one that establishes a core account of saintliness and of what makes them morally good that is consistent with the tradition but that also can illuminate the extent to which non-traditional saints are in fact saintly. Since I hope to develop an account of saintliness that more adequately characterizes the saints than do my interlocutors, I will be subjecting their accounts and my own to testing by a set of adequacy criteria like those used to evaluate scientific theories. Below I propose and defend my chosen criteria of adequacy. Other accounts of saintliness may fit other sets of criteria of adequacy. I have tried to make my criteria strict enough to be plausible guidelines. I have also taken into account some of the criticisms leveled against other accounts of saintliness in formulating my criteria. If I can meet my own guidelines, then I will have constructed an account of saintliness that already answers some of the critiques raised in the literature.

My first criterion is one of scope. Any adequate account of saintliness must be able to account for as many of those figures that most ordinary language users refer to as saints. The lines of demarcation are unclear for this criterion, for it is surely the case that many language users could be mistaken about the saintly status of many figures, but it would likewise seem odd to presume that only a few people are correct in their labeling certain figures saints. The more figures called saints that an account of saintliness can explain the better.[46] In other words, the account must be broad or loose enough to encompass diverse phenomena. On the other hand, the account must be narrow or strict enough to distinguish the saints from the non-saints. Hence, with regard to scope, an adequate account of saintliness must be able to cover as many saints as possible without creating room for non-saints to fit the description.

---

[45] Lawrence Cunningham, "The Hidden Dimensions of the Modern Sanctity" in *The Meaning of Saints*, 86-114.

The second criterion is internal consistency. As with any theory or account of something, internal inconsistencies signify conceptual error. Hence, an adequate account of saintliness must be internally consistent. Part of remaining consistent will involve consistently testing my account of saintliness against individuals to see if my account correctly categorizes them as saints or non-saints. If a given account, consistently applied, allows for non-saints to count as saints and saints to count as non-saints, then that account will fail to meet the scope criterion, and thus fail to adequately account for saintliness. If, however, a given account is inconsistently applied so as to fit the expected outcome, then the account will fail to meet the consistency requirement. In this way the scope criterion and the consistency criterion work together to maintain proper strictness.

Linked closely with the consistency criterion is my third criterion, conservatism. An adequate account of saintliness must fit with as many of the established accounts of saintliness as possible. The goal should be to appropriate as much of what is true in the other theories while eliminating whatever aspects of the theories are problematic. Adhering to this criterion requires one to know the established theories well enough to be able to adjudicate between what about the theory makes it plausible and what aspects of it make it less than ideal. The conservatism requirement also guards one against flippantly writing off traditional accounts of saintliness that have stood the test of time. It would be ill-advised for an account of saintliness to ignore the Christian tradition of reflection on saintliness, for example. Conservatism does not make it impossible to critique the tradition, but rather urges humility and caution before going against the established theory. The conservatism criterion also warns against too readily writing off accounts of saintliness which are given by saints themselves. If given the option, a theory that remains consonant with what saints say about their own saintliness will be more conservative than an account that must assume the saints, who on other questions might be seen as reliable sources of knowledge, are self-deceived. It is logically possible that all the saints have been wrong about what it is that makes them saintly, but one's default position should be to assume that this is unlikely.

---

[46] It is worth noting here that in the literature I am discussing, the predominance of saints referenced by the authors of that literature come from fourth, thirteenth, sixteenth, and twentieth centuries. Such chronological clustering makes some sense given the important transformations going on at those times in the Christian Church, but an account of saintliness ought to be applicable to saints from all centuries if it is to meet the scope criterion.

My fourth criterion is simplicity. With all the good insights offered by the different accounts of saintliness, we need a simple account that can make sense of all of these insights. Ockham famously argued that one should not needlessly multiply entities. I will hold to Ockham's Razor in my account, but I will lay emphasis on the adverb "needlessly" in Ockham's phrase. Appealing to simplicity can be dangerous because modern attempts tend to excise God from the equation under the banner of simplicity. These accounts, I will argue, lose too much in the other criteria of adequacy by doing so, including the criterion of simplicity. God is necessary for understanding saintliness, and including God in the equation provides the best explanation for all of the phenomena highlighted by the competing accounts of saintliness. Hence, including God in the equation does not needlessly complicate the account.

The final criterion of adequacy is fruitfulness. In science, a fruitful theory is one that generates further inquiries that lead to the discovery of truths unknown prior to the formulation of the theory. Darwin's theory of evolution, for example, has proven to be fruitful because it has opened up entire fields of study that have helped us to understand animal life and propose plausible solutions to puzzles that pre-Darwinian biology was not able to solve. A fruitful account of saintliness, though simple, ought to be pregnant with new insights into what makes the saints saintly. We might expect a fruitful account of saintliness to help us understand not only the moral and religious aspects of saintliness, but also the nature of the moral life and the impact a relationship with God might have on the lives of non-saints. Finally, a fruitful account should help us to identify new cases of saintliness and separate the saints from the non-saints. We ought to find, then, an expansion of the applicability of the attributive property of saintliness to those who have previously not been recognized as saints without in the process diluting the nature of saintliness or misapplying the concept.

As I critique competing approaches and set forth my own, I will be using these criteria of adequacy to evaluate the merits of each approach. My contention will be that a role-centered account of saintliness meets the criteria of adequacy better than do the accounts of my interlocutors.

CHAPTER TWO

James's Account of Saintliness

1. Starting with James

I begin my study of modern accounts of saintliness at the outset of the twentieth century with William James. James's contribution to the topic, though neglected by those not studying saintliness specifically, is the fullest and most referenced treatment of the saints by any of the philosophers I am engaging in this study. Over the course of five lectures, James lays out a rich account of saintliness that sets the standard for later twentieth-century accounts. Because his contribution is so great and his account so nuanced and provocative, I dedicate two chapters to laying out and evaluating his approach to the topic.

1.1 The Difficulty of Writing on William James

Before proceeding to set forth what I take to be William James's "position" on saints and moral theory, I must issue a disclaimer. James is not a systematic thinker; in fact, he despises systematic thought. He is slippery, and attempts to pin him down on a position usually fail. As his biographers have noted, James wanted to keep as many possibilities open as possible. He writes, "Philosophy, like life, must keep the doors and windows open."[1] As a result, he often oscillates between positions, changing his mind whenever he feels that he has backed himself into a philosophical corner, one requiring him to accept uncomfortable conclusions. James, as Ralph Barton Perry notes, was more concerned to avoid "thinness" than "inconsistency."[2] This willingness to embrace inconsistency to avoid missing out on a true insight makes James both fascinating and frustrating to interpret. Gale writes of interpreting James, "Because James's philosophy is an attempt to have it all, to let all of his many selves fully realize themselves, it presents the interpreter with a dazzling array of seemingly incompatible positions."[3] I have tried to construct as coherent a view as possible from James's various works on religion and moral philosophy, noting, when necessary, the various turns and retractions he makes along the way. I am fully aware that any criticisms I level against James's view may be interpreted as straw man arguments by defenders of James who will likely be able to present counter-example from other texts. My aim here is simply to present and assess the thought of what I take to be the best of the many William Jameses, hoping to glean insights into the nature of saintliness and its place in moral theory.

---

[1] William James, "Some Problems of Philosophy," in *The Writings of William James: A Comprehensive Edition*, ed. John J. McDermott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 55.

1.2 William James' Varieties

William James's goal in writing *The Varieties of Religious Experience* is to engage in a comprehensive empirical psychological study of the religious experience of individuals. He aims to fulfill the task Adam Lord Gifford set out for Gifford lecturers in his will, to contribute to a science of religion.[4] He hoped that by cataloging all the first-hand religious experiences of individuals he could enable those who had not had those experiences to appreciate them second-hand and acknowledge their validity. In creating a science of religion, he hoped to restore some respectability to religion in the face of Darwinism and positivism and to achieve some unification of his own divided self that was, on the one hand, both thoroughly committed to modern naturalistic science in general and to Darwinian evolutionary biology in particular and, on the other hand, thoroughly committed to the reality of the unseen spiritual world. In his attempt to restore respectability to religion in the face of growing skepticism, James knew that he would have to engage in an "unrespectable" project of listening to those whose experiences were too often ignored by the "clerico-academic-scientific type, the officially and conventionally 'correct' type, 'the deadly respectable'" type, for whom to ignore others is a besetting temptation.[5]

---

[2] Ralph Barton Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James*, vol. II (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1935), 668.

[3] Richard M. Gale, *The Divided Self of William James* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 19.

[4] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encylopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1991), 1-4.

James's study of religion is empirical to its core, and as such it rules out engaging in theological and metaphysical speculation. In lecture XVIII, James argues that systematic theology has collapsed under the weight of its own bad arguments and the growing irrelevancy of its theories, particularly those regarding the nature of God, which make, according to James, no difference in the practical lives of believers.[6] He also restricts the scope of his study to individual religious experience, the seat of the "spontaneous religious spirit" as opposed to institutional or corporate religious experience. In light of his *Principles of Psychology*, where he famously connects the mind to the brain, arguing that "all states of mind are neurologically conditioned,"[7] James is concerned to preserve the value of religious experience when reducing religious experiences to brain-states raises serious questions about what James calls the "reality of the unseen."[8] To stem the tides of widespread skepticism about religion in the wake of his new psychology, James argues that we ought to look not to the *origins* of religious experience, but to its *fruits*. It is precisely the fruit of saintliness that he invokes to give credence to religious experiences such as experiences of the divine and to conversion. For James, then, saintliness plays the central role in resuscitating religious belief in the minds of modern academics because the saints display good fruits that cannot be grown in secular soil.

---

[5] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Penguin Group, 1982), 107. See Douglas R. Anderson, "William James and the Wild Beasts," in *Philosophy Americana: Making Philosophy at Home in American Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 113.

[6] James, *Varieties*, 371.

While most of James's *Varieties* has received much attention among philosophers and scholars of religion, the lectures on saintliness surprisingly have been ignored, a fact all the more deserving of explanation if my claim that the phenomenon of saintliness occupies such a central place in James's argument is true.[9] Likewise in James's larger

---

[7] Ibid., 32-3.

[8] James seems to have the same concern in writing *Human Immortality*, in which he argues for the possibility of the mind surviving the death of the brain by opening up a wider array of interpretations of his claim that "Thought is a function of the brain." William James, *Human Immortality: Two Supposed Objections to the Doctrine* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1956). Likewise, he is concerned to make clear what his work in psychology does *not* rule out as religiously or morally possible in "The Dilemma of Determinism" and "The Will to Believe." Both essays are found in William James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1897).

[9] For example, Charles Taylor's *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002) covers just about every section but the lectures on saintliness. Russell Goodman's *Stanford Encyclopedia* article does the same. Russell Goodman, "William James," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2009 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2009/entries/james/ (accessed August 3, 2011). Julius Seelye Bixler's *Religion in the Philosophy of William James* (Boston: Boston Marshall Jones, Co., 1926) only makes one reference to saints. Notable exceptions to the rule are those by Anderson, Levinson, and Ellen Kappy Suckiel's *Heaven's Champion*, which recognize the importance of saintliness to James's project. Anderson, "William James and the Wild Beasts." Henry Samuel Levinson, *The Religious Investigations of William James* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1981). Suckiel, *Heaven's*

corpus, though moral considerations lie behind all of his philosophical investigations,[10] his moral philosophy has almost equally been neglected.[11] My goal over the course of the next two chapters will be to bring these two neglected areas of James's thought together in an illuminating way. Doing so renders both James's moral philosophy and his account of saintliness at once more comprehensible and more available for critical examination. In what follows, I begin with a summary of James's account of saintliness and his assessment of the value of saintliness as laid out in lectures XI to XV of *Varieties*. I then weigh the merits of his account, focusing particularly on how James uses actual saints, particularly those most referenced by the other philosophers in my study. Then, I connect James's claims about the value of saintliness with assertions James makes elsewhere regarding morality to illuminate what James means when he claims that the saints are good. Finally, I evaluate the validity of his claims.

2. Characteristics of the Saints

The purposes of James's lectures on saintliness are first to give an account of the nature of the saints, second to determine their pragmatic value, and third to argue from the fact that they are valuable that the religious experiences they have are likely genuine,

---

Champion: William James's Philosophy of Religion (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999). Bennett Ramsey also devotes a few pages to saintliness. See Bennett Ramsey's *Submitting to Freedom: the Religious Vision of William James*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 98-102.

[10] Graham Bird, *William James* (The Arguments of the Philosophers), (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Books Ltd., 1986), 144.

[11] For a few notable exceptions to this rule, see John K. Roth, *Freedom and the Moral Life: The Ethics of William James* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969); Abraham Edel, "The Search for a Moral Philosophy in James" in *The Philosophy of William James*, ed. Walter Robert Corti (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1976), 245-60; Bernard Brennan, *The Ethics of William James* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1961). Ellen Kappy Suckiel's *Heaven's Champion* brings together aspects of *Varieties* and James's moral philosophy.

even if they saints themselves misunderstand the nature of their experiences. James's commitment to radical empiricism rules out his ability to ground his claims about saintliness either theologically or metaphysically. In particular, at the beginning of the lecture James is concerned to rule out Thomistic accounts of saintliness. He writes:

> If, in turning to this theme, we could descend upon our subject from above like Catholic theologians, with our fixed definitions of man and man's perfection and our positive dogmas about God, we should have an easy time of it. Man's perfection would be the fulfillment of his end; and his end would be union with his Maker.[12]

According to the Thomistic account, the value of saintliness derives from the larger teleological picture of human life. The saints, on the Thomistic account, are those who realizes their *teloi* and achieve ultimate union with God. As a result of his radical empiricism, James cannot avail himself of "so admirably convenient a method as this."[13] The adoption of the empirical method comes with its consequences, James admits. He confesses "after that act of renunciation [of non-empirical methods] we can never hope for clean-cut and scholastic results."[14] James's radical empiricism forces him to remain agnostic with respect to human nature, the existence of God, the existence and nature of the soul, and so on, at the outset of his study. Hence, when he approaches saintliness, he attempts to bracket all metaphysical explanations for the phenomena he encounters. Instead, he proposes that:

> We have merely to collect things together without any special *a priori* theological system, and out of an aggregate of piecemeal judgments as to the value of this and that experience—judgments in which our general philosophic prejudices, our

---

[12] James, *Varieties*, 278.

[13] Ibid., 278.

[14] Ibid., 278.

> instincts, and our common sense are our only guides—decide that on the whole one type of religion is approved by its fruits, and another type condemned.[15]

He makes what to some in his audience would have been the shocking claim that we have always done this with respect to religion, believing or disbelieving in the gods as we have had need. When a conception of God becomes useless to us we find it implausible and look to revise our conception. This is what we have done with the Greek and Roman gods, and it is what James believed was happening with the Thomistic conception of God in his day. The Thomistic doctrine of God became implausible to James and his audience because that conception failed to meet their need—i.e., to preserve the best fruits of religious experience while affirming the findings and methods of modern naturalistic science. Now theology and philosophy must turn to empirical methods of science and come to an understanding of God that arises out of what is common in all religious experiences, regardless of theological convictions of the person having the experience. For James and his intended audience, the Thomistic doctrine of God, with its (supposed) allegiance to Aristotelian biology and ignorance of the other conceptions of God proposed by the world's great religions and the new American sects, was outmoded and needed to be replaced. Moreover, according to James, those who promoted and defended the Thomistic doctrine of God had insulated it with an ideologically-driven method that restricted its range of insights and ability to account for experiences that did not fit into its pre-established framework. While resorting to a Thomistic account would make the study of saintliness easier, that approach is no longer a live option for James and those to whom he writes.

---

[15] Ibid., 278-9.

According to “our general philosophic prejudices, our instincts, and our common sense,” we can judge that the saints are valuable based on the effect they have on those they help and on the world in general. Common sense helps us distinguish between the real fruits of sanctity and pathological excess. Asceticism, devoutness, purity, and charity all appear to common sense to have limits to their practical effectiveness, and saints often go beyond those limits to the detriment of themselves and those they hurt in the process. However, according to James, it is only in the extreme nature of the saints that we can see just where that limit is.

2.1 Belief in the Ideal Power

James argues that without metaphysical or theological speculation we can recognize in most cases of saintliness four basic features. The first is a sense that there is more to life than “this world’s selfish little interests” and a corresponding conviction that some “Ideal Power,” or what he later calls “the More,” exists. Because James is intentionally avoiding unnecessarily specific theological and metaphysical speculation, he uses these generic names to pick out not the substance or being of the thing the saints experience but rather the way the saints experiences whatever it is. He believes that the saints perceive the existence of some psychic entity outside the bounds of normal everyday experience and that they filter their experience through categories provided by their culture and tradition. Thus, a Methodist will perceive the More in a Methodist way, a Quaker in a Quaker way, a Catholic in a Catholic way, and a Hindu in a Hindu way. According to James, these filters tend to obscure the common individual religious experience saints of all faiths share. He places much confidence in the existence of whatever it is saints of every theological stripe experience on the fringes of the human psyche, but places very little confidence in the saints' ability to define in any specific or final way the characteristics of that entity. In his lectures on the value of saintliness, James goes so far as to say that we construct our gods in accordance with what we find useful and that as we progress culturally we dispense with gods that either fail to meet our changing needs or become repugnant to our evolving moral sentiments. So while the saints may believe that they are sensing the presence of a particular deity, according to James, we know better than they did some things about the nature of that entity and should be skeptical of any theological or metaphysical ideas the saints glean from their experiences. James thus has little doubt that Mrs. Jonathan Edwards had intense religious experiences and that those experiences reliably point to the existence of some being beyond the scope of ordinary experience while detesting the particular way her husband conceived of God. The same is true for the myriad Catholic saints James discusses while at the same time rejecting Catholic dogma.

2.2 Self-surrender to the Will of the Ideal Power

The second core aspect of saintliness, the feeling of "friendly continuity" with that Ideal Power and a "willing self-surrender to its control," issues from the first. On James's view, saints not only perceive the existence of the Ideal Power but also a sense of oneness with it. They achieve a sense of oneness by "letting go," by taking a stance of utter passivity towards the Ideal Power and letting it transform the saint's emotional center. In "losing themselves," the saints experience freedom to the point that the normal bounds of selfhood begin to disappear.

James argues that saints lose themselves and thereby enter into a "wider" life. In ordinary people, the core of the self is the active consciousness. James writes, "The conscious self of the moment, the central self, is probably determined to this privileged position by its functional connexion with the body's imminent or present acts. It is the present *acting* self."[16] Everything in consciousness comes to the self as *belonging* to the self. Experience as I have it is always my experience, and is thus limited in scope by both my finitude and my selfishness. The active consciousness can only take in so much, and it takes in even less than it can because it narrowly focuses on those aspects of its experience that serve itself. All relations to objects, people, and God are forms of self-love for the ordinary person. We are, in our normal engagement with the world, trapped by our perspective and by our "selfish little interests." The saints, however, become passive by somehow turning off the constant activity of consciousness and allowing their consciousness to be "taken over" by the Ideal Power. As a result, they experience a shift in the center of their consciousness to their spiritual relation to God. Their consciousness "compounds" with God's, which gives them a limited ability to feel, think, and act from a different center of consciousness and with a wider perspective and deeper source of spiritual and moral energy than they had previously.[17] They are able to be in the world in a way wholly other than the way ordinary people are, acting without the inhibitions or selfishness that keep ordinary people from ameliorating the universe.

---

[16] William James, *A Pluralistic Universe* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 131.

[17] James postulates an infinite God in "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life," but he does so only as part of a thought experiment. The notion of God that emerges from *Varieties* and *A Pluralistic Universe* is that of a finite God whose experience is much wider than ours and whose desires are much more benevolent than ours but whose knowledge and power are limited. This God is personal and loving, and we have the ability to enter into a personal relationship with him, to experience a "compounding of consciousness" with the divine. Moreover, this God needs us to bring about his purposes. He cannot satisfy all the demands in the universe alone. He believes we can recognize in human experience a "something more" that exists on the fringes of consciousness. We find this especially in mystical experiences, which offer us access to a wider perspective. He writes, "It must always remain an open question whether mystical states may not possibly be...superior points of view, windows through which the mind looks out upon a more extensive and inclusive world." James, *Varieties*, 356-7. Our most intimate interaction with God does not happen at the level of reflection or of conscious, linguistically-governed experience but at the subconscious, passive, mystical level, the level of deepest feeling. The saints open themselves to this "more," and by entering into friendly relationship with it, they find themselves transformed to do what the rest of us find both strange and remarkably good.

The saints makes their relationship to God the most important relationship, subjugating all other aspects of their self-understanding (their bodies, their other social relationships, their possessions, etc.) to that relationship, and creating such a hierarchy gives unity and freedom to their lives. Their relation to God transforms their relationships to everything else, giving them a new quality and changing the way they feel towards and interact with those other aspects of their experience. They feel a sense of freedom towards them. They are free to love them without becoming enslaved to them. They are equally free to give them up should it be necessary for the service of God.

After conversion, which involves giving up the active element of their conscious experience, the saints' old selves are replaced by new selves in which their friendly continuity with the Ideal Power gives them a new perspective on their experience and on themselves. From their new perspective more comes into view; more people are related to them; more are within their domain that they can help. For the saints, this loss of self is in fact a gain because in letting go of themselves, they let go of their fears and other inhibitions, their desires for the petty things of this world, and their attachments to lesser goods. For James, this second aspect of saintliness is intimately connected with the conversion experience and mysticism. In the section of *Varieties* dedicated to the experience of the loss of self among the saints, James refers specifically to women like Madame Guyon, Mrs. Jonathan Edwards, and Sister Séraphique de la Martinière whose powerful experiences of God's affectionate presence cast this aspect of saintliness in its most intense light, but James intends us to recall the conversion experiences of saints like the Apostle Paul, Antony of Egypt, Francis of Assisi, the experiences of union with the divine by Christian mystics such as Teresa of Avila, and the joyful sense of connection with God in the midst of persecution of saints like Polycarp, Perpetua, and Stephen and Protestant heroes like Blanche Gamond. Furthermore, James believes we find the same experience in other religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam, particularly in the Sufi mystic Dervishes, as well as in some more recent quasi-religious phenomena like the Transcendentalist, mind-cure, and nationalist movements of the late nineteenth century.

According to James, saintly devotion to the Ideal Power when coupled with an inferior intellect can warp into fanaticism. Fanaticism takes the form of obsessive devotion to particular objects or ideas as in the case of Francis of Assisi's devotion to Christ's wounds,[18] or of intolerance and persecution as in the case of the Crusades, the Armenian genocide, or the Anabaptist pogroms of the sixteenth century, or of what James calls *theopathic* excess in which the saints feel singled out and overwhelmed by God's amatory advances as in the cases of Teresa of Avila, Gertrude, and Margaret Mary Alacoque. In a passage that expresses well both James's pragmatic approach to evaluating the merits of saintliness according to common sense and his confidence in the progressive nature of science, religion, and philosophy, James criticizes those he labels fanatics:

> What with science, idealism, and democracy, our own imagination has grown to need a God of an entirely different temperament from that Being interested exclusively in dealing out personal favors, with whom our ancestors were so contented. Smitten as we are with the vision of social righteousness, a God indifferent to everything but adulation, and full of partiality for his individual favorites, lacks and essential element of largeness; and even the best professional

---

[18] For other examples of excessive devotion, see *Varieties*, 289 fn. 2.

> sainthood of former centuries, pent in as it is to such a conception, seems to us curiously shallow and unedifying.[19]

As in the cases of other excesses, James uses the categories in play in his day to cast judgment upon the way certain saints have understood their religious experiences. Since he is looking for the value of the saints for today, he thinks himself perfectly justified in assessing their value according to contemporary standards of judgment. He is quick to rationalize the saints' actions by reference to the categories that were available to them in their day, but when it comes to deciding whether or not a given saint had a sufficiently broad intellect or was sufficiently concerned about social justice, he uses late nineteenth century categories and suggests that future generations revisit the saints and bring their new categories to bear upon them.

2.3 Freedom through Loss of Self

As a result of the self-surrender, the saints experience freedom, joy, security, and a melting away of the "outlines of the confining selfhood." In exchange for autonomy and independence, the saints receive a sense of genuine freedom, freedom from fear, and inhibitions and freedom to love others unreservedly. In that freedom, they find elation and joy along with the security that comes from sensing oneness with the most powerful entity in the universe. The freedom the saints experience takes the form of a feeling of expansiveness, where instead of feeling limited to their own interests and inclinations, the saints are able to embrace those of the Ideal Power and those of other people readily. The saints, according to James, are aware of more than normal people are. They are attuned to the promptings of the More and are eager to do its bidding. They can sense the suffering of those around them more acutely and do something to relieve it, even if it means absorbing the suffering themselves. They do so joyfully because they do not experience themselves in the same way that non-saints do. Non-saints, when they attend to the suffering of others, do so fully aware of the extent to which they must suffer in attending to the other. Non-saints serve others calculatingly, prudentially doing triage whenever necessary. They think in binary terms, delineating carefully between themselves and the suffering other. Not so the saints who experience no such binaries, who do no such calculations when attending to the needy. Francis of Assisi thinks nothing of himself when he kisses a leper or exchanges his garment with a beggar. His joy in serving is not tempered by his awareness of cost to himself.

---

[19] James, *Varieties,* 293.

2.4 Shift of Emotional Center

The fourth aspect of saintliness flows naturally out of the third and completes the picture of the saints who, as a result of the loss of self, lose the normal inhibitions that come with being self-conscious. The saints experience “a shifting of the emotional center towards loving and harmonious affections.” While most normal people feel far too self-conscious and self-protective or too heavily invested in common human pursuits like health, wealth, and comfort, the saints do not experience such obstructions to doing good. Moreover, the saints take positive joy in routines, interactions, and deeds non-saints find burdensome or repulsive. The people whom the non-saints find loathsome and repugnant, the saints find loveable. This shift in emotional center, though not the root, is the key to the goodness of the saints for James. James values saintliness because of its fruits, and it is the emotions of the saints that generate the good fruits he deems so important to the melioration of the world. The saints’ emotions supply the impetus for good deeds and the energy to perform them. The saints show us that simply doing what is right is not what is most excellent. We must do what is right from the right emotional center, with loving and harmonious affections driving us towards love and good deeds.

These first four characteristics, or "passions" as James sometimes calls them—a belief in the existence of the Ideal Power, a feeling of friendly continuity with and willing self-surrender to it, a resulting sense of freedom and joy, and a shift in emotional center towards loving affections—are the core or "essence" of saintliness. Other familiar aspects of saintliness such as asceticism, strength of soul, purity, and charity typically issue forth from those core passions, but James warns against confusing these "accidents" with what is essential to saintliness. Saintliness is essentially a shift in emotional center, or what he might call a state of character, not a set of actions. People who do what look like saintly actions out of a sense of dispassionate duty are not saints, nor are people who in a brief storm of emotional excitement do something heroically virtuous. Saintliness is the result of a lasting conversion experience, not a transient rush of emotion. Each of these characteristics comes in degrees, ranging from the fairly banal to the pathological extreme. James carefully distinguishes between the levels of severity of asceticism each saint adopts, the strength of soul demonstrated by each saint, the degree of purity demanded by each saint, and the extent to which each saint is willing to go for the sake of charity. For James, the most effective saints are those who go well beyond the normal degrees of asceticism, strength of soul, purity, and charity but stop short of the pathological extreme. When coupled with a sufficiently broad intellect saintly virtues and actions constitute "the best things that history has to show."[20]

---

[20] James, *Varieties*, 225.

2.5 Asceticism

In its most basic form, asceticism is simply an attempt to increase manliness or hardiness, which James believes is admirable and ought to be imitated, particularly in the midst of excessive wealth and comfort. Such arduous living brings on the strenuous mood necessary for the moral life. Engaging in practices that harden one to discomfort, such as abstaining from certain foods or drink, taking a vow of chastity, or wearing simple garments prepare the body and soul for future trials and temptations. The saints' asceticism stems not simply from a desire to strengthen themselves but more often from a desire to surrender themselves to the Ideal Power. In less strenuous and, according to James, more virtuous forms of asceticism, this self-surrender is motivated by a joyful sense of sacrifice or a healthy desire for purity. James's clearest example of a healthy level of religious asceticism, one that goes beyond mere hardiness, is the case of M. Vianney, a French country priest who among other commitments vowed never to sit down, shoo a fly, take a drink when parched, warm himself in winter, or complain about anything. Vianney displayed what James calls the "impulse to sacrifice [that] lies deeper than any special creed."[21] Such an impulse, James argues, is healthy and evocative of saintly fruits. Certainly the asceticism of Francis of Assisi would also fall under this category, for though Francis of Assisi's devotion to poverty was complete and his willingness to incur bodily harm was unmatched, he was motivated by positive desires to serve God and man. John of the Cross serves as James's final example of self-mortification with a positive and, in this case, mystical purpose. James quotes John as taking "great delights and unspeakable consolations" in overcoming human joy, hope, fear, and grief through his ascetic practices.[22] John's goal was to deny himself every natural impulse so as to gain supernatural joy. In doing what was hardest, tasting what was most disgusting, laboring, and willing nothing, knowing nothing, and owning nothing, John claimed he could gain everything through his connection with God.

---

[21] Ibid., 259.

James criticizes stronger forms of asceticism, like those that derive from a sense of self-hatred or of penance. While on the one hand asceticism is a valiant attempt to address the wrongs of this world directly, on the other hand, it only deals with the wrong within the individual saints and is virtually useless in combating the external evil.[23] In these forms, the saints see their ascetic practices as purgative of sin, as attempts to appease the Ideal Power and escape future torments.[24] In its pathological forms, ascetics positively harm themselves and display an unhealthy and obsessive self-hatred. James offers the case of Henry Suso, who subjected himself to physical torments so as to snuff out his fiery temperament. He wore leather undergarments with sharp brass tacks driven into his flesh. He wore a hair garment at night and fastened his hands to his neck so that he could not combat the insects that invested his sleeping quarters. Later, he fashioned gloves for himself with sharpened nails attached to them so that if he were to attempt to scratch his bug bites or shoo the bugs away, he would cut himself. His immolations continued as he bore a cross with iron needles on his bare back and neck. He would sleep on a wooden door, and then later a small wooden bench, and he refused to so much as touch a penny or scratch himself, and he deprived himself of water for long stretches of time. James is right to label Suso extreme and unhealthy and perhaps even pathological. Though motivated by the love of God and attempting to imitate the sufferings of Christ, Suso's spirituality is clearly out of balance. He took no joy in his sacrifice, often writhing in pain and crying out complaints to God, and while grasping God's judgment and sharing in Christ's sufferings, he seems to have experienced little of the love and grace of God. In the most extreme cases, ascetics undergo a pathological transformation so that they experience "genuine perversions of the bodily sensibility, in consequence of which normally pain-giving stimuli are actually felt as pleasure."[25] Suso never experienced such pleasure from his self-inflicted torture, but Margaret Mary, the founder of the order of the Sacred Heart did. She claimed that her very life was sustained by two passions: the holy Eucharist and "suffering, humiliation, and annihilation."[26]

---

[22] Ibid., 261.

[23] Ibid., 305.

[24] Ibid., 254.

In James's final estimation of the value of asceticism, he views it as a "profounder way of handling the gift of existence" than that of the optimist while at the same time criticizing the specific ways asceticism has been practiced in the past, particularly in the ecclesiastical context. He connects it with the heroic impulse to meet death courageously, even to seek out that which causes death to mitigate the sway it holds over one's life. He writes, "he who feeds on death that feeds on men possesses life supereminently and excellently, and meets best the secret demands of the universe."[27] For James, asceticism is the "moral equivalent of war" without the accompanying horrors and atrocities, bringing out in humans the strenuous mood so necessary for living a moral life.

---

[25] Ibid., 255.

[26] Ibid., 265.

[27] Ibid., 306.

The forms of asceticism specific to the ecclesiastical context, namely obedience, chastity, and poverty James finds somewhat mysterious, though valuable in their moderate forms. Obedience proves the most difficult for James, whose belief in self-reliance and autonomy runs deep:

> It is difficult even imaginatively to comprehend how men possessed of an inner life of their own could ever have come to think the subjection of its will to that of other finite creatures recommendable. I confess that to myself it seems something of a mystery.[28]

While James writes off many instances of obedience to ecclesiastical expediency and indecisiveness on the part of individuals, he does see the value of obedience in some cases, particularly in cases in which others see a situation more clearly than we do, either because they are experts in a given area or because they know us better than we know ourselves. In the religious realm, though, obedience is a form of asceticism, a form of sacrifice of one's will to the will of the Ideal Power, which is often instantiated in the saints' minds in the form of their ecclesiastical superiors. James appears unconvinced by the reasons given for embracing this particular form of asceticism, doubting as he does the legitimacy of the claims to spiritual authority by religious institutions and their representatives. The reasons given in defense of the practice of obedience, or at least the ones James quotes, do seem suspect, particularly to our post-WWII ears, for Jerome and John Climacus both refer to obedience as an "excuse before God," meaning that any sin committed at the behest of one's superior are credited solely to the superior.[29] Ignatius Loyola provides probably the most extreme version of obedience, claiming that if the ecclesiastical church says something is black that he sees with his own eyes to be white, he must deem it black.[30] James quotes Loyola as having said that he "must consider [him]self as a corpse which has neither intelligence nor will" upon entering a religious order. As presented by James, such claims do appear to diminish humanity unnecessarily and do so for immoral reasons like immunity from punishment for wrongdoing.

---

[28] Ibid., 265.

James more readily recognizes the value of voluntary poverty than he does obedience, for over-reliance on having distracts people from being and doing good. With increased possessions comes increased worries about maintaining and protecting those possessions, and on James's view, all people should carefully consider having less for the sake of living a happier life. The saints adopt voluntary poverty not primarily for the sake of their happiness (though we do find saints making arguments to that effect) but rather for the sake of self-surrender. By keeping nothing for themselves, the penurious saints force themselves to rely completely on God's provision through miracles or through prompting generosity in other Christians. Finally, James commends the democratic sense of those who voluntarily give up all they have. He claims that part of their motivation is not to possess anything others do not also possess. Of course the most famous example of the impecunious saint is Francis of Assisi, and James makes much of his degree of poverty. James recounts how Francis would not allow one of his followers to possess even a Psalter because he believed that once one owned one thing, no matter how holy the object, that person would want more and more things and then become puffed up with pride about his possessions and his knowledge. Francis' austerity seems to have arisen by a mixture of moral and religious motives and while his poverty was total and his actions often foolish by worldly standards, Francis earns James' esteem by being useful to others and by never manifesting a pathological level of self-hatred. Francis was motivated primarily by his love for God and others, not by self-loathing or fear of punishment, and while the prudential types may snicker at his simplicity, it is difficult to deny his impact.

---

[29] Ibid., 267.

[30] Ignatius of Loyola, "Rule XIII: The Rules to Have the True Sentiment in the Church" in *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1992), 135

2.6 Strength of Soul

One of the most striking qualities we notice about the saints is their strength of soul. According to James:

> The sense of the enlargement of life may be so uplifting that personal motives and inhibitions, commonly omnipotent, become too insignificant for notice, and new reaches of patience and fortitude open out.[31]

They seem able to do things ordinary people might wish they could do but feel too inhibited by fear, disgust, cowardice, or impatience to bring to fruition. When saints recognize an opportunity to do good, they do it without hesitation. Such strength of soul has its root in the sense of the enlargement of life, in the joy and exhilaration that comes from being raised to a higher sense of consciousness of spiritual realities and of the needs of others. The saints are both more aware of suffering and more able to meet the needs of the suffering because they feel intimately connected with the source of all power and goodness. Drawing on their relationship with the Ideal Power, the saints sense no limits to their ability to do good and, on the contrary, feel positively spurred on to love and serve whomever requires aid. Though suspicious of the value of some of the acts of "hospital purulence" by John of God and of the eremetic monasticism of Antony of Egypt or Simeon Stylites, James would certainly exalt the patience and fortitude it takes to face the challenges they faced.[32] He would just prefer that their strength of soul find a more useful outlet. And James would surely praise the strength of soul of the martyrs of all ages, from Jesus and the Apostles to Perpetua and Polycarp, to Bonhoeffer and Jim Elliot and Martin Luther King Jr.

---

[31] James, *Varieties*, 236.

2.7 Purity

The shift in emotional center the saints' experience increases the saints' sensitivity to discords and impurities both in themselves and in the world. The saints' awareness of impurities often prompts them to engage in ascetic practices to cleanse themselves from the "brutal and sensual elements."[33] As in the case of asceticism, James values the drive for purity in accordance with the fruits that drive produces. If the saints engender a better moral universe through their sensitivity to impurity, then James praises it. For example, he extols some of the early Jesuit missionaries for purifying the South American tribes of immoral practices because they improved the welfare of others. If, however, the saints' drive for purity causes them to engage in extreme ascetic practices as it did Suso, or produces what James would call escapist tendencies as he finds in hermits and monks, or encourages the saints to support harming others in the name of preserving the pure name of their deity as in Catherine of Siena's preaching of the Crusades, then James condemns it. Unfortunately, according to James, the drive for purity produces negative effects more often than not and ought to be thought of as a regrettable side-effect of some religious experiences. Hence, he writes, "Purity…is not the one thing needful; and it is better that a life should contract many a dirt-mark, than forfeit usefulness in its efforts to remain unspotted."[34] In the best saints, we find the drive for purity blunted or redirected so that it becomes useful; in the worst saints, the drive for purity dominates and provokes frightening actions.

---

[32] Ibid., 245.

[33] Ibid., 236.

2.8 Charity

James lauds saintly charity above all other characteristics of saintliness. The saint's sympathy and empathy towards other human beings, even the most repugnant, distinguishes the saints from the ordinary, self-focused people. Tenderness towards others results from the sense of friendly continuity with the Ideal Power and the joy and freedom that comes from self-surrender. James marvels at the ability of a conversion experience to transform the most irascible hooligans into pacifists even when being struck by their enemies. James attributes the ability to love one's enemies to the intense level of emotional excited aroused by religious experience. When love is directed not to one's enemies but towards the repugnant, James argues we can only understand it as being connected with a frenzy of self-immolation.[35] Thus James views some instances of saintly charity as allied to the ascetic impulse. He focuses particularly on the way that saints like Francis of Assisi and Ignatius Loyola interacted with beggars and lepers and the way that many saints cared for the sick, often taking repulsive measures to alleviate their suffering. Charity is also connected with equanimity, resignation, fortitude, and patience, according to James, and we find these qualities preeminently in the saints. Some instances of these virtues are admirable while others James finds pathetic. Impressed by the fortitude and patience of the martyrs and reformers, James is less taken by individuals like Pascal whose sense of resignation James finds "pathetic and fatalistic."[36]

---

[34] James, *Varieties*, 299.

[35] Ibid., 245.

James is perhaps at his best when he defends saintly charity against the criticisms of Herbert Spencer and Friedrich Nietzsche. He admits that when we view saints in isolation, we must admit that they are not paradigms of human well-being.[37] He is happy to yield to Spencer's criticism that extreme charity, such as is found in all saints, can make the saints unfit for a world full of non-saints. He agrees that saintly charity is not a characteristic conducive to survival or flourishing because the saints do not distinguish between the truly needy and the manipulative, but rather put themselves at the disposal of anyone who asks for help. Conceived wholly in terms of individual flourishing, saintliness does not make much sense.

James also admits that Nietzsche is right that by our worldly standards the saints often appear weak, not up for competition in a world that is "red in tooth and claw." From a Darwinian standpoint we tend to value the strong man, the chief, the "overpowering men of prey," because of their heartiness and their energy. They seem best adapted to this world, best prepared to meet the challenges that face the human race and to conquer them. James writes, “Compared with these beaked and taloned graspers of the world, saints are herbivorous animals, tame and harmless barn-yard poultry.”[38] Saints are much less likely to survive or help the group survive in the face of danger, and to Nietzsche their austerities appear as self-hatred, as pessimistic Schopenhauerian denials of the will-to-power.

---

[36] Ibid., 246.

[37] In this James agrees with Susan Wolf.

Yet, James defends the pragmatic value of extreme charity by appealing to the whole effect of its presence in the world. He claims that when judged with respect to their function in system of economic relations the saints are “indispensable to the world’s welfare.” There is room in James’s universe for both the Nietzschean *Übermensch* and the saint, and he judges each type’s value in accordance with their function in bringing about a better world. Although prudent, self-interested individuals may get on better in a world full of prudent, self-interested individuals, a world full of such people is worse than a world inhabited by ill-adapted saints:

> And yet you are sure, as I am sure, that were the world confined to these hard-headed, hard-hearted, and hard-fisted methods exclusively, were there no one prompt to help a brother first, and find out afterwards whether he were worthy; no one willing to drown his private wrongs in pity for the wronger’s person; no one ready to be duped many a time rather than live always on suspicion; no one glad to treat individuals passionately and impulsively rather than by general rules of prudence; *the world would be an infinitely worse place than it is now to live in*. The tender grace, not of a day that is dead, but of a day yet to be born somehow, with the golden rule grown natural, would be cut out from the perspective of our imaginations.[39]

---

[38] James, *Varieties*, 312.

[39] James, *Varieties*, 300 (emphasis mine).

Instead of evaluating the saints in terms of their ability to adapt to this world, James believes we ought to see their value as helping the world become better, and in this task the saints are often surprisingly successful. They reveal to us possibilities where we can see only impossibilities. They are willing to give people chances at turning their lives around whose causes we think are hopeless, and in doing so, they often see their hopes become reality. Their example both condemns our hopelessness and points a new way forward. Just as in his essay "The Will to Believe" where James says that if we believe in something, our believing will give us the strength to make it true, so the saints can create a new reality for the object of their love.[40] James contends that we see this sort of thing happen all the time in saintly lives. Saints tend to make lovers out of their enemies and good people out of the wretched:

> The saints, existing in this way, may, with their extravagances of human tenderness, be prophetic. Nay, innumerable times they have proved themselves prophetic. Treating those whom they met, in spite of the past, in spite of all appearances, as worthy, they have stimulated them to be worthy, miraculously transformed them by their radiant example and by the challenge of their expectation. From this point of view we may admit the human charity, which we find in all saints, and the great excess of it which we find in some saints, to be a genuinely creative social force, tending to make real a degree of virtue which it alone is ready to assume as possible. The saints are authors, *auctores*, increasers, of goodness. The potentialities of development in human souls are unfathomable. So many who seemed irretrievably hardened have in point of fact been softened, converted, regenerated, in ways that amazed the subjects even more than they surprised the spectators, that we never can be sure in advance of any man that his salvation by the way of love is hopeless.[41]

The pragmatic value of the saints rests in their ability to do for humanity what for the non-saints is impossible. The saints can somehow take a situation, a deed, or a life that is otherwise worthless and give it value through charity. The saints can bring out of hateful people “potentialities of goodness which but for them would lie forever dormant.”[42] Charity takes that which is hateful and turns it into something lovable. But charity does not stop at that first miracle. It can potentially help transform the person who is hateful into a lover herself. This is “the saint’s magic gift to mankind.”[43] The saints use creative energy to keep the community moving forward spiritually. Without the saints, humanity would be given over to spiritual stagnancy. Ultimately, the saints are valuable because they ameliorate the world, and for James, this gives credence to their religious experience. Suckiel writes, “For James, then, the ultimate pragmatic criterion of the value of religious belief is the progressive perfection of the individual in that individual’s attempt to contribute to the perfection of the world.”[44] Indeed, for James, the saints are *the most important persons* in the moral universe because the saints, through their charity, lead us towards a better world.

---

[40] William James, "The Will to Believe," 25.

[41] James, *Varieties*, 301.

3. Assessment of James’s Account of Saintliness

James’s contribution to understanding saintliness from a philosophical and psychological perspective is enormous. He responds directly to Nietzsche’s attack on saintliness and, in the minds of many liberal Protestants, revives the saints in the age of Darwinian biology and the new psychology of James and Freud. In a field strewn with land mines of the nineteenth-century war between science and religion, James managed to provide helpful categories for understanding the saints and backed them up with wonderfully colorful stories of their lives. In addition to highlighting the lives of well-known Christian saints, James drew on stories from lesser-known Protestant saints and from followers of other religions in an attempt to support his liberal Protestant belief about the universality of religious experience despite the variety of special doctrines. While the search for universal truth claims regarding religious experience could have led the prominent psychologist to reduce religious experience to brain-states, James recognizes that neurology does not answer the question of the origin or value of religious experience. James's subtlety and breadth are what make *Varieties* such an impressive study of human nature. Most helpful are the distinctions James makes regarding the degrees of certain characteristics of saintliness. He carefully distinguishes between mundane, extraordinary, and excessive saintly characteristics, lauding the virtues and condemning the vices we find in people called saints by focusing on the fruits of saintliness. For James, if a saint's actions are not useful according to our best lights, then they are not good, and generally speaking, James is probably right. Some so-called saints do go to extremes, some do so for poor reasons, and some were likely undiagnosed psychopaths. Suso probably was a masochist. Ignatius Loyola probably did go too far in his claims about obedience. So with respect to many of his broadest claims and with respect to some of his assessments of specific saints, James serves as a helpful guide.

---

[42] Ibid., 301.

[43] Ibid., 302.

[44] Suckiel, *Heaven’s Champion*, 111.

However, James's account of saintliness is fraught with difficulties. My first set of concerns regard the relationship between the saints' beliefs and their practice-based communities and traditions. From the very beginning of *Varieties* James wrongly forces a false dichotomy between religious individuals and religious institutions, not once acknowledging the crucial difference (emphasized by MacIntyre) between a community and an institution.[45] James also fails to recognize the good that religious institutions do in making saintly lives possible, and he overstates the historical corruption of Christian churches in particular.[46] Furthermore, while James discusses ascetic practices sufficiently, he does not give enough weight to the role it and other religious practices play in producing the fruits he so values. Such practices are often practiced in community, passed down by tradition, and sustained, promoted, and regulated by religious institutions.

3.1 Religious Community

In the opening lectures of *Varieties* and consistently throughout the whole series, James argues that religion consists of two realms, the genuine religion of individuals and the false religion of institutions. He writes, "At the outset we are struck by one great partition which divides the religious field. On the one side of it lies institutional, on the other personal religion."[47] For James institutions deaden the religious experience of individuals by using religion as a tool of manipulation and oppression to satisfy their own greed and lust for power. For him, true religion comes at first-hand, "not as a dull habit, but as an acute fever rather.[48] James fails, however, to make a crucial distinction between institutions and practice-based communities. Institutions are, according to Alasdair MacIntyre, primarily concerned with the pursuit of goods external to practices, but ideally their purpose in attaining those external goods is to support those engaged in the pursuit of goods internal to practices. The best institutions aim at sustaining the practices of a community by supporting its practitioners with finances, legal representation, education, organization, and so on. The worst institutions succumb to the temptation to pursue external goods for their own sake, using the practitioners and their supporters to satisfy their impure appetites. James is right that genuine religion cannot be found in the ecclesiastical institution as such, but he is wrong to infer that the only place it can be found is in individuals, for religious practices, religious beliefs, and many religious experiences are first and foremost the possession of religious communities. Individual religious experience is significant, even transformative in many of the ways James outlines, but without a religious community, we would see very little of the fruits James so acclaims.

---

[45] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 194-6.

[46] Cf. William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[47] James, *Varieties*, 44.

[48] Ibid., 26.

By intentionally limiting his study to "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine,"[49] James shrinks religion down to individual religious experience. Such a reduction did not go without notice in his day, and scholars concerned about James's mistake continue to raise questions about the legitimacy of some of James's findings. Not long after the publication of *Varieties*, James's friend and colleague Josiah Royce published a two-volume rebuttal called *The Problem of Christianity*. In the introduction to the first volume, Royce marks his point of departure from James's project. He writes, "The religious experience upon which, in this book, I most depend differs very profoundly from that whose 'varieties' James described. He deliberately confined himself to the religious experience of *individuals*. My main topic is a form of *social* religious experience."[50] This rectification, according to Frank Oppenheim, is one of Royce's most important contributions to American philosophy of religion. He writes, "American philosophy is indebted to Royce for his crucial correction of William James' one-sided approach to religious experience. Counter-balancing James' individualistic tone, Royce insists on *communal* religious experience, and on the form, depth, and potential genuineness of such experience."[51] Royce's focus then, is not individual saints but the communion of saints, the Beloved Community, and the role the Spirit plays in the context of communal worship.

---

[49] Ibid., 31.

More recently, contemporary scholars writing on saintliness have echoed Royce's concern over James's overly individualistic characterization of saints. By viewing the saints too individualistically and ruling out from the outset any reference to social or institutional religious experience, James misses the richness and texture of saintly narratives. Saints do not simply pop into existence as "aberrations from the path of nature;"[52] they arise out of communities and traditions and are shaped by education and practices, which are sustained in part by religious institutions, as the biographies of the saints bear out. Hawley notes that saints tend to come in "flocks," forming communities of saints.[53] Emerging saints look to living and dead saints to disciple them in virtue. They often live together, worship together, and serve together. Only the rare exception actually lives in the kind of solitude James ascribes to them. Even if his study of them in their solitude is simply methodological, such a restriction seems sure to come with its costs.

---

[50] Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity*, vol. I. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), xxiii (emphasis mine).

[51] Frank M. Oppenheim, S. J., *Royce's Mature Philosophy of Religion: Reimagining Pragmatism via Josiah Royce's Interactions with Peirce, James, and Dewey* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), 310.

[52] James, *Varieties*, 226

The social roles saints play extend beyond those he discusses in *Varieties*. The saints function not simply as charity workers but also as teachers, healers, prophets, intercessors, and moral examples for their communities. Peter Brown highlights the saint's role within the community, correcting his own overly individualistic approach to the study of saints:

> If I were now to do more justice to his role as exemplar, the greatest single feature of my portrayal of the holy man that would have to be modified would be his "splendid isolation." I would be concerned to present him less as a deliberately distanced judge, counselor, and arbitrator: more as a moral catalyst *within* a community.[54]

Other historians, theologians, and sociologists have agreed with Brown, focusing on various ways in which the saints function in their particular communities. Richard Kieckhefer and George D. Bond define saints as the objections of imitation and veneration within their traditions.[55] Karl Rahner notes the function of saints as paradigms of Christian living for each historical community of Christians:

---

[53] John Stratton Hawley, "Introduction: Saints and Virtues," in *Saints and Virtues,* ed. John Stratton Hawley (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), xviii.

[54] Peter Brown, "The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity," in *Saints and Virtues*, ed. John Stratton Hawley (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), 9.

[55] Richard Kieckhefer and George D. Bond, *Sainthood: Its Manifestations in World Religions* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), viii.

> They are the initiators and the creative models of the holiness which happens to be right for, and is the task of, their particular age. They create a new style; they prove that a certain form of life and activity is a really genuine possibility; they show experimentally that one can be a Christian even in 'this' way; they make such a type of person believable as a Christian type.[56]

Sociologists like Joachim Wach, Max Weber, Werner Stark, Pitirim Sorokin, and G. van der Leeuw have pointed to the authority saints have within their communities, shaping communities through their actions and charismatic personalities.[57] So, it appears James's bracketing off the communal aspects of religious experience is not without consequences for his understanding of saintliness.

James's omission of the communal dimension to saintliness is somewhat surprising given that he has within his *corpus* the tools to give a richer account of the saintly self. If the self is a complex set of relations, then why talk of saintly selves exclusively in terms of their relation to God and rule out considerations of the saints' relationship to their formative communities and institutions? Perhaps James has the resources within his philosophy to make sense of the communal aspect of saintliness. Fontinell argues:

> James has been criticized – quite properly, in my opinion – for failing to grasp the contribution of communal experience to the religious life. If one keeps in mind, however, the relational character of all realities, including the human self, it might

---

[56] Karl Rahner, "The Church of the Saints," in *Theological Investigations* III (Baltimore, MD: Helicon Press, 1967), 101.

[57] Joachim Wach, *Sociology of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944). Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, trans. A. R. Anderson and Talcot Parsons (New York: The Free Press, 1947); Werner Stark, *The Sociology of Religion: A Study of Christendom*, vol. 4, (New York: Fordham University Press, 1966). Pitirim Sorokin, *Altruistic Love* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1950), 197. Sorokin, *The Ways and Power of Love* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1954). G. Van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation: A Study in Phenomenology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963).

> be argued that James's religious self is not only open to the communal but is diminished without it.[58]

Yet James neither makes these connections explicit nor allows considerations of religious community to permeate his account of saintliness or temper his overly individualistic claims.

3.2 Religious Institutions

While James is right to point out that institutions can corrupt a community in various ways, he fails to recognize that they can also play important roles of hemming in excesses, preserving doctrine in a community of belief, providing order, managing finances, legitimizing religious orders, and canonizing saints. James holds a fairly extreme, though not uncommon view that most individual religious experience is good but when mediated through ecclesiastical structure or authority or doctrine, it must be evil. James's tone in the following two passages betrays his bias:

> When a religion becomes an orthodoxy, its day of inwardness is over: the spring is dry; the faithful live at second hand exclusively and stone the prophets in their turn. The new church, in spite of whatever human goodness it may foster, can be henceforth counted on as a staunch ally in every attempt to stifle the spontaneous religious spirit, and to stop all later bubblings of the fountain from which in purer days it drew its own supply of inspiration.[59]

Again, with more vitriol than one is accustomed to hearing from James, he emphasizes the dichotomy between individual religion and religious institutions:

> The basenesses so commonly charged to religion's account are thus, almost all of them, not chargeable at all to religion proper, but rather to religion's wicked practical partner, the spirit of corporate dominion. And the bigotries are most of

---

[58] Eugene Fontinell, "James: Religion and Individuality," in *Classical American Pragmatism: Its Contemporary Vitality*, eds. Sandra B. Rosenthal, Carl R. Hausman, and Douglas R. Anderson (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 149.

[59] James, *Varieties*, 286.

> them in their turn chargeable to religion's wicked intellectual partner, the spirit of dogmatic dominion, the passion for laying down the law in the form of an absolutely closed-in theoretic system. The ecclesiastical spirit in general is the sum of these two spirits of dominion.[60]

MacIntyre admits that since institutions are concerned primarily with external goods, they are therefore liable to corruption when the pursuit of external goods dominates over the pursuit of goods internal to the practice. He agrees with James that institutions can be and often are corrupted. However, he submits that institutions also sustain practices in important ways, and are sometimes run by people who understand that their purpose is to support those who pursue the goods internal to practices. When functioning properly, institutions can foster virtues; they are not essentially evil entities, as James suggests they are.

3.3 Exaggerated Claims about the Corruption of Christian Churches

In addition to making exaggerated claims about religious institutions in general, James overstates the corruption of Christian churches in particular and gives too little weight to the positive role they have often played in supporting saintliness and curbing distortions of genuine sanctity. The Church's history is long and varied. At times it was primarily concerned with setting the table for its parishioners to pursue the goods internal to religious practices. At other times, it became more concerned with external goods and needed to be reformed from within or from without. While it is undeniable that the Church at different times in history went off track, on the whole it has been on the side of the saints, and the saints have overwhelmingly been on the side of the Church. James cites the standard black marks on the historical record, the crusades, the massacring of the

---

[60] Ibid., 286.

Jews and the Albigensians, the Inquisition, the religious wars of the 16th and 17th centuries, the murdering of the Mormons, and so on, some of which have been exaggerated and misunderstood, and many of which were supported by the saints themselves. I'll offer one clear example to illustrate my point. Catherine of Siena and Bernard of Clairvaux preached the crusades, but they did so not, as James argues, because they were fanatics or because they wanted to redirect the barbaric energies of the nobles away from themselves and towards a common enemy but because they saw the need to defend their Christian brothers and sisters in the Byzantine empire and to protect Christian pilgrims to the Holy Land. The Church and the saints on the whole viewed the crusades as necessary evils aimed at correcting the injustice of the capture of the Holy Land by the aggressive Seljuk Turks. Atrocities were surely committed during the crusades, and the church is not entirely free from blame, but recent historical evidence shows that the church actually served the role of checking the motives of the crusaders and curbing the all-too-human vices of some of them. Enlightenment historians, on whom James was relying, have recently been shown to have grossly exaggerated the greed, intolerance, and violence of the church during the Crusades and in the process have misunderstood the saints who supported the crusades. When they supported what they took to be the just war against the Seljuk Turks, they did so for medieval, not modern reasons.[61] It is one thing for James to say that he does not support such actions, but he goes further by ascribing to the saints motives they simply did not have.

---

[61] Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades: A History*, Second Edition (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 1-16. Jonathan Riley-Smith, "The Crusading Movement and Historians," in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Crusades*, ed. Jonathan Riley-Smith, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 6-9. Jonathan Riley-Smith, "Crusading as an Act of Love," in *The Crusades: The Essential Readings*, ed. Thomas F. Madden (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002). Jonathan Riley-Smith, *What*

While James charges that ecclesiastical institutions "[lay] down the law in the form of an absolutely closed-in theoretic system," one might plausibly argue, as C. FitzSimons Allison does, that these churches are attempting to protect individuals from "the cruelty of heresy."[62] Theological convictions affect action, and since some theological convictions contribute to immoral actions, we ought to be concerned to promote the right kind of theological convictions and censure the wrong kind. This is exactly what religious institutions believe they are doing when they "lay down the law," and in many cases Christian churches have been successful. Certainly we can agree with James that some religious institutions have promoted the wrong theological convictions or that they have laid down the law by resorting to immoral means of punishment, but we need not share James's conviction that all religious institutions are necessarily evil simply because they place limits on what count as acceptable beliefs for their members.

In the same vein, James will sometimes admit that the Church condemned some of the excesses he also denounces, but he does not allow such admissions to temper his criticism of the ecclesiastical spirit. The Church disapproved of Suso's self-immolation and strongly cautioned other ascetics against sacrificing health, and it did so for many of the same reasons James offers, namely that an unhealthy person is of little use to the church and those outside of the church. Had the Church not condemned such austerities, we would likely have seen a promulgation of competitive asceticism as was the case among some of the early desert fathers. Instead, because of the Church's institutional

---

Were the Crusades?, Third Edition (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2002), 9-26. Thomas F. Madden, *The New Concise History of the Crusades* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 223-5.

[62] C. FitzSimons Allison, *The Cruelty of Heresy: An Affirmation of Christian Orthodoxy* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1994), 17-24.

voice, we find even among the most zealous religious orders a measure of temperance and prudence. Ideally, the Church and individuals keep each other in check. And at times, this ideal has proven realistic, as the history of reform movements in the Church bears out. James's skepticism about this symbiotic relationship between individual and institution reflects the anti-ecclesiastical prejudices of his time, when institutional religion had begun to fall out of favor in New England both because of corruption and because of the church's inability to answer the pressing concerns of the time as raised by Darwinism and historical criticism.

3.4 Practices of Religious Communities

One of the consequences of James's overemphasis on individual religious experience is his failure to recognize the causes of sanctity beyond conversion and mystical experiences. While James is right to point out that many saints do indeed begin their journeys towards saintliness with conversion experiences, and that all of them at some point renounce sin and enter into a formative relationship with the More, James overlooks the long process of moral, intellectual, and spiritual formation that must follow initial conversion if the convert is to become a saint.[63] In other words, conversion may be necessary for sainthood, but it is far from sufficient. Many people who have experienced radical conversions have fallen short of sanctity. All of James's stories of radical conversions leading to behavioral change involve turning from sin (James focuses on renouncing alcoholism, smoking, and violence), but simply refraining from doing evil is only the first step towards sainthood. Saintliness is not best characterized *via negativa*, as Robert Adams has aptly put it.[64] Religious experiences need to be coupled with religious practices if they are to bear fruit. Conversion or mystical experience may plant a seed, but it needs to be watered. Antony of Egypt had a profound religious experience that caused him to renounce his worldly goods and take up eremetic monasticism. While fasting, praying, and meditating in his cave, Antony developed into a sage and tender advisor to those who visited him. In some cases, religious practices lead to religious experiences, as in the case of Thomas Aquinas who was known by his fellow friars for his intense periods of ecstatic prayer.[65] It was said that the writer of the *Summas* needed to be physically roused by the brothers to get him to take up his pen and ink each morning. Surely his prayer and meditation sustained him in his colossal work, and they eventually culminated in his putting it down towards the end of his short life. Furthermore, religious practices have an affect on the fruits of religious conversion even if they take place before the conversion. Paul's conversion is one of the most spectacular on record, but his ministry would have been quite limited had it not been for the theological training he received before his conversion experience, training that when baptized by his new faith allowed him to teach and preach throughout the Roman world to Jew and Gentile alike. There is much more to say on the role of spiritual disciplines in the lives of the saints, but I will save a fuller articulation for later chapters. It should suffice to say that because James rules out the social and institutional aspects of religion from the outset, he finds it difficult to talk about any form of moral and spiritual formation that takes place within the religious community and tradition. As a result, his understanding of the development of saints is limited in its explanatory power.

---

[63] Douglas R. Anderson suggests that James actually has two kinds of saints, the healthy-minded and the converted sick soul, and that both must be afforded equal importance in his thought. The healthy-minded saints do not need a conversion experience to release their creative energy. Their mood is active, self-empowered, and free, not as reflective or passive as the converted sick soul's. Granting Anderson's point, James still does not give due attention to the moral and spiritual formation of the saints beyond either being born with a Whitmanesque mood or being converted by a religious experience. See *Philosophy Americana*, 119-27.

---

[64] Robert M. Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 52.

[65] Farmer, *Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, 503.

3.5 Theology

A second objection is connected to the first set of objections because religious communities are constituted not only by practice but also by belief, and in fact many of the community's practices are generated by their theological convictions. James regularly eschews "special doctrines," by which he means specific theological claims that are incompatible with other specific theological claims, because such beliefs have the potential for separating religion from religion and denomination from denomination. James, however, fails to recognize the role theological convictions play not only in structuring the religious experience but also in generating the fruits of religious experience. In his haste to make religious experience a universal point of agreement for disparate religions, James skews the facts. First, to make Christian saints appear to be more like their counterparts in Eastern religions, he casts their beliefs in a Buddhist or Gnostic light. He thus reads all Christian mystical experiences as obliterative of the self and Christian ascetic practices as motivated by hatred towards the body. The reality, however, is that those Christian mystics and ascetics who were approved by the Church held to orthodoxy, which would militate against such views of the self or of the body. For the orthodox Christian saints, the experience of the loss of self is not the same as that of the Buddhists. The Christians and the Buddhists have different beliefs about what it is they are losing and why they are losing it. The Buddhists' goal when attempting to lose themselves is to overcome desire and in turn the suffering that comes from desire. The Buddhists are supposed to shut off their will entirely. The Christians' goal is quite different: it is not to lose their selves or the will full stop, but to reject a particular way of being selves, namely false selves whose will is oriented towards what is sinful. When Christians loses themselves, they gain their true self anew. Christians describe this as a loss of self because as sinful people, they were so accustomed to operating with a degenerate will, habitually oriented toward lesser goods, that the reorientation of their will comes as a radical conversion. Consequently, they describe themselves after the conversion as a "new creation." The goal is openness to being guided by and united with God's will, not utter passivity. Whatever Christians will in accordance with God's will Christians still will. To describe the saints' religious experience as involving total renunciation of selfhood is hyperbolic and misleading. In misunderstanding the Christian saints' motives, James misunderstands their actions.

James is also wrong to ascribe to orthodox Christian ascetics' motives of bodily hatred. Gnostic asceticism is motivated by a belief that the body is either illusory or that it is real but evil. While Christians have been tempted by Gnostic heresy with each new generation, the goal in orthodox Christian asceticism is quite different from that of the Gnostics. According to orthodox Christianity, the body and the soul are both created good and are good in their redeemed state, but both are liable to corruption by sin. Orthodox Christianity does not privilege the soul over the body or believe sin's seat is exclusively in the body. Orthodox Christian asceticism does not intend to punish the body for its sin or attempt to destroy the body to make way for the soul. Instead, the ascetics think of their mortifications in much the same way athletes think of their grueling regiments; they think of themselves as training their bodies so that their bodies will be disciplined in the face of trials and temptations.[66] Moreover, ascetic practices are as much about training the mind or soul as they are about disciplining the body. By practicing fighting banal temptations like eating more food than they have vowed to eat, ascetics learn to fight more momentous or challenging temptations when they arise. By making their bodies accustomed to austere conditions, ascetics prepare themselves for future trials, even tortures by foes spiritual or physical. When the Church was performing its institutional function properly, if it began to suspect that any ascetics' motives were skewing in a Gnostic direction, it would offer counsel or reprimand as needed.[67] If ascetics were really Gnostic, they would be condemned for heresy by the tradition and by the ecclesiastical institution. If they were not a Gnostic, then James must be wrong in ascribing to them anti-physical motives.

Theological convictions are not only essential to the quality of the religious experience, but they also influence what the saints do with their experiences. In other words, theology affects the fruits. The notion that Christian asceticism would involve hatred of the body is unfounded, for James even lists caring for the very sick as a form of asceticism, and caring for the sick means caring for their bodies. If they were true Gnostics, they would not have any reason to care for the physical needs of anyone. Instead, their orthodox Christian convictions compel them to care for the physical needs of others. James could argue that the saints only hate their own bodies, but if Christian ascetics really hated their bodies, then the ascetic mortifications would presumably never stop, but we find in many cases that once they achieve a certain level of discipline, they stop or at least scale back their ascetic practices. Often it is at this stage that they begin to engage in their more active ministry to others.[68] Many cenobitic monks left the monastery to serve as bishops and missionaries.[69] We find the pattern of spending time in the wilderness before starting one's ministry, which was set as an example by Jesus, repeatedly in the lives of the saints. The lives of the saints are not simply a "history of successive renunciations," but of renunciations as means to greater ends.[70]

---

[66] In 1 Corinthians 9:27, Paul writes "But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified."

[67] St. Basil's Rule, for example, requires monks to submit to their superior regarding how much they eat and fast so as to curb the ascetic excesses that were found among the early hermits of Cappadocia.

James's overly individualistic study also leads him to overlook the central place non-mystical theological convictions have played in shaping the saints' self-understanding. Not all saints have come to their theological convictions mystically. Nor have they all felt a sense of friendly continuity with the Ideal Power. Perhaps the most puzzling counter-example can be found in the recent revelations of Mother Teresa of Calcutta's diary entries in which she claims to have sensed God's absence for the majority of her ministry.[71] She wrote privately:

---

[68] Lawrence Cunningham reports that "Saint Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556), the founder of the Jesuits, spent a year in solitude in the caves of Manresa shortly after his religious conversion and just before he began his active life of pilgrimage and study." He wrote the first draft of his *Spiritual Exercises* there. Cunningham, *The Meaning of Saints*, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1980), 123.

[69] Gregory the Great is one of the most notable examples of this type of movement. Farmer, *Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, 227. Augustine of Hippo left his quasi-monastic life to become a priest and then Bishop of Hippo. Ibid., 37.

[70] James,*Varieties*, 295

[71] She wrote famously, "If I ever become a saints – I will surely be one of 'darkness.'" Mother Teresa, *Come Be My Light: The Private Writings of the "Saint of Calcutta,"* ed. Brian Koldiejchuk, M. C. (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 229. See Ibid., 149-340 for more on her experience of God's absence and helpful commentary on it by Paul Murray, *I Loved Jesus in the Night: Teresa of Calcutta – a Secret Revealed* (London: Paraclete Press, 2008).

> Now Father – since 49 or 50 this terrible sense of loss – this untold darkness – this loneliness this continual longing for God – which gives me that pain deep down in my heart – Darkness is such that I really do not see – neither with my mind nor with my reason – the place of God in my soul is blank – There is no God in me – when the pain of longing is so great – I just long & long for God – and then it is that I feel – He does not want me – He is not there - ...God does not want me – Sometimes – I just hear my own heart cry out - "My God" and nothing else comes – The torture and pain I can't explain - .[72]

She apparently was sustained in her charity work through a faith and hope no longer grounded in the personal experience of God's closeness, but rather in the sense of God's utter absence and abandonment. She maintained doctrinal orthodoxy throughout her life despite this prolonged "dark night of the soul." Perhaps James would not contend that all of the characteristics of saintliness need always be present. He never claims to have listed necessary and sufficient conditions for sainthood. Yet, by disparaging dogma, James debars himself from the quite plausible explanation of Mother Teresa's continued charity that she maintained her theological convictions and did what they required of her despite having lost her felt connection with God.

3.6 James's Use and Misunderstanding of Particular Saints

My third set of objections focuses on James's choices of saints to illustrate his point and his judgments about the value of others. First, James tends to focus on extreme ascetics and mystics, but not all saints are so extreme. Such an approach may obscure the reality of genuine saintliness. Many saints were moderate ascetics, doing only what was necessary to keep them physically and spiritually disciplined for the work they believe God called them to do. While Jesus sent the disciples out into ministry without food and with minimal clothing, we have no indication that this means that they voluntarily starved themselves. Francis of Assisi is known for his poverty and his willingness to part with his garments at the first sight of a beggar, but he never did anything like sleeping on a cross with protruding nails as Suso did. By limiting his data to the extreme cases, James sets himself up to overstate certain characteristics of saintliness and their importance, as can be seen in his statements about the loss of self, asceticism, and purity.

---

[72] Mother M. Teresa, M. C. to Father Joseph Neuner, S. J., undated, most probably written during the retreat of April 1961; quoted in Brian Kolodiejchuk, "Introduction" in Mother Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, 1-2.

Second, in addition to focusing too heavily on extreme ascetics, James also gives too much weight to mystical and not enough to non-mystical theologian saints. Many saints were also orthodox theologians of the non-mystical sort, but James neglects them entirely. Athanasius, John Chrysostom, Basil the Great, Augustine of Hippo, Anselm, and Thomas Aquinas are all excellent examples of saints who, while some of them had mystical experiences, spent most of their time developing non-mystical theology. James ignores such figures entirely either because he disagrees so vehemently with the way they do theology or because they are not extreme enough to attract his attention. James instead discusses lesser-known and rather extreme mystics like Suso and Margaret Mary Alacoque along with better known mystics like Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross. A more balanced approach would yield an account of saintliness with more coverage than James's narrow scope allows.

Third, while many of his general categories are helpful, and while his praise for particular saints is often on target, some of his criticisms of particular saints seem unfair. For instance, James heavily criticizes Margaret Mary Alacoque, Gertrude, and Teresa of Avila for their narrow intellect and their uselessness to humankind. Their mystical experiences seem to James to be little more than "amatory flirtation…between the devotee and the deity."[73] According to James, these women believed that they were God's favorites, singled out by God to receive an extra measure of divine love. A more charitable and I would argue correct way of understanding these women and assessing their value would be that they express, often in an extreme way, the love God has for all people. That they experienced it more fully than others does not mean that they believed God had singled them out. Such an interpretation is born out in the words of Margaret Mary Alacoque:

> And He showed me that it was His great desire of being loved by men and of withdrawing them from the path of ruin into which Satan hurls such crowds of them, that made Him form the design of manifesting His Heart to men, with all the treasures of love, of mercy, of grace, of sanctification and salvation which it contains, in order that those who desire to render Him and procure for Him all the honor and love possible, might themselves be abundantly enriched with those divine treasures of which this Heart is the source.[74]

We find here not the narrow-minded prattling of a flirt but rather the mature voice of a woman who understands God's love for all people.

James's account of saintliness bears all the marks of his philosophical prejudices towards individualism and against established religion. These prejudices flatten and distort the reality of saintly lives, which point to the social nature of saintliness. To be fair, James probably was not as individualistic as his writings sometimes portray. Oppenheim remarks that James often responded to such criticisms by saying that he always presupposed the social dimension of the individual.[75] Charlene Haddock Seigfried argues:

---

[73] Ibid., 294.

[74] Mary Margaret Alacoque, *From The Revelations of Our Lord to St. Mary Margaret Alacoque*, *Imprimatur*: E. Morrogh Bernard Vic. Gen., Westmonasterii, 1954.

> The important point...is that the individualism that James celebrated was defined not in opposition to intimate relationships or to the public good but as a necessary component of a deeply experienced connection with others. It is true that Josiah Royce, John Dewey, and George Herbert Mead systematically draw out the interconnection where James mostly assumes it and that James acted on the belief more than he explicitly incorporated it into his writings, but he nonetheless consistently situates the self in relation to others.[76]

Still, presupposing the social dimension of the individual does not seem sufficient. Saints are formed in the context of communities, most of them deeply connected to institutions and deeply committed to established doctrines and practices. They view themselves not as radical individuals but as members of their communities, and they understand themselves as having a particular vocation within those communities. To deny the individuality of the saints would be a serious mistake, but to extract them from their communal contexts is equally erroneous.

---

[75] Frank M. Oppenheim, *Reverence for the Relations of Life: Reimagining Pragmatism via Josiah Royce's Interactions with Peirce, James, and Dewey* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 97.

[76] Charlene Haddock Seigfried, *William James's Radical Reconstruction of Philosophy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990), 87.

CHAPTER THREE

James's Account of the Moral Goodness of the Saints

1. James's Moral Philosophy

Having raised concerns about particular assertions and omissions in James's *Varieties* regarding the saints, I now address more specifically James's claims about the goodness of the saints. Moral goodness is undoubtedly what makes the saints so attractive to James. He may be intrigued by the other aspects of saintliness and what they tell us about human nature, but his lectures on the value of saintliness demonstrate that what really matters to him is what the saints do to make the world morally better. When coupled with a sufficiently broad intellect, James believes the saints are "the best things that history has to show."[1] I assume that the superlative James uses to describe the saints entails that they are morally superior to other human beings, and the rest of what James says about them in *Varieties* supports my inference. But what does James mean when he says that the saints are morally good? In this chapter I search James's moral philosophy for clues as to what exactly he means by "moral goodness." Then I will connect his claims about the saints with his claims about moral goodness and evaluate his claim that the saints are morally good. When one factors the saints into James's moral philosophy, a host of possible interpretations emerge, many of which presage later twentieth-century attempts to account for the moral goodness of the saints.

---

[1] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: New American Library, 1958), 225.

Moral considerations run throughout James's philosophical writings. His most pressing concerns are to carve out a place for genuine freedom and the right to believe in those postulates that motivate the strenuous mood, the attitude necessary to make the universe a better place. James's religious writings in particular are at bottom motivated by an interest in preserving moral sources of religious belief in the face of the reductionistic epistemology of the positivists. He writes, "In a merely human world without a God, the appeal to our moral energy falls short of its maximal stimulating power."[2] James sees clearly the need for belief in God, freedom, and immortality to support and sustain the modern demand for universal benevolence, but he realizes that belief in these things can no longer be taken for granted. His best bet is to defend the right of people to believe in these things and then to argue that the effects of such beliefs in the lives of believers lend credence to the beliefs themselves.

Although moral considerations saturate most of James's work, he most clearly puts forth his moral philosophy in "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life," a short essay he published in 1897, just five years before *Varieties*, as one of the "other essays in popular philosophy" to accompany "The Will to Believe." In it, James sets forth his answers to what he calls the psychological questions, which inquire into the origins of our moral ideals and judgments; metaphysical questions, which inquire as to the meaning and usage of moral terms like "goodness," "badness," and "obligation;" and casuistic questions, which inquire as to how philosophers ought to measure or rank the plurality of goods found in the ethical demands made by different people. Pertinent to my study of

---

[2] William James, "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life," *International Journal of Ethics* (April 1891): 351.

James is that while he does not explicitly reference the saints he later writes about in *Varieties* or clarify the role they play in his moral philosophy, he defines the role they need to play in the universe at the end of "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life." Furthermore, his account of saintliness in *Varieties* provides a solution to a problem that arises in thinking through his moral theory as developed in this early essay. In what follows, I lay out what I take to be James's moral philosophy without comment, saving my critique until after I have pieced together James's assertions into as coherent a system as his writings will allow. To the analytic moral philosopher obvious objections will arise, and I raise many of those objections when I assess his moral philosophy as a whole.

1.1 Moral Psychology

James's moral philosophy focuses on making a better moral universe. What does he mean by this? What makes one possible universe more desirable than another? To answer this question, James argues that the only access we have to what is desirable is through the desires of sentient people. So, James agrees with Bentham, Mill, and Bain that many of our ideals arise from the association of pleasure and pain with our actions, an apparent commitment to a version of psychological hedonism. We call "good" those actions that tend to produce greater pleasure and "bad" those which tend to produce pain. Yet, in contrast with the Utilitarians, James is not satisfied that *all* of our ideals arise from this source, for he claims we have "brain-born" intuitions that are irreducible to associations of pleasure and pain or to utility. We have an innate preference or taste for nobler things quite apart from their tendency to produce physical pleasure. Because our intuitions and tastes cannot be readily absorbed into the calculus of Mill's Utilitarianism, James needs a broader category that will encompass both pleasures and intuitions. So, in his system he replaces “pleasure” with “demands” because demands can arise in response to pleasure or pain or in response to intuitions.

1.2 The Metaphysics of Morality

James attempts to support his psychological claim by answering the metaphysical question about the meaning and reference of moral terms. To do so, James engages in thought experiments to prove that there is no “goodness” or badness” in the universe outside of the demands of sentient beings:

> *Goodness, badness, and obligation must be realized somewhere in order really to exist; and the first step in ethical philosophy is to see that no merely inorganic ‘nature of things’ can realize them. Neither moral relations nor moral law can swing in vacuo*. Their only habitat can be a mind which feels them; and no world composed of merely physical facts can possibly be a world to which ethical propositions apply.[3]

He continues the thought experiment by adding one person into the hypothetical world. In this world, James argues that there would be no difference between what that person *feels* as good, what is good *for him*, and what is good absolutely. James writes, “So far as he *feels* anything to be good, he *makes* it good.”[4] The individual is the “sole creator of values in that universe, and outside of his opinion things have no moral character at all.”[5] The only thing restricting his claims would be his own inner drive for consistency, to feel inner harmony by eliminating discord.[6] James later adds that inner discord can arise from the moral solipsist’s own sense that certain moral ideals are higher than others and that in living according to lower ideals and neglecting the higher he will not be able to rest easily.[7] His feeling of inner discord will have the force of an obligation, albeit a weak and apodictic, not categorical one. On his view, obligation is possible in a world of one sentient being, and the force of obligation comes from the individual's own experience and own moral ideals, however formulated. The individual may be a self-interested egoist or a eudaemonist of any stripe. All that matters for James is that the sources of obligation are all found in the experience of the lonely individual and the demands that individual makes on himself or herself.[8]

---

[3] William James, “The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life,” 335.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] See James’ “The Sentiment of Rationality,” in *The Writings of William James: A Comprehensive Edition*, 320, ed. John J. McDermott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 320 for more on this.

The world of one individual doing whatever it is his experience and moral ideals tell him to do is a relatively simple world, according to James, but all of that changes as soon as we add a second being into the universe. For, while it is possible for both sentient beings to exist in their own moral universes, never making or responding to the claims of the other, the question will immediately arise for the philosopher as to which of the their demands is better.[9] Although this is the juncture at which philosophers and theologians have typically wanted to appeal to an *a priori* impersonal standard of morality against which to judge the comparative goodness of these two positions, James argues that no such standard can be invoked because, as he established before, no morality exists in the absence of actually existing sentient beings. As he believes he has established in his thought experiment, obligation only enters the world in the form of demands made by these really existing beings. In other words, we have no access to the best possible universe prior to the experience of actual sentient beings. Any appeal to an abstract moral order simply masks the personal preference of the person doing the invoking. And why ought one person's (the philosopher's) demands trump another person's demands? Abstract moral orders can be reduced either to superstitions or to actual claims made by a God who is able to make all-encompassing demands. If the former, then the appeal on the part of the philosopher is to an illusion and it cannot bring more gravity to his position. If the latter, then James's claim that good (and bad) "are objects of feeling and desire, which have no foothold or anchorage in Being, apart from the existence of actually living minds," still holds because the claim is grounded not in an abstract moral order but in the desires of the Deity. The question still arises in the minds of the other sentient beings that exist in the same universe as God as to why they ought to satisfy the demands God makes.

---

[7] In this essay, James does not espouse the notion that certain ideals are objectively higher than others. Rather, the person who ranks ideals in this way does so simply by personal preference.

[8] One might reasonably wonder if James thinks that people in "moral solitude" could be right if they held that drinking scotch without constraint was good. Though James does not entertain a question like this in his essay, I would venture to say that James would respond by saying that while drinking scotch without restraint would be *physically* detrimental to such individuals, it would only be *immoral* if they obliged themselves to promote their own well-being. According to that self-imposed standard, drinking scotch without restraint would be morally wrong. James seems to be confident that individuals would be drawn to some higher ideals for their lives that would lead to the formulation of a self-imposed prohibition against excessive drinking, but in the absence of such an ideal, doing so, according to the thought experiment, must be morally permissible. I am only explicating, not endorsing James's view here, as I argue below in my critique of James's thought experiment.

[9] James dismisses the moral skepticism that would arise from simply accepting a universe that consisted of a plurality of moralities. A philosopher *qua* philosopher must attempt to bring about some unity, and the only way to do this is to judge each of the various demands made according to some casuistic scale.

1.3 Casuistry and the Task of the Moral Philosopher

The casuistic question in philosophy typically has to do with applying moral principles to particular cases. For James, since the moral principle at work is simply to maximize demand-satisfaction, casuistry involves ranking the various goods demanded by individuals. The moral philosopher's goal is to recommend ethical principles, laws, and social policies that rank all the goods in the universe, and based on James's answers to the psychological and metaphysical questions, the goods in the universe just are whatever existing individuals demand. To give an accurate, unprejudiced account of the moral universe, the philosopher cannot privilege his favored goods over those of anyone else. James describes the role of the philosopher as having to "find an account of the moral relations that obtain among things, which will weave them into the unity of a stable system and make of the world what one may call a genuine universe from an ethical point of view."[10] He must view himself as a scientist of ethics, collecting the "data" of ethics, namely the demands of individuals, and using the same "common sense" and "general philosophical prejudices" he uses in *Varieties* to make tentative claims about morality.

One of James's key contentions is that "There is no such thing possible as an ethical philosophy dogmatically made up in advance."[11] All dogmatic ethical philosophies “violate the character with which life concretely comes and the expression which it bears of being, or at least of involving, a muddle and struggle, with an ‘ever not quite’ to all our formulas, and novelty and possibility forever leaking in.”[12] The philosopher’s role, then, cannot be to come up with an *a priori* principle that will make sense of the whole of morality. Instead, the aim of the philosopher is to take account of the moral relations in experience and propose tentative principles, laws, codes, and policies that best approximate those moral relations. The philosopher enters the fray *in medias res* and tries to make the universe a bit better through means specific to his vocation as a philosopher. In trying to bring about a stable system and a genuine ethical universe, the philosopher must, instead of turning to an abstract moral order prior to investigation, listen to the cries of protest that arise out of the experience of other individuals concerning their unmet demands. These protests clue the philosopher into the imperfection of the present order. If the philosopher can suggest a new moral principle or a change in social practice or policy to meet those needs without creating more problems, then he will have succeeded in his task.

---

[10] James, "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life," 331. As will become clearer below, moral relations are moral insofar as they deal with human action, with what humans ought to do in particular situations. Moral relations are relations because they are what connect the "parts" of moral experience together. Given James' radical empiricism, these relations are just as real as the "parts" they connect. The "parts" of moral experience moral relations bring together are the individual person's interests, desires, motivations, and feelings, the possible actions that could be performed in the given situation, and the consequences effected by the possible actions that could be performed on the individual and on other people. Moral relations are the felt continuities between these "parts" of experience. Modern moral theories attempt to ground the other "parts" of experience in one of the other "parts." James finds this approach inadequate because these ethical theories end up proving too much, as Hillary Putnam has aptly put it. They end up trampling on some feelings or intuitions we have about our moral experience. In a given situation, I may have a particular purpose that I could accomplish by performing a certain action. If I read only those moral relations that hold together my purpose and the action and disregard the relation my action has to other consequences I would not intend, then my action will not likely be meliorating. For example, I may narrowly read my experience and try to satisfy my demand for dulling pain by turning to drugs or alcohol while ignoring the larger consequences that action will have on me, let alone on my friends, family, and society. Insofar as I have a demand for dulling my pain, drugs and alcohol can satisfy that demand, but insofar as I have other demands for a flourishing future, drugs and alcohol are likely to cut me off from my demands. The moral agent's task is to read his experience and reflect on the consequences that will likely come about if he performs a particular action. Being reflective means taking into account all the "parts" of experience as they relate to each other and attempt to come to something like what Rawl's has since called "reflective equilibrium" when making moral decisions. Hilary Putnam, "How Not to Solve Ethical Problems," in *Realism with a Human Face* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 181. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Second Edition (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 20, 48-51.

[11] James, "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life," 330.

According to James, none of the traditional definitions proposed for the essence of goodness have given general satisfaction because they have all been susceptible to counter-examples. He thinks that Aristotle and Mill, in their different ways, came closest by asserting that the ultimate good is happiness and that all things are good insofar as they tend towards happiness, but he finds that proposal too narrow, for some things are considered good that neither are happiness nor constitute happiness nor lead to happiness. He hopes here to agree as much as possible with Mill without getting trapped by counter-examples provided especially by Kantians and intuitionists. He proposes a more general essence of goodness that he believes can cover all the possible meanings and usages of goodness. He writes, "in seeking for a universal principle we inevitably are carried onward to the most universal principle – that the essence of good is simply to *satisfy demand*. The demand may be for anything under the sun."[13] To try to sum up all the goods in the universe under one principle or law any more restricting than this one, like for example the Greatest Happiness Principle or the Categorical Imperative, is bound to fail because, according to James, there are probably a plurality of moral laws in ethics just as there are a plurality of natural laws in physics, and no other casuistic scale than the one he has proposed makes it possible to rank their importance when it comes to creating a stable ethical system. The philosopher can use this casuistic scale to determine the legitimacy of a particular moral principle to a particular situation. The key for James is that this casuistic scale allows for experience to speak in particular contexts with a voice loud enough to overcome what he believes to be overly narrow ethical laws and principles.

---

[12] Ralph Barton Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James*, vol. 2 (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1935), 700.

How does the moral philosopher use such a casuistic scale? According to James, if the essence of good is simply to satisfy demand, then the goal of the philosopher is to create as much good as possible in the world, which is to say to satisfy the maximum amount of demands in the universe possible with ethical principles and policy recommendations. A corollary of this is that no ethical philosophy can be complete until every voice has been heard and taken into account. It remains an open question whether it will ever be possible to satisfy everyone's demands, and in the present it seems that the only way to satisfy some demands is to deny others, just as it is in the experience of the individual. However, it is certainly possible to satisfy more or less demands, and the philosopher's task is simply to ameliorate the universe to the extent possible in the role of philosopher in that particular time and place. In an ideal world, all demands would be met, but in the real world, we must deny some demands to make the best system possible. As James says, the real world is "tragically practical."[14]

---

[13] James, "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life," 343.

The task of the philosopher is to try to satisfy as many demands as possible and avoid being partisan. The philosopher must promote ideals that require the least other ideals to be sacrificed in the process and bring about as peaceful a system as possible, where most people are satisfied that their moral ideals have been met and the least possible people believe their ideals are being trampled upon. So, for example, James would have been acutely aware of the inadequacies of the philosophies and social policies that allowed for American immigrants to be mistreated and slaves to be kept by aristocrats. Those systems met the demands of the rich establishment, but they failed to take account of the demands of the oppressed. Too much had to be sacrificed for too little reward. As we evolved socially, we revised our understanding of what counts as a just social system to give voice to those whose voices were being silenced for the sake of the wealthy. This is not to say the previous system was irrational. It was perhaps the most rational system at the time, but it became irrational as people started to become uncomfortable with the way that system was lived out and the experiences of the oppressed came to light. At best, the philosopher can only hope to arrive at rational, though tentative conclusions.

---

[14] Ibid., 344.

1.4 Summary of James's Moral Philosophy

Ultimately, James's moral philosophy is an extension of the rest of his philosophy. Instead of offering a full-blown theory, James sets out to answer important moral questions using radical empiricism as his guide. Metaphysically, the good is simply whatever actually existing individuals demand, and they demand what they perceive to be the goods of their experience. Psychologically, they perceive as good those things that bring pleasure, but they also have some "brain-born" intuitions about goods not reducible to pleasure. In both the metaphysical and psychological arenas, James asserts the primacy of perception. When philosophers enter the scene, their job is one of conception, of theorization. In radical empiricism, percepts always lead and concepts always follow. The same goes in James's moral theory. The philosophers must listen to and answer to the concrete experience of individuals and try to bring about a system that generates the least protest from experience. Moral philosophy, for James, must be done empirically, and therefore must be a matter of compromise and continuing revision, for on his view to develop a moral philosophy for the ideal world makes little sense when it comes to constructing principles, laws, and policies in the actual world. He attempts to set the table for pure experience to teach us what is true in the moral realm and allow those on the fringes of what is taken to be genuine experience to have a voice to call into question the dominant paradigm when needed. He embraces ethical pluralism, tolerance, and an egalitarian spirit in which he argues that we can all learn from other people's experiences, but that no one can have our experience for us.[15] Experience is the greatest teacher when it comes to figuring out how best to ameliorate the human condition. The more experience we have, and the closer attention we pay to what it is teaching us collectively, the better we will become at reading the future consequences of our actions so that we can develop ethical principles and social policies that will bring about a better moral universe.

---

[15] By ethical pluralism, James means that the demands made in the universe are many and conflicting and that we can never satisfy all of them. He writes, "The actually possible in this world is vastly narrower than all that is demanded; and there is always a *pinch* between the ideal and the actual which can only be

Thus in "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life" James appears to espouse something like preference utilitarianism, though a label like "demand-satisfaction consequentialism" is probably more appropriate. James writes:

> Since everything demanded is by that fact a good, must not the guiding principle for ethical *philosophy* (since all demands conjointly cannot be satisfied in this poor world) be simply to satisfy at all times as many demands as we can? That act must be the best act, accordingly, which makes the best whole, in the sense of awakening the least sum of dissatisfactions.[16]

Here, James's moral philosophy shares the basic characteristics of preference utilitarianism because (1) it makes the right a function of the good, in James's case the good being whatever is demanded; (2) it contains a maximizing feature, though in James's case he only asks that we maximize the satisfaction of demands to the extent possible, and he is unclear on what he means by possible (i.e. are we required as individuals to satisfy only as many demands as we personally can, or are we responsible for satisfying as many demands as the most capable human being could); and (3) it is consequentialist because the rightness or wrongness of each agent's action is determined

---

got through by leaving part of the ideal behind. There is hardly a good which we can imagine except as competing for the possession of the same bit of space and time with some other imagined good. Every end of desire that presents itself appears exclusive of some other end of desire." "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life," 344. See also "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings" and "What Makes Life Significant," in *Talks to Teachers on Psychology: and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals* (New York: Holt, 1899), 229-301.

[16] James, "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life," 346.

by how many demands are in fact satisfied as a consequence of each action. His moral philosophy is best categorized as demand-satisfaction consequentialism, because James uses the word “demand” instead of “preference,” and for him “demand” carries more moral weight than does “preference,” for the demands he is talking about are felt needs that arise out of human experience, and they carry with them the idea that if the demands are not satisfied, the demander will feel that they have been wronged, whereas in many cases of preferring, when the people doing the preferring do not get what they prefer, they do not describe what transpired as wrong.

2. Critique of James's Moral Philosophy

Ultimately, “The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life” is best read as an application or illustration of James’s radical empiricism and his then emerging pluralism rather than a stand-alone theory. For on its own this essay contains too many undefended presuppositions and begs too many questions to be taken as a serious alternative to the major ethical theories available outside of pragmatism. Indeed, James probably never intended to lay out a “theory,” but rather to offer some considerations for moral philosophers to take into account when they construct ethical principles and policies. Some of the undefended presuppositions and begged questions in “The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life” he bolsters in other places, and I will attempt to do him justice both by pointing out the deficiencies in that essay and also hinting at possible ways that James perhaps would have responded to my criticisms. First, I raise objections to James’s moral philosophy, especially to the claims he makes in “The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life.” Then, I argue that James can overcome some but not all of those objections by appealing to the saints.

James's theory is so closely aligned with Mill's that he is open to almost every standard criticism raised against Utilitarianism. James only disagrees with Mill in one respect. He disagrees with Mill's theory of life (hedonism), which holds that all goods people demand are reducible to pleasure. James argues that we intuit some things as good apart from their utility. He agrees with Mill's theory of morality (the Greatest Happiness Principle), but he defines happiness as demand-satisfaction instead of as pleasure and the absence of pain.[17] His small departure from standard Utilitarianism only exempts him from the critique he himself raises against Mill. Others still remain.

2.1 First Critique: Immoral Demands

James's first assumption, namely that everything that is demanded is by that fact a good, seems wrong, for it does not seem to be the case that all demands people make are good. James starts this way because he wants to be careful not to bring to the table any particular moral ideals that would rule out prior to investigation the demands people have, and we can probably come up with examples of legitimate demands throughout history that have been summarily dismissed because they did not fit into what James calls "ethical philosophy dogmatically made up in advance." So perhaps his tolerance of demands reflects some prudence, but still counter-examples abound. Some demands people make (or put forward) are misinformed, some crazy, some horrifying, some trivial, as critics of preference-satisfaction utilitarianism have pointed out.[18] It seems reasonable to believe that those sorts of demands ought to be ruled out in advance of empirical investigation and that they should not be included in the moral calculus at all. To make such caveats, though, would run counter to James's project.

---

[17] Thanks to Robert Kruschwitz for help in making this point.

[18] Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, "Consequentialism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2008 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta,http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/consequentialism/> (accessed August 3, 2011).

2.2 Second Critique: The Meaning of "Desirable"

In response to the first concern, James insists that the only way we can know if something is desirable is if it is in fact desired by some sentient creature. James's response, however, raises a second concern. Like Mill, James relies on an analogy between visibility and desirability, claiming that because visibility means "able to be seen," desirability must mean "able to be desired." And, it makes sense that James would reason in this way because his presupposition of radical empiricism rules out the possibility of thinking that 'desirable' means anything other than "able to be desired." Yet, the primary usage of 'desirable,' especially in ethical contexts is "worthy of being desired." James does not have this definition at his disposal because to make a claim about the worthiness of some desire would be to reference some *a priori* judgment of value. Such an attack on Mill has become standard in the literature and can be applied to James as well.[19]

In *Varieties*, however, the more mature James recognizes some of the inadequacies I have pointed out and alters his moral philosophy in response to such criticisms. He looks to religious experience and to the saints to augment his moral philosophy to make it more plausible. In *Varieties* he argues that some demands are qualitatively better than others. In a move parallel to Mill's distinction between higher and lower pleasures, James avers that some demands are of a higher moral order than others. He looks to the saints and their religious experience to tell us how to rank demands qualitatively.[20] "Desirable" then no longer means "able to be desired" but rather "desired by the saints and the Ideal Power, whose privileged perspective allow them access to that which is worthy of desire." The saints have a privileged perspective on reality because of their connection to the Ideal Power and their existence in a "wider life." James does not reduce the value of Ideal Power's or the saints' demands to their effectiveness in satisfying demands as they happen to arise in the experience of concrete individuals, but claims that God and the saints have access to what demands ought to be made by others and what demands ought to be satisfied. Demands inspired by religious experience and self-sacrificial love exist on a higher plane than those that we find when we do a "science of ethics," studying every demand as mere neutral data. The philosopher can no longer treat all demands as equally worthy of satisfaction but must rather privilege the demands of the saints. The demands of ordinary people are grounded in experience, but the saints demands are grounded in religious experience, and religious experience affords the saints with better epistemic access to the goods of experience.[21]

---

[19] G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903), § 40.

---

[20] Suckiel, *Heaven's Champion: William James's Philosophy of Religion* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 109.

[21] See Russell Goodman's *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entry on William James, where he claims that James oscillated between thinking a science of religion was possible and allowing for a domain of experience only accessible through personal experience and not available to the methods of science. My claim here is that James settled upon the notion that religious experience was of a higher order than ordinary experience and that the impact of religious experience carries over into the ethical domain. I do not believe James held onto his belief in "The Moral Philosopher" that he could create a science of ethics any more than he could create a science of religion. Russell Goodman, "William James," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2009 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2009/entries/james/ (accessed August 3, 2011).

2.3 Third Critique: Requires too much Calculation to be Practical

A third concern is that James's moral philosophy like Mill's requires too much calculative power on the part of the moral agents. How can a moral agent make moral decisions when knowing the right depends on knowing the good consequences an action will produce in an unknown future? To calculate all the potential consequences of an action and to ascertain which of those potential consequences will actually obtain would require omnipotence. James is not susceptible to this critique in the same way Mill is. This is because Mill requires that every agent who aspires to moral goodness also be a philosopher, constantly calculating all the consequences of every action (or for rule-utilitarian interpretations, discovering the best policies for action which have and will produce the most happiness). James expects his moral agents simply to attend to the moral relations they feel in their experience, challenging them to expand the horizons of their attention, but not condemning them too harshly when they fall short of moral perfection. Rather, the impossible task in James's system is that of the philosopher. How can any philosopher take into account every demand raised by every individual in the universe? Policies need to be constructed; judgments need to be made about moral issues; and yet James does not give the philosopher recourse to any fixed principles. Any theory the philosopher constructs will be imperfect and will have to resemble triage, attending to the most pressing demands that are remediable and neglecting those that are less urgent or beyond repair. Because goods compete, some will have to be sacrificed to bring about a unity of system. And worse, whether a given course of action will satisfy the maximum amount of demands possible is not available in advance of experience. James asks us to bite the bullet on this, saying that life is uncertain and risky and that the best we can do is learn from our mistakes. It is possible that, within a particular community, some level of equilibrium can be brought about in the face of conflicting moral demands, but it is just as possible that there are many differing approaches that could lead to a peaceful resolution as it is that there is only one approach or none at all.[22] The result is that "on James's view, the idea of a morally perfect life is contradictory; no life could realize all the moral goods any more than any single photograph of you could capture all of your features" and that "we are thus resigned to a life in which moral conflict and uncertainty are inexorable."[23]

In *Varieties* James does not revise his view on the task of the philosopher to construct ethical principles and social policies, so he still requires the philosopher to do more than is humanly possible in calculating the effects of those principles and policies on every individual affected by them. At the same time, he shifts the primary responsibility of making the world better off from the philosopher to the activity of the saints. The saints can better bear this burden because of their connection to the Ideal Power, which gives them prophetic power and the sort of moral and spiritual energy needed for the task at hand. Most importantly, the saints have the ability to inspire individuals to change, to bring others into friendly relationship with God, which then transforms their selfish demands into saintly demands. The philosopher can only propose principles or policies that help the needy and oppressed get what they want and keep the oppressors from getting what they want. The saints, on the other hand, can bring goodness into the universe by helping both the oppressed and the oppressors become more saintly by connecting them with the Ideal Power, which can then get them in touch with the true goods of experience and open them up to a life of self-sacrificial love. The saints' task, then, does not appear to be as impossible as that of the philosophers, for the saints do not calculate but act in ways that make the world better and inspire others to do the same.

---

[22] See Henry Jackman, "Jamesian Pluralism and Moral Conflict," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 41, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 125-6. See also Robert B. Talisse and Scott F. Aikin's reply, "Still Searching for a Pragmatist Pluralism," in the same volume, 145-60.

[23] Robert Talisse and Micah Hester, *On James* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2004), 66.

2.4 Fourth Critique: Desire Dilemmas

In "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life" James is egalitarian and inclusive in his treatment of all sentient beings' desires, interests, and ideals. The philosopher rules out some of those demands because they conflict with other demands, but initially no demands enjoy privileged status over others.[24] A fourth concern is that because he grounds the good in the demands of individuals in the initial stages of inquiry, James opens himself up to variants of the arguments raised in Plato's *Euthyphro*. On the one hand, people, like the gods, disagree about goods. If all demands are treated equally, then when A claims that X is good and B claims that X is not good, James is left with a contradiction about X, for it is both good and not good at the same time. James might respond by claiming that X is good *for* A, but not good *for* B. The role of the philosopher would simply be to find out how many people X is good for and how many it is not good for and then to figure out ways to make sure that the most people for whom X is good get it and the most people for whom X is bad are not adversely affected by it. If X is of the nature that it makes the attainment of some other widely desired goods impossible, then perhaps those for whom X is good need to be denied it. Relativizing X to the agent's desires gets James out of the contradiction, but it still raises the question about the goodness of X in reality. To answer this question, James must pick a horn of the Euthyphro dilemma: Is X good because individuals demand it or do individuals demand X because it is good? James would seem to want to claim that the only epistemic access we have to the good is through the demands of concrete individuals but that metaphysically the demands of individuals arise out of real goods in experience.

---

[24] See Suckiel's *The Pragmatic Philosophy of William James* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), ch. 4 and Perry, *The Thought and Character of Williams James*, vol. 2, 265.

James would probably argue that to divorce the goods of experience from their connection to the desires, interests, and intuitions of individual experiencers is to obscure the reality of their connectedness in pre-linguistic experience. But the question of the actual goodness of the goods demanded does not go away by appealing to the access individuals have to pure experience via their feelings, for they disagree about the goodness of some of the aspects of their shared experience, and if all individuals are treated equally, then we have no way of deciding what is truly good.

James attempts to answer the arbitrariness objection by claiming that the saints have better access to what is actually good than ordinary people do, for what is actually good for everyone is known by the Ideal Power and is communicated by the Ideal Power to the saints. James moves away from his egalitarian position in "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life" and privileges religious experience as a superior form of epistemic access to the good. If A is a non-saint, then James no longer claims that X is good simply because A demands it. Rather, X is good or bad regardless of whether or not A demands it. If A is a saint, then A's assessment of the goodness or badness of X trumps the assessment of any non-saints. In addition to knowing the good, the saints do the good.

Their relationship with the Ideal Power equips them to meet the needs of those the Ideal Power knows are in need of care. They demonstrate to everyone else the best sort of life, a life that makes the world better by putting one's petty demands aside and instead attending to the pressing demands of those who cannot help themselves. The saints then occupy a central role in James's more mature moral theory because they not only know how to rank demands, but they also demonstrate a unique and effective way to satisfy the demands most worth satisfying, namely those of the oppressed, the sick, and the impoverished.

2.5 Fifth Critique: The Impossible and Unwanted Task of the Philosopher

Just as Mill has trouble accounting for individual moral agents' motivation to maximize general happiness, James fails to motivate philosophers to satisfy as many demands as possible. In his *Utilitarianism*, Mill must rely on a questionable belief that maximizing individual happiness involves maximizing the happiness of the whole. James's analogous move is to claim that in satisfying as many demands as possible, the philosophers satisfy their own demand for a stable ethical system. James seems to assume that this ideal is shared by all philosophers, but this assumption is questionable. The only philosophers who would agree to it would be those who already accept the idea that the only access we have to the good is through the demands of individuals and that all the demands of individuals are equally morally significant. James himself seems to deny that the demands of every individual are equally morally significant by the time he writes *Varieties*, as I have argued above. In the absence of such convictions, it is unclear why philosophers would want to satisfy as many demands as possible.

The question of why the philosopher ought to be motivated to maximize demand-satisfaction still remains in *Varieties*, but James appears to be on better footing with respect to the saints, for he builds the motivation to bring about a better moral universe into his description of the saint. Simply describing the philosopher as motivated to maximize demands appears *ad hoc* on James's part, for not all philosophers have understood themselves in the way James stipulates; but describing the saints in such a way is more plausible, for saints do appear to have at the core of their self-understanding a desire to do God's will and thus to contribute to bringing about a more perfect world. On James's view, to ask why the saints ought to make the world better would be paramount to asking why the saints ought to be saints. We cannot dismiss such a question with respect to the philosopher so easily. Still, the idea that saints are motivated to satisfy the maximal amount of demands appears implausible. More likely, the saints are motivated to meet the needs of those they meet. They think neither about perfecting the world in the abstract nor serving the most people possible but of how to serve the person God has set before them at a given moment.

James is also open to critique with respect to his meta-ethical claims. First, James argues that metaphysically, "good" actually means "is desired by an actually existing person." Second, when doing casuistry, James says that "good" means "to satisfy demand." Yet, everyone including James, clearly uses "good" in a sense other than demand-satisfaction. For example, when I say, "This is a good carving knife," I am not simply saying, "I demand that this carving knife have such and such properties." I may in fact demand that the knife have such and such properties, but that is separable from my use of the word "good." "Good" is primarily used to express an objective relation the knife has to its design function. A good carving knife has characteristics, like sharpness, that make it a good carving knife regardless of any subjective demands placed upon it. James could argue in response that the design function expresses human demands. At some point, concrete individuals demanded an easier way to slice meat, so they came up with the carving knife and called it "good" because it satisfied their demand. Yet, James would be confusing the impetus for creating an object with what makes that object good. What makes an individual carving knife a good carving knife is not whether it satisfies demands or not but whether it has those qualities a carving knife must have in order to perform its function, a function established by the demands of human subjects. Furthermore, to know whether carving knives in general are good, James needs to answer the question of whether it is good for human subjects to demand that they exist. Certainly we cannot say that whatever human subjects demand to exist is good, for human subjects have demanded the existence of atomic bombs and gas chambers. To decide whether a demand is a good demand, James would have to appeal to the function of a human being, but that is something James is loathe to do. The Aristotelian or Thomist has the tools to answer such questions, but James has barred himself from such explanations. The best he can do in his more mature moral philosophy is to say that the saints have a better perspective on the needs of the whole world through their connection with the Ideal Power, that they are willing and able to sacrifice their own good to satisfy the demands of the most needy, and that the rest of us ought to look to them for some guidance when we make our demands. We ought, for example, to focus our demands on creating objects which function to satisfy the moral demands of the needy rather than creating objects which function to satisfy our baser desires.

Granted, we do not claim the relation of a carving knife to its design function is a moral relation. However, we may replace knife with judge and find that good judges have certain characteristic virtues that make them good judges. If judges do not have these characteristics, we call them bad judges and in doing so make a claim about their moral relation to the function of judges. Counter-examples to James's meta-ethical claim about the meaning of "good" could be multiplied *ad infinitum*, and James himself seems to have to admit as much. He claims function of philosophers is to take a neutral stance towards moral ideals, adjudicate between the many demands proposed to them by non-philosophical moral agents, and try to satisfy as many demands as is possible. If philosophers do not fulfill their role and instead enter the ethical debate as "one of the parties in the fray," systematically ignoring the demands of those who differ from them, and choosing only to satisfy their own demands (say, by offering "an ethical philosophy dogmatically made up in advance"), then James would call them *bad* philosophers.[25] In calling neutral, demand-satisfying philosophers "good," though, James cannot mean that those philosophers simply satisfy the most demands people place on their philosophers. Instead, he is smuggling in his own pragmatic preconception of the function of philosophers when he judges them to be good or bad. James thus falls victim to his own critique both by espousing an ethical philosophy in advance of experience and by utilizing a definition of "good" that does not mean "to satisfy demand."

2.6 Sixth Critique: Problems with Thought Experiments

My final set of concerns about James's moral philosophy regard his thought experiments, which appear to beg too many questions to establish their conclusions. At the very outset of his discussion of the metaphysical question about goodness, James asks us to imagine a world with no sentient beings whatsoever. Yet this begs the question of the possibility of a universe without the existence of a creator. A Thomist would find such a scenario inconceivable and would offer both revelation and philosophical argumentation to prove its impossibility even in the imagination. Without this thought experiment, however, James is unable to get his account of obligation off the ground. If he cannot make the claim that obligation is coextensive with demand, then his later claim that good means to satisfy as many demands as possible becomes doubtful. James also claims that there are no absolute evils, but this denies the intuitions of many moral agents whose intuitions are drawn from their experience, intuitions that suggest that there are absolute evils and that these demands include a demand that they not be treated as preferences. Certain acts, many would claim, are simply evil regardless of whether anyone believed them to be so or not. James's approach eliminates the possibility of such strong evaluative claims at the outset, though, so in claiming that there are no absolute evils, James is simply drawing a logical inference from his presuppositions at the beginning of the essay, not giving his readers reasons to believe those presuppositions. Resorting to "common sense" and our "general philosophical prejudices" to dismiss Aristotelian and Thomistic philosophy and theology is insufficient defense of his position.

---

[25] Ibid., 204.

3. How James's Account of Saintliness Improves His Moral Philosophy

Having outlined James's account of saintliness and morality, I now can turn to the central question: What exactly does James mean when he says the saints are morally good? We have before us several possible answers, all of which could be supported by the combination of James's moral philosophy and his view of the saints.

3.1 The Demand-Satisfying Saint

The first possibility is that "Saint So-and-so is morally good" means that "Saint So-and-so satisfies the most demands possible." The moral goodness of a particular saint would then be directly proportional to the amount of such demands the saint satisfies. James implies something like this answer when he judges the value of the saints and saintly qualities in terms of their usefulness to humanity. Such an account squares well with James's utilitarian leanings, but it would not make the best sense of James's claims in *Varieties*, for such an account does not make a qualitative distinction between demands. If a saint were presented with the possibility of satisfying a hundred demands for chocolate ice cream by corpulent financiers and one demand for medical attention by a penniless beggar, the saint would clearly opt to satisfy the latter, even though doing so would not maximally satisfy demand, and James knows this.

Perhaps a better way to think about the moral goodness of the saints then would be to say that the saints are morally good because they maximally satisfy a particular set of demands in the universe. Figuring out how James would characterize that set is the difficult task. He could argue that they satisfy the qualitatively highest demands, or the demands most worthy of satisfaction. This account seems more plausibly to represent James's convictions in light of more mature moral philosophy he espouses in *Varieties*. If James would agree to this account, he would be faced with some difficulty, for it is unclear that any real saints maximally satisfy any demands or are even motivated to do so, as Robert Adams points out in response to Susan Wolf's caricature of the saints *qua* perfect utilitarians.[26] Further, any claims about maximization will be saddled with the criticisms leveled against utilitarianism regarding the impossibility of anyone knowing how to maximize demand-satisfaction in the long-run or even whether a given person has maximized demand-satisfaction. James would of course respond to such an objection by saying that our judgments about the moral goodness of the saints are always tentative and limited by our finite perspective. Finally, while James seems to suggest that the demands of the oppressed, the sick, and the impoverished are qualitatively highest, it is unclear that the saints do the best job at meeting their basic needs. We could perhaps overlook James's earlier commitment to maximization and assume that perhaps he would say the saints are morally good because they satisfy significantly more qualitatively highest demands than the average person.

It could be argued that if the saints really wanted to satisfy the most qualitatively highest demands possible, they would search for political or economic means of meeting those needs, but a scant few of the people we call saints meet human needs through such means. Perhaps, by responding to the demands of their constituents or customers, hard-headed and self-interested politicians or businesspeople could effectively do more to meet the needs of the downtrodden than could the saints. We do not tend to think that donating to charity to receive a tax break or passing a bill to satisfy one's constituency makes one saintly, but doing so may actually help the needy more than the saints can. James has not proven that the saints' way of satisfying the qualitatively highest demands is the most effective approach to meliorating the world, and he would have difficulty proving so.

---

[26] See Robert M. Adams, "Saints," *Journal of Philosophy* 81 (1984): 395-6.

Perhaps such a critique too hastily equates the demands of the oppressed, the sick, and the poor with stopping their oppression, healing their sickness, and eliminating their poverty. If such an equation were accurate, then politicians, lawyers, doctors, engineers, researchers, and businesspeople probably would be best suited to satisfy such demands.[27] Perhaps, though, what these people need exceeds what average professionals provide in the context of their work. Perhaps their needs, while including the physical, are irreducible to the physical. If James would find such a claim plausible, then perhaps he would argue that what makes the saints morally good is that they satisfy the demands non-saints will not or cannot satisfy. In other words, perhaps demands exist that only saints can satisfy because of their peculiar abilities and emotional dispositions. This account of the moral goodness of the saints is perhaps the one James intended in *Varieties*, and it appears to be pregnant with several neighboring accounts of the moral goodness of the saints, all of which have some merit and all of which echo some insight by other philosophers in this study.

3.2 The Saints as Perfect in an Ideal World

A second way to interpret James would be to assume that he believes the saints are morally good because their actions are perfect and that their peculiar abilities and emotional dispositions make it possible for them to act perfectly in an ideal world. Such an understanding of saintliness is suggested by Susan Wolf, who says that a saint is a "person whose every action as morally good as possible," and James seems to agree to a certain extent.[28] In his discussion of saintly charity, he says, "Perfect conduct is a relation between three terms: the actor, the objects for which he acts, and the recipients of the action. In order that conduct should be abstractly perfect, all three terms, intention, execution, and reception should be suited to one another."[29] Whether Wolf would agree with this understanding of perfect action, I am unsure, but it seems plausible to assume that "perfect conduct" in James's sentence is equivalent to Wolf's "every action as morally good as possible." Interestingly, while Wolf believes saints' actions are "as morally good as possible," she does not believe we should be saints, and while James does believe we should be saints of a sort, he does not believe the saints' conduct is perfect, at least not in this world. James believes that because this world is imperfect the saints are ill-adapted to it and thus cannot generate perfect actions, for the actions of the saints will never be received appropriately by imperfect recipients, and for James, actions are only perfect when they are successful in bringing about the aim of action. James argues that the saints are better suited to an ideal world, where they would have more success. Their value comes not in their perfect actions in this world but in their ushering forth and making visible the ideal world. Their very ill-adaptedness arrests our attention and calls into question our mode of living. This suggests that James could argue that "Saint So-and-so is morally good" means that "Saint So-and-so's conduct is perfect in an ideal world," which modifies Wolf's claim significantly.

---

[27] I am not suggesting that people of these professions cannot be saints but rather that people in these professions who are not saints may be able to do as much or more good from non-saintly motives when compared to their saintly counterparts and compared to saints outside of those and similar professions.

---

[28] Susan Wolf, "Moral Saints," *The Journal of Philosophy* 79, no. 8 (August 1982): 419.

[29] James, *Varieties*, 299-300.

3.3 The Saints as Servants of "the Other"

Third, James's account seems to resonate well with that of Edith Wyschogrod, whose account of saintliness I discuss briefly in chapter four, for James makes the demands of what Wyschogrod calls "the Other" the central concern of the saints. Many of James's examples of charity and asceticism involve doing what Wyschogrod says the saints do, namely substituting their needs for the needs of the Other. According to Wyschogrod, the saint is "one whose adult life in its entirety is devoted to the alleviation of sorrow (the psychological suffering) and pain (the physical suffering) that afflicts other persons without distinction of rank or group or, alternatively, that afflicts sentient beings, whatever the cost to the saint in pain or sorrow."[30] She also says that the saints are a "radical altruist[s]"[31] who puts themselves "totally at the disposal of the Other,"[32] who she describes as the "wretched of the earth," as the destitute, the needy. Wyschogrod thus focuses on the specific way in which the saints satisfy the demands of the Other rather than simply on the fact that the saints satisfy the needs of the Other. So, perhaps the specific demands the saints are supposed to satisfy are those of the wretched, those no one else will help.

3.4 The Saints as Follower of Divine Commands

Fourth, given the characteristics James ascribes to the saints, we can say that what separates the saints from non-saints is their friendly relationship with and surrender of will to the Ideal Power. That relationship gives the saints the ability to know and to satisfy the deepest demands of the needy and the will to act on that knowledge. The saints, then, satisfy the demands of the Ideal Power and in doing so reveal the demands of the Ideal Power to others. In obeying the demands of the Ideal Power, the saints appear to echo Robert Adams's divine command theory, which I discuss in chapter four. Also in line with Adams's understanding of the saints, they appear to resemble the divine in sharing the will of the Ideal Power and acting to satisfy those demands. To suggest that James could be labeled as a divine command theorist or a divine will theorist will ruffle many a pragmatist's feathers, but the fact is that the theme of moral goodness being connected to the demands of the Ideal Power runs through both "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life" and *Varieties*. Depending on how one construes the theories, one could plausibly call the James we find in those two works a divine command theorist or divine will theorist.

---

[30] Edith Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 34.

[31] Ibid., 58.

[32] Ibid., 98.

3.5 The Saints as Sharers of God's Motives

Fifth, if one finds such a suggestion too implausible, perhaps calling James a divine motivation theorist would be more palatable. In surrendering their wills and having them replaced by "loving and harmonious affections," saints come to share the Ideal Power's motives, which is exactly what Zagzebski's divine motivation theory argues. The question is of course one of grounding. Would James agree with Adams that obligation is grounded in divine commands? Would he argue that moral goodness is synonymous with resembling God or sharing God's motivations? As usual, it is difficult to pin James down here. In some passages, he appears to answer these questions affirmatively; in others, he seems to suggest otherwise.

3.6 Saints and Social Roles

A sixth route we might take in trying to understand James's account of the moral goodness of the saints is to suggest that the notion that the saints satisfy the demands non-saints will not or cannot may be translatable into a statement about the social role of the saints, for it defines the unique function of the saints vis-à-vis other people. The saints could be said to occupy the social role of minister to the needs of a sector of society others ignore. If they do not attend to the demands of the destitute, the repugnant, and the enfeebled, no one will. By discharging their social role well, they do the world a great service. The saints could also be said to occupy the role of intermediary between the Ideal Power and all the non-saints who, given their insusceptibility to its promptings, remain unaware of the moral demands placed upon them. In viewing the saints, they are made aware and perhaps even sensitized to a realm of experience of which they were hitherto ignorant.

3.7 The Saints and Social-Ecclesiastical and Historical-Eschatological Roles

Finally, they could be seen as occupying the role of a catalyst for amelioration in the universe. When the rest of the world is stuck in its fixed moral theories, its customs, and values, the saints prod the world to embrace a new moral vision, one that more creatively responds to the needs of those neglected under the old paradigm. The saints break rules that are too narrow, calling into question principles inadequate to the needs of the oppressed. Often we find saints doing things that at a given time and to a given people with particular philosophical prejudices and short-sightedness appear odd or even immoral. Saints often suffer for their saintliness and are rejected by some of their own people, sometimes to the point of martyrdom.[33] The saints prove themselves prophetic in calling the established rules into question and in revealing a new form of life that responds to higher ideals than those available at that time. These are exactly the roles Bernard Brennan and Ellen Kappy Suckiel see the saints playing in James's universe. According to Brennan, saints work alongside of the Ideal Power to accomplish its purposes, which it cannot achieve without the saint's help. Bernard Brennan writes:

> Through the saints, God's collaboration with mankind reaches its greatest effectiveness. His inspiration and power flood the saint, who, patiently, waits on the divine will. The unseen world, with which the saint seeks to conform his life, provides beatific bliss, which at the same time most often also brings the power to make extensive, practical changes in the world. The genuineness of the saint's holy bliss is witnessed to by the ways in which his life transforms the world.[34]

Moreover, the saints draw on moral and spiritual energy not available to the ordinary person or to the philosopher. This allows the saints to sacrifice themselves for the good of others. The philosopher can only assuage people as they already are, trying to balance whatever demands they happen to have. The saints, on the other hand, have the ability to change people and their demands, to transform them through *agape*. Suckiel notes this as a significant development in James's thought:

> Whatever the advantages of his view in "the Moral Philosopher," however, James goes beyond it in *Varieties*. Ultimately, James's moral ideal is not the inclusive satisfaction of any and all demands, but rather the achievement of religiously inspired self-sacrifice. In working to help God perfect the universe, we elevate the nature of our demands, as well as the actions which follow upon them. In so doing, we elevate that part of God's creation for which we are most directly responsible.[35]

---

[33] Christian saints interpret this as sharing in the similar suffering of Jesus, who taught that prophets are not honored in their own towns (Matthew 13:57; Luke 4:24; and John 4:44).

[34] Bernard Brennan, *William James* (New Haven, CT: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1968), 125.

[35] Suckiel, *The Pragmatic Philosophy of William James,* 111.

So, the saints' sacrificial love transcends maximal demand-satisfaction, which is to say that the saints can improve the world in a more significant way than can the moral philosopher. Brennan puts the point even more clearly: "In the saint we find that James discovers the apex of moral perfection. In saintliness he finds the highest development so far realized in the moral evolution of the world, an evolution which is advanced by the cooperative efforts of God and good men."[36] Suckiel agrees with Anderson, who claims that "[m]eliorism in this world requires that we occasionally call on the wild beasts of the philosophical desert."[37]

In *Varieties*, then, James seems to think of the saints as having a function, namely meliorating the universe, and that performing that function is what makes them morally good. When they do not perform their function well, James criticizes them; when they do, he praises them. The saints' function could plausibly be linked to the role or roles they play in society. On such a construal, "Saint So-and-so is morally good" would mean that Saint So-and-so discharges well a set of social roles. To illustrate, good judges possess the virtues expected of judges, and they perform the duties of judges well. If judges also demonstrate virtue in their other social roles, we call them good people. We might say the same for saints. Perhaps the saints occupy a cluster of social roles and discharge those social roles well. The saints' moral goodness then may plausibly be linked to the social roles they play in the universe, the social roles of care-giver, prophet, and Christ-type, ushering in a new moral universe through sacrificial love.

---

[36] Brennan, *The Ethics of William James*, (New York: Bookman Associates, 1961), 154.

[37] Douglas R. Anderson, "William James and the Wild Beasts of the Philosophical Desert," in *Philosophy Americana: Making Philosophy at Home in American Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 128.

Such an account of saintliness appears very attractive to me, as I will discuss in my closing chapter. However, on my view, the social role of the saints must first be indexed to their particular communities, while James, at his best, sees the saints as occupying a role or set of roles in the universe as a whole. It is unclear to me what it would mean to occupy a social role or set of social roles when the society in question includes the whole world. Even if it were conceivable for a finite human being to occupy such a role or roles, it simply is not the case that the saints do. To be morally good, the saints would have to discharge well whatever social roles we believe they have throughout the whole world. We do not think someone is a good father if he only does what fathers should do for a subset of his children, so we could not think of the saints as morally good whose impact is limited to some subset of the world's population. Moreover, working for the good of the universe simply is not part of the saints' motivational structure. Instead, they are concerned for the good of those around them. In attending to local needs, they do indeed contribute to the global good, but focusing on the global good the saints do tells us very little about the moral psychology of the saints. Finally, to call the saints morally good, we do not need to make the leap to the global level. Saints are recognized as morally good first by their local communities, and what is good for a particular community depends in part on factors specific to that community's place, time, composition, beliefs, customs, conflicts, and challenges. What is good for one community will be somewhat different than what is good for another community, and what is good for a given community at a given time will be different than what is good for that same community at a different time. Thus, the social roles the saints need to play and the way they play them will depend in part upon circumstances. Certainly there are universal goods that apply to all communities, but the saints' contribution to a community extends beyond universal goods to meet the particular needs of their community.

4. Criteria of Adequacy

Applying the criteria of adequacy to James is difficult, for as I have argued, he can be read many ways. Some general assessments are possible, particularly regarding the aspects of saintliness James points to that have more to do with the mystical aspect of saintliness and less to do directly with the moral goodness of the saints. The degree to which James is successful in constructing an account of saintliness that meets the criteria of adequacy depends in large part on which of the possible accounts of their moral goodness James actually espoused. In subsequent chapters I will be investigating the claims of a number of more recent philosophers who take up some of those possibilities, so in analyzing their accounts, I will to a certain extent be continuing my assessment of James's account.

4.1 Scope

With respect to scope, James is in one respect the best of the philosophers in this study and in another sense scope is a weak spot in his account. On the positive side, James does the best job at citing specific saints from a wide range of sources, often quoting their biographers at length to illustrate a point. On the negative side, James is too narrow in some respects and too broad in others. I have already argued that James overemphasizes the extreme mystics and ascetics to the exclusion of the more moderate saints. We find no acknowledgement of saints whose primary contribution was in non-mystical theology. While James's range of saints is impressive, he focuses almost exclusively on the group of saints that appear in Europe from the High Middle Ages to the Counter-Reformation and on more recent American religious figures, many of them members of sects or cults. The only saints between the second and eleventh centuries that he mentions are Augustine, Jerome, and John Climacus; the first he mentions only to quote, and the others he references only to critique their views on obedience. James's neglect of the great saints of late antiquity and medieval times betrays his bias against what Enlightenment historians derisively call the "Dark Ages." While those centuries were perhaps "dark" in some respects, the saints were beacons of light. I think particularly of Perpetua, Polycarp, Anthony of Egypt, Basil the Great, Simeon and Daniel the Stylites, Ambrose of Milan, Augustine of Hipp, Patrick, Benedict of Nursia, Gregory the Great, Anselm of Canterbury, Bernard of Clairvaux. Leaving out such key figures in the history of the saints diminishes the credibility of James's account of saintliness and reflects some Enlightenment bias on his part. On the other hand, I would argue that James's scope is too wide, for he includes many individuals of questionable saintliness. He allows Muhammad, the Buddha, members of the mind-cure movement of the late nineteenth century, Quakers, Transcendentalists, and Unitarians to sit at the same table as the great Christian saints. His is clearly what I have called an expansive definition of saintliness. The problem with such an approach is that by taking such a broad range of data, James is unable to come up with an account of saintliness that can successfully bring unity out of diversity. As I have argued above, he attempts to make individual religious experience the common ground on which these very different individuals can stand fails in the final analysis because theology, religious practices, and communal religious experience all affect the quality and content of individual religious experience.

4.2 Internal Consistency

James never intended to construct an internally consistent account of saintliness or of their moral goodness. James would rather embrace inconsistency and include more true insights about the saints and their moral goodness than rule out a single true insight because it is inconsistent with some other insight. The inconsistencies between "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life" and *Varieties* can be accounted for by assuming James's moral philosophy evolved in the intervening years between the publication of the two documents. Other inconsistencies remain, as in his use of ethical principles made up in advance of experience while in the same breath denouncing such principles and in his rejection of religious institutions as necessarily evil while at the same time agreeing with their denouncements of excessive asceticism, hence validating their role in hemming in individual religious experience. The main inconsistency in James's work is in his accounting for the moral goodness of the saints. The array of possible accounts that arise from *Varieties* is startling, especially since some of them seem to rule out others of them.

4.3 Conservatism

James's account of saintliness is conservative insofar as it emphasizes the virtues of the saints, their austerities, their emotions, and their connection to the Ideal Power (although referring to God in such a way is not conservative). Overall, his approach is radical, though. To include non-Christians in the set of data, to remove from the definition of saintliness any reference to orthodox Christian belief, and to separate individual religious experience from the religious experience of traditional, practiced-based communities are all radical departures from the traditional way of understanding saintliness, though they are in line with the liberal Protestantism of James's day. That this is the case should not surprise us, and it certainly would not bother James, for his goal was to preserve what he believed was best about traditional religion by divorcing it from what he believed to be superstitious, regressive detritus. Compared with those like Nietzsche who would have liked to remove the saints from their pedestals entirely, James appears conservative. Against the tradition, though, James is staunchly liberal.

4.4 Simplicity

James would argue that his account is simple because it accounts for what make a wide range of individuals called saints saintly. He thinks he has united them all through their common individual religious experience and shown that their similar religious experiences evoke a similar pattern of response in the form of purity, asceticism, strength of soul, and charity. I have argued that such a move is illicit despite its simplicity. However, compared to those that would like to reduce saintliness to neurology by arguing that neurological explanations preclude theological explanations for religious phenomena like saintliness, James appears to complicate what would be a very simple scientific account of saintliness by arguing for the reality of the Ideal Power. Here I think James is to be commended for his willingness to embrace complexity in the face of pressure from the scientific community, for he is willing to take the experiences of the saints at face value, trusting that their religious insights may prove truer than his scientific ones.

4.5 Fruitfulness

James account is certainly fruitful insofar as it illuminates certain aspects of saintly lives. We can take people James did not discuss and compare them to the model James has constructed and determine whether or not they are saints, according to James' criteria of sainthood. We can also decide the degree to which they exhibit saintly characteristics, and James has given his readers plenty to work with on that score. He also offers several possible ways to understand that person's moral goodness, but because *Varieties* opens up so many possibilities, James's account is only of limited value.

5. Conclusion

James has offered a rich and thoughtful but problematic account of saintliness. Although his account of moral goodness remains somewhat obscure, marrying his moral philosophy to his work on the saints yields a more reasonable account of the goodness of the saints. Indeed, if the moral philosophy that Brennan and Suckiel see emerging from *Varieties* accurately represents James's position, then his account is rather compelling. Later twentieth-century philosophers' accounts of saintliness branch out from the trunk of James's complex and fruitful study, and while most of them are certainly clearer and more amenable to categorization than James's account is, none of them quite match its richness. It is to these accounts that I now turn.

CHAPTER FOUR

Recent Accounts of Saintliness

Following James's *Varieties*, philosophers generally avoided the topic of saintliness until J. O. Urmson revived discussions of the saints with "Saints and Heroes" (1958) in which he treated saintliness exclusively as a moral phenomenon, intentionally stripping the term of its religious connotations.[1] Aside from responses to Urmson's essay, silence again reigned until Susan Wolf in "Moral Saints" (1982) disquietingly claimed that saints (again conceived exclusively as moral exemplars) are ugly and boring and ought not to be imitated.[2] Robert Adams, in a response to Wolf in "Saints" (1984), marked a return to thinking of saints in religious terms.[3] His *Finite and Infinite Goods* and Linda Zagzebski's *Divine Motivation Theory* utilize real saints (as opposed to theoretical constructs) in their frameworks, and both attempt to connect the saint's moral exemplarity to God.[4] Edith Wyschogrod and Andrew Michael Flescher, so far as I am aware, are the only other two recent moral philosophers to discuss the saints and their relation to moral philosophy in any depth, but they, like Urmson and Wolf, take the saints to be moral exemplars.[5] To them, the saints' religious devotion is accidental, not essential to their saintliness. Adams's and Zagzebski's work stand out as exceptions to the rule that when invoking the saints in moral theory, one must take the religious aspect of saintliness to be essential to their moral goodness.[6]

---

[1] J. O. Urmson, "Saints and Heroes," in *Essays in Moral Philosophy*, ed. A. I. Melden (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1958).

[2] Susan Wolf, "Moral Saints," *The Journal of Philosophy* 79, no. 8 (August 1982): 419-39.

[3] Robert M. Adams, "Saints," *Journal of Philosophy* 81 no. 7 (July 1984): 392-401.

[4] Robert M. Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). Linda Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

In this chapter, I explore what happens when James's successors emphasize one aspect of James's account of saintliness to the neglect or exclusion of the other. Susan Wolf emphasizes the moral aspect of saintliness, defining the saints according to the normative ethical theories available to her given her own meta-ethical commitments. She argues that the saints (as understood by those normative theories) make unattractive moral ideals, proving to us that morality is not as important as modern moral theories make it out to be. I critique Wolf for her neglect of James's second aspect of saintliness, their close relationship with God, and show that while Wolf is correct that morality in the way she conceives it is not a proper object of extreme devotion, the saints show us that devotion to God, far from making the saints ugly and boring, makes them attractive exemplars. I then turn to Robert Adams and Linda Zagzebski, who in their own ways draw connections between the saints' relationship to God and their moral exemplarity. I find their approach to be much more illuminating of saintliness, and though I quibble with the ways they articulate the saints' relationship with God and the ways they connect the saints' relationship with God to moral exemplarity, I argue that Zagzebski and Adams bring us closer to understanding Christian saintliness and its role in Christian ethics.

---

[5] Edith Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990). Andrew Michael Flescher, *Saints, Heroes, and Ordinary Morality* (Washington, D. C.: Georgetown University Press, 2003).

[6] Among sociologists, the trend has also been to describe saints in ways that bracket out their religious devotion. Max Weber and Joachim Wach discuss them primarily in terms of their charisma and the impact they have on their communities. John Mecklin argues that the category itself is no longer meaningful. Joachim Wach, *Sociology of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944). Maximilian Weber, "The Nature of Charismatic Authority and its Routinization" in *Theory of Social and Economic Organization,* translated by A. R. Anderson and Talcott Parsons, (New York: The Free Press, 1947). John Mecklin, *The Passing of the Saint: A Study of a Cultural Type* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941), 5.

1. Susan Wolf on Ugly, Boring Saints

I begin with Susan Wolf's astonishing claim in "Moral Saints" that saintliness is unappealing, that we ought not to aspire to be saints or want to have saints as our friends. Her conception of the saints is that of the do-gooder, people whose lives are dominated by the desire to do what is right. Since modern moral theorists are divided about what makes an action right, she considers what she calls Utilitarian Loving Saints and Kantian Rational Saints separately and dismisses each in turn as attractive life ideals. I then critique Wolf for setting up a straw man, for she misconstrues saintliness by taking morality rather than God to be the object of the saints' devotion.

1.1 Susan Wolf's Moral Theory

According to Susan Wolf, morality is all about right action, which she conceives of as not obstructing others as they pursue their chosen goods and as minimally helping them pursue their chosen goods to the extent that duty requires. Her meta-ethical theory is consonant with Utilitarian and Kantian approaches to ethics, but she rejects the extreme versions of both. For her, moral value is one type of value among many that human beings can pursue, and from the point of view of personal development one ought not to allow one's moral values to dominate over one's nonmoral values. Her view is strongly influenced by intuitionism, though she does not intend for her form of intuitionism to be a direct alternative to “rigorous, systematically developed, moral theories.”[7] Rather, she hopes to diminish the importance of such normative theories. She hopes to do so by painting a picture of the saints (as a Utilitarian or Kantian would understand them) that exposes their unattractiveness. By proving that the saints are ugly and boring, she hopes to make manifest the problem with assuming that our lives ought to be dominated by a desire to be moral.

1.2 Wolf's Account of the Saints in General

According to Susan Wolf, saints are those whose lives are dominated by a commitment to improving the welfare of others or of society as a whole. She divides saints into two types: Loving Saints and Rational Saints. Loving Saints derive happiness from doing saintly actions; they see their individual good as equivalent to the social good. Rational Saints are ones who sacrifice their own interests for the sake of duty; they share the normal person’s basic motivational system but act against inclination, because for them, the social good trumps individual good. For Wolf, saints are allowed to have diversity in their personality, but they are all the same in the virtues, and they have the virtues to a non-standard degree. They are all patient, considerate, even-tempered, hospitable, charitable in thought and deed, reluctant to make negative judgments of other people, and careful not to show unjustified favoritism. None of the saints will appreciate low moral tone, the darker arts like satire and film noire, or even the fine arts like opera and painting. They cannot “appreciate” the fine arts because they will not have time or energy for developing nonmoral interests, and may even object to some of them. For example, moral saints would never acquire an interest in gourmet cooking, for gourmet cooking takes time to appreciate with sophistication, and the money involved could always be better spent on helping the needy than on pleasing the palate of a gourmand. The same goes for any number of activities in which we recognize standards of excellence and exemplars of those nonmoral goods, but which take time and energy away from moral concerns.

---

[7] Wolf, “Moral Saints,” 439.

Loving Saints derive happiness from doing actions that are as morally good as possible. According to Wolf, they are clearly abnormal human beings because they take great joy in "improving the welfare of others or of society as a whole." They do what they do out of love because in bringing about the social good, they also bring about their own individual good. Unlike the Loving Saints, Rational Saints do not take any pleasure from doing what is good. Rather, Rational Saints believe that the social good should trump their individual good, and out of a strong sense of duty, they do what is necessary to bring about the social good. On her view, Loving Saints will take pathological joy in sacrificing their own goods for the goods of others, while Rational Saints will be motivated by a pathological fear of damnation. According to Wolf, the Utilitarian will prefer Loving Saints and a Kantian will prefer Rational Saints.

1.3 Wolf's Critique of Utilitarian Loving Saints

The ideal Utilitarians goal is to bring about the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people and finds their own happiness in doing so. Even if Utilitarians could not or would not want to create a world made up entirely of Loving Saints, they should still aspire to become Loving Saints themselves. Rather than promoting moral saintliness in others, they should privately and quietly devote all of their time and energy to bringing about the greatest happiness for the greatest number, making sure to promote their own self-realization only insofar as it contributes to the happiness and self-realization of others or to society as a whole. Loving Saints, after all, can bring about greater happiness for more people than can a normal, well-rounded person, and Utilitarianism claims that we should bring about the greatest general happiness possible. Thus, ideal Utilitarians would have to be very much like Loving Saints, so long as they include self-realization as a part of the general happiness and avoid being condescending, for those traits would likely take away from the general happiness rather than promote it.[8]

Wolf raises some serious questions about whether Loving Saints (and ideal Utilitarians if, as she argues, ideal Utilitarians are sufficiently like Loving Saints) are worthy of emulation. Wolf claims that Loving Saints "show a weakness and shallowness in [their] appreciation" of nonmoral activities.[9] They are, in a certain sense, blind to nonmoral goods.[10] For, Loving Saints, on this view, will have to be very strict in monitoring the way they allot their time and energy in the pursuit of such nonmoral goods. They cannot appreciate nonmoral goods for their own sakes because they only value them as part of the general happiness. Wolf's claim is that to enjoy nonmoral goods properly, they must enjoy them as ends, not merely instrumentally.[11] Yet Loving Saints value nonmoral goods only insofar as they promote moral goods. There is no reason to suspect that they would not, without hesitation, exchange these goods for other goods that promote the general happiness equally effectively. Most people would view this sort of reasoning about our nonmoral attachments as involving what Bernard

---

[8] Ibid., 428.

[9] Ibid., 430.

[10] Ibid., 424.

[11] Ibid., 429-31.

Williams calls, “one thought too many.”[12] Anyone who only enjoys painting or playing tennis or music merely as a part of the general happiness lives an impoverished life, so we ought not to strive to be like such a person.

1.4 Wolf’s Critique of Kantian Rational Saints

Having raised difficulties for a version of moral saintliness favored by Utilitarianism, Wolf examines the connection between ideal Kantians and Rational Saints. It would seem that Kantians would prefer Rational Saints to Loving Saints, for Rational Saints do what they do out of respect for the moral law, and not out of interest or inclination. However, it is not clear that Kantians must agree that one’s life should be dominated by a desire to be moral. On one interpretation of the categorical imperative (in its various formulations), duty does not seem to require moral saintliness. According to this interpretation, one must simply make sure that one’s maxims for action are universalizable, and that one does not treat other human beings merely as means, but also as ends. In Wolf’s words, the categorical imperative seems to require “unerring obedience to a limited set of side-constraints,” and this does not commit the Kantian to an ideal conception of a human person in the fuller sense she is critiquing.[13] On another interpretation, however, there does seem to be in the Kantian framework an unlimited demand that we encourage moral growth, for Kant claims that we have a duty of benevolence to ourselves and others as well as a duty to increase our moral perfection. Wolf reasons, if it is virtuous to act from these duties, and the more one performs these acts, the more virtuous one becomes, then it is clear that one ought always to perform these actions. On this interpretation of Kant, then, Kantian saints do seem to be "dominated by a commitment to improving the welfare of others or of society as a whole."[14]

---

[12] Bernard Williams, *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); quoted in Wolf, “Moral Saints,” 430 and 431.

[13] Wolf, “Moral Saints,” 420.

Wolf considers each of the two above interpretations of Kant. On the second interpretation, Kantian saints are sufficiently similar to Rational Saints, and so are subject to the same critiques Wolf levels against Rational Saints, which are similar to those she levels against Loving Saints. On the one hand, Kantian saints whose lives are dominated by a desire to be moral, think one thought too many when they take on nonmoral interests, for they see these interests only through the lens of doing their moral duty. They cannot appreciate these goods on their own terms. According to Wolf, "the Kantian would have to value his activities and character traits insofar as they are manifestations of respect for the moral law."[15]

The first interpretation of Kant seems preferable to Wolf. It allows perfect moral agents to fulfill the demands of the moral law without having their personalities completely consumed by obedience or loyalty to it, for they may pursue their own personal interests so long as they do not disobey the categorical imperative, and so long as they set aside some time and energy for fulfilling their duties of benevolence to others and to themselves. Yet, Wolf thinks there are still problems. Kant explicitly talks about "duties of apathy and self-mastery" that keep the disinterested, rational part of the human self in control. Ideal Kantians must keep their passion for and appreciation of nonmoral goods in check so that they do not overcome the disinterested, rational part, and according to Wolf, this is to give these goods "a necessarily attenuated place" in life.[16] Furthermore, Wolf objects to the notion that one can put a limit on one's capacity to be moral. This interpretation of Kant denies supererogatory acts, for it allows for people to be perfectly moral so long as they meet the minimal requirements of the moral law. This is a problem for the Kantian system, as J. O. Urmson argues in his article, "Saints and Heroes."[17] Wolf wants to agree with Urmson and say that supererogatory actions are morally better, but she also wants to argue that the supererogatory life is an undesirable ideal.[18]

---

[14] Ibid., 430-1.

[15] Ibid., 431.

1.5 Wolf's Conclusions

Wolf concludes that moral saints as understood via the Utilitarian and Kantian paradigms present unattractive ideals for human life. Because of their devotion to moral goods, their resultant avoidance of certain nonmoral goods, and their relegation of other nonmoral goods to the service of moral goods, saints will be "dull-witted or humorless or bland." They will also be lacking in well-roundedness. Since having a good wit, a good sense of humor, being interesting, and being well-rounded are good human traits, humans should not aspire to be moral saints. As a result, Wolf claims that we have a choice: we must either change our moral theories so that the ideal agent in our theories makes for an attractive exemplar of every aspect of life, or change what we mean by affirming an ethical theory. Wolf takes the second route, claiming that our moral theories ought to look to figures like these as paragons of morality, but that we ought not to aspire to make morality our all-encompassing concern as they do. She takes this route because she believes that moral value is not the only value we recognize, nor should it dominate our lives as it does the lives of the saints. She holds onto the ideal of moral saints because she wants to maintain a place for supererogation in moral theory. We should ascribe praise to the moral saints insofar as they are moral, even though we should not try to become moral saints ourselves. She writes:

---

[16] Ibid., 432.

[17] Urmson, "Saints and Heroes," 201.

[18] Wolf, "Saints," 432.

> A moral theory that does not contain the seeds of an all-consuming ideal of moral sainthood thus seems to place false and unnatural limits on our opportunity to do moral good and our potential to deserve moral praise. Yet the main thrust of the arguments of this paper has been leading to the conclusion that, when such ideals are present, they are not ideals to which it is particularly reasonable or healthy or desirable for human beings to aspire.[19]

The problem, according to Wolf, is in morality's tendency to dominate over less demanding desires. Morality forces its devotees to subsume or demote all other interests to its service. She writes, "The way in which morality, unlike other possible goals, is apt to dominate is particularly disturbing, for it seems to require either the lack or the denial of the existence of an identifiable, personal self."[20] To devote oneself to morality, Wolf thinks one must give up on many of the interests that make one a distinctive self. For this reason, she claims that morality is not a proper object of passion and that it dangerously lures its adherents toward moral fanaticism.

---

[19] Ibid., 433.

[20] Ibid., 424.

1.8 Assessment of Wolf's Argument

Wolf's conclusion that one ought not to aspire to saintliness is shocking, and she intends it to shock. Aside from Nietzsche and Sartre, every other philosopher who has discussed the saints, from those of late antiquity to Wolf herself, have taken the saints to be admirable and attractive moral ideals to which everyone ought, insofar as possible, to aspire. Furthermore, the general consensus regarding the saints outside of philosophical circles is that they are worthy objects of our imitation and admiration. Indeed, a primary reason we regard people as saints is that they are widely recognized as exemplars of moral virtue. Yet, Wolf is certainly right to suggest that morality, as she defines it, must be less important than modern moral theorists think it is. So, where does her argument go wrong? I would argue that Wolf's own meta-ethical commitment to thinking of morality, restricted as it is to non-interference with and minimal assistance to others as they pursue their own desires, is far too limited to capture the true nature of saintliness. The life well-lived must include something more, and it is to that more that the saints point us. Wolf does not see that the saints' devotion is not to morality as she construes it but to God. Their devotion to God makes them more, not less interesting, and more, not less attractive as moral ideals. Robert Adams, unlike Wolf, incorporates James's second aspect of saintliness: their ultimate devotion to God, not morality. His understanding of the life well-lived is broader and richer than Wolf's, and in the context of his broader view he is able both to characterize the saints more accurately and to account for their attractiveness. It is to his work that I now turn.

2. Robert Adams's Holy, Devoted Saints

In reviewing Robert Adams's insightful critique of Wolf and, more importantly, his own positive account of saints, I hope to establish three points: the saints' devotion to God is essential to their saintliness; the moral goodness of the saints is connected in some important way to their devotion to God; and a concept of vocation helps to explain why the saints are good for doing what they do even if we ought not to do exactly as they do. I will then raise concerns about Adams's overstating of the otherness of the saints; his neglect of the practices, communities, institutions, and traditions that make saintliness possible; and his insufficient characterization of the emotions, motives, motive dispositions, and virtues of the saints. I start with Adams's critique of Wolf.

2.1 Adams's Critique of Wolf

Two years after Wolf's essay appeared, Adams responded with his essay, "Saints." His thesis is that her definition of saintliness is faulty. Given her definition of saintliness, it follows that the saints are unworthy ideals from imitation, but he suggests that there are no good reasons to accept her definition. Indeed, the real saints are not and do not even try to be as Wolf describes them. According to Adams, the real saints are not lacking in individuality or the "ability to enjoy the enjoyable in life." Nor are they "very, very nice" or "dull-witted or humorless or bland." They are more often called eccentric individuals than boring clones of ethical archetypes.[21] Wolf's fundamental error is that she assumes that to be a saint is to be a perfect person and that to be a perfect person means to maximize moral value in every action.[22] As a result, she ends up with a very unattractive and unlivable picture of human life, which she rightly rejects.[23] Adams believes that the saints faithfully resemble God not only in ways Wolf would call "moral," but also in their intellectual and aesthetic excellences. He agrees with Wolf that we ought to affirm intellectual and aesthetic excellence in addition to the value of other-regarding actions, but he disagrees that actual saints are excessively devoted to the latter at the expense of the former.

---

[21] Adams, "Saints," 392.

Unlike Wolf, Adams claims that while saints are committed to other humans, "it would be misleading to say that their lives have been 'dominated by a commitment to improving the welfare of others or of society as a whole.' For sainthood is an essentially religious phenomenon."[24] Any commitments saints have to other people must be considered in the context of a more comprehensive devotion to God. So while Wolf sees a problem in the limited resources available to moral saints, Adams responds with, "Not so the saints. The substance of sainthood is not sheer will power striving like Sisyphus (or like Wolf's Rational Saint) to accomplish a boundless task, but goodness overflowing from a boundless source."[25] Because of their connection to and confidence in the boundless goodness of God, the saints are both empowered to do more and greater things for those in need and freed to allow God to provide where they cannot. When they fail to be morally perfect they trust that God's grace will cover their multitude of sins, both of commission and omission. As Adams argues, "They are not in general even trying to make their *every action* as good as possible . . .. Saintliness is not perfectionism."[26] Recognizing the religious dimension of saintliness also helps Adams overcome what Wolf sees as an exclusive disjunction between self-giving and being interested in one's own personal fulfillment. If we conceive of the saints as religious rather than ethical exemplars, then we can agree with James against Wolf that this is a false dichotomy, for the saints find their self-fulfillment in giving themselves both to God and to others. The saints understand that true happiness *qua* personal fulfillment cannot be had directly; one must first let go of one's narrowly self-interested desires before one can find true fulfillment.

---

[22] One might argue that Wolf has identified a puzzle for Christians who are called to be perfect. Matthew 5:48 reads "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Being perfect might seem to require maximizing every moral value. However, being "perfect" in Matthew's sense does not likely mean maximizing every moral value. Luke's parallel rendition substitutes "merciful" for "perfect," and John Calvin rightly argues in his, Commentary of Matthew, Mark, Luke, Vol. 1 that the injunction here is to a possess the specific virtue of pure kindness. He writes, "This *perfection* does not mean *equality,* but relates solely to resemblance. However distant we are from the perfection of God, we are said to be *perfect, as he is perfect,* when we aim at the same object, which he presents to us in Himself. Should it be thought preferable, we may state it thus. There is no comparison here made between God and us: but the *perfection* of God means, *first,* that free and pure kindness, which is not induced by the expectation of gain; — and, *secondly,* that remarkable goodness, which contends with the malice and ingratitude of men. This appears more clearly from the words of Luke, *Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful:* for *mercy* is contrasted with a mercenary regard, which is founded on private advantage."

[23] Adams, "Saints," 393.

[24] Ibid., 395.

In *Finite and Infinite Goods*, Adams argues that we mischaracterize saints if we conceive of them *via negativa*, as those individuals who never do anything wrong, for the real saints are usually controversial and open to genuine critique.[27] Instead, we ought to think of them in terms of the positive quality of holiness. The saints "contain a richness we can hardly name" which is "bound to be alien in ways we may find uncomfortable."[28] We find many of their actions bizarre because they see themselves as connected to a good that transcends our overly narrow ethical principles and our all-too-human understanding of well-being. They do not fit our formulas because our formulas are not designed to assess the rightness of *their* actions and goodness of *their* character; the lives of saints are intelligible only when we realize that they point beyond their own actions and beyond their own character to a transcendent Good.

---

[25] Ibid., 396.

[26] Ibid., 396.

[27] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 52.

[28] Ibid., 52.

Instead of seeing the saints primarily as exemplars of moral perfection, we ought to see them as revealers of God's goodness. Moral worthiness does not capture saintliness, but rather we see that goodness is present in the saints in an extraordinarily powerful way.[29] In "Saints," Adams offers the following account of the nature of saintliness:

> Saints are people in whom the holy or divine can be seen. In a religious view they are people who submit themselves, in faith, to God, not only loving Him but also letting His love possess them, so that it works through them and shines through them to other people. What interests a saint may have will then depend on what interests God has, for sainthood is a participation in God's interests.[30]

Later, in *Finite and Infinite Goods*, he claims the goodness we see in the saints consists in their faithfully resembling God. While their resemblance to God is limited by their finite capacities, within the context of their particular vocations they reveal aspects of God's infinite goodness through their lives, aspects that may not be available to ordinary people or even to other saints. They are not imitable, except at a very general level. We can all faithfully resemble God and obey God's commands as the saints do, but we cannot and in some cases ought not attempt to resemble God in exactly the same way the saints do, for each individual is uniquely called to resemble some "part" of God's infinite goodness.

---

[29] Adams, "Saints," 396.

[30] Ibid., 398.

We ought not to ask, "What would Francis of Assisi do in a similar situation," for we may not be called to do what Francis would do. After all, Francis' solution sometimes involved giving up his cloak, and we are probably not all called to disrobed ministry.[31] Certainly we can imitate Francis in some respects, and we would all be better if we allowed ourselves to be confronted and critiqued in light of his holiness. However, we certainly cannot utilize Francis as Rosalind Hursthouse would employ the completely virtuous agent when we try to determine what the right course of action is in a given situation.[32]

Because Adams sees saints primarily as religious exemplars, and because he sees their goodness as but a finite reflection of God's infinite goodness, he is open to a wider range of saints. He lists Fra Angelico, Thomas Aquinas, and J. S. Bach as examples and even considers the possibility of Van Gogh. He can do so because he agrees with Wolf that morality, when construed as always doing what one is required to do, is not a proper object of maximal devotion. Rather, the divine, because it is richer and broader than morality, is the only proper object of maximal devotion.[33] So, for Adams, those who resemble God in some way possess excellence. Those who resemble God in many areas of their lives are probably saints on Adams's view.[34]

---

[31] See Hester Goodenough Gelber's "A Theater of Virtue: The Exemplary World of St. Francis of Assisi," in *Saints and Virtues*, ed. John Stratton Hawley (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), 16-7.

[32] Hursthouse's virtue theory grounds right action in what the completely virtuous person would characteristically do in like circumstances. Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 28.

[33] Adams, "Saints," 400.

[34] It is important to Adams that the resemblance be faithful without being a caricature, so we should assume that the saints' resemblance to God is not of the sort that makes a mockery of certain attributes of God. One might imagine, for example, someone claiming to resemble God by exerting power

While Adams believes the saints ought not to be reduced to moral exemplars, he does believe that they play an important role in moral theory. Their lives point to the essential connection between morality and religion, which Adams hopes to recover with his version of divine command theory. At the end of "Saints," he sketches the moral theory he develops more completely in other essays and most comprehensively in *Finite and Infinite Goods*:"

> The fact is that many of the concepts that we use in morality were developed in a religious tradition, and to tear them loose entirely from a context in which something (distinct perhaps from morality but including it) claims maximal devotion seems to threaten something that is important for the seriousness of morality. It may not, in other words, be so easy to have a satisfactory conception of morality without religion–that is, without belief in an appropriate object of maximal devotion, an object that is larger than morality but embraces it.[35]

I turn now to Adams's attempt to establish the relationship between morality and God to clarify the role the saints play in his moral theory.

2.2 Aspects of Robert Adams's Moral Theory Important for his Account of Saintliness

In *Finite and Infinite Goods* and its sequel, *A Theory of Virtue*, Adams develops his Platonic and theistic moral theory. Discussing goodness in those contexts in which it involves excellence, he refers not only to moral excellence but also to aesthetic and intellectual excellence. He argues that finite things are good insofar as they imperfectly but faithfully resemble the infinite Good, which he equates with the God of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. He then accounts for well-being by saying that the good life is life of enjoyment of and loyalty to the Good. In *A Theory of Virtue*, he gives a fuller account

---

but not showing love or mercy. On Adams's view, such a person does not faithfully resemble God. God would have to recognize the person's excellence as being a true likeness of his excellence to count as faithful resemblance. Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 33-4.

[35] Adams, "Saints," 400-1.

of the life lived *for* the Good. Adams believes the realm of obligation is distinct from the realm of goodness *qua* excellence. He defends a heavily modified divine command theory, restricted to the realm of obligation, to things we *have* to do, claiming "Any action is ethically wrong if and only if it is contrary to the commands of a loving God."[36] For Adams, "the good is more basic than the right, but...obligation has an origin distinct from the good."[37] Adams's framework for ethics is Platonic, realistic, and theistic. Five aspects of his theory that bear on his account of saintliness are the ideas that to be good is to resemble God faithfully, that a person's well-being is characterized by being "*for* the Good," that being *for* the Good involves obedience to God's commands, that being *for* the Good involves devotion to God, and that devotion comes in a variety of forms that Adams calls "vocations." I will outline each of these in turn.

Faithful resemblance to God. According to Adams, to be good is to resemble God faithfully.[38] God's goodness is best characterized as intrinsic excellence, and Adams believes an advantage of his theory is that he can derive both the value of persons as persons and the value of well-being from God's excellence. He argues that persons are valuable, even sacred, because they are images of God. The saints are thus good, as are all people, because they possess the *imago Dei*. Beyond that, they resemble God through possessing some excellences that resemble God's goodness. They resemble God though their love, their creativity, their beauty, their knowledge, their power and through many other means.

---

[36] Robert M. Adams, *The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays in Philosophical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 132.

[37] Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, 263.

[38] Adams overcomes the objection that "good" does not *mean* "faithfully resembles God" using Kripke's and Putnam's direct reference theory. According to Adams, given direct reference theory, we need not worry about the semantics of "good" when we theorize about the nature of goodness. Instead, what we ought to do is figure out what "semantic role" the nature of goodness plays and then see which of the proposed natures of goodness best fits those roles. For Adams, the roles goodness plays are that it is a real property, that it is intrinsically valuable, that excellent things resemble it, and that it is the proper object of *eros*, admiration, and recognition. He believes that God is the best candidate to fill all of these roles, and hence that God is the good and the nature of goodness is to resemble God faithfully. Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980). Hilary Putnam, "The Meaning of 'Meaning'," in *Mind, Language and Reality, Philosophical Papers* 2, 215-71. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

Being for the Good. Adams accounts for well-being by describing the good life as one "characterized by *enjoyment of the excellent.*"[39] In other words, the individual person must enjoy life, and that life must be excellent. By an excellent life, Adams means that the person must love the Good, be *for* (as in allied with) the Good. Typically people show that they are *for* the Good by loving the Good and doing good deeds, but Adams also makes a convincing argument for the value of symbolic gestures signifying one's allegiance to the Good such as a worship and martyrdom. Here again, the saints are good because they are *for* the Good in their actions and in their symbolic gestures.

Obedience to God's commands. Another advantage Adams claims for his theory is that it can account for moral obligation and supererogation in a way that makes the good preeminent but does not allow it to swallow up the right. His approach attempts to affirm the insights of both virtue theory and divine command theory, overcoming the standard problems with divine command theory by embedding it within the context of his account of the Good. As was the case in his account of the nature of goodness, Adams does not think we can find the nature of obligation by looking to the semantics of obligation. Instead, we must specify the roles the best candidate for the nature of moral obligation must fill. He argues that the obligatory will find its place against the backdrop of "human actions, feelings, and utterances," but also be connected to rights, guilt, value, and the good.[40] According to Adams, it is important that we limit the discussion of moral obligation to those contexts in which it refers to something we *have* to do. The obligatory must be something we should "take seriously and care about...be motivated to comply with...[and] ground *reasons* for compliance."[41] Not doing what is obligatory ought to generate appropriate blame and cause guilt, which Adams sees as social alienation that can be overcome by apology and forgiveness.[42] Obligations give us reasons to comply because they arise out of social contexts in which we value our social bond. We are motivated to comply with our obligations not because we hope to gain or continue our social relationship with the person doing the commanding but rather because we value that relationship already.[43] This understanding of the nature of obligation fits well with our pre-moral conception of obligation in which we do what our parents say because we value a close relationship with them and feel guilty when we anger them by not complying with their demands.[44]

---

[39] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 93.

While Adams believes obligation arises within social contexts and that we learn obligation in the context of purely human relationships, he also believes that "actual human social requirements are simply not good enough to constitute the basis of moral obligation."[45] For, there are obviously cases in which we ought not to do what someone commands us to do, even if we value our social bond with that person. It matters what sort of person is doing the commanding, for what reasons that person is issuing the command, and whether the action being commanded is good. Adams argues that we can distinguish between human commands we ought to obey and those we ought not to obey. For example, he believes that "we normally have more reason to comply with the requests and demands of the knowledgeable, wise, or saintly."[46] However, ultimately, Adams believes we need more than just the demands of individuals or society to ground moral obligation, for it is possible that individuals or societies could simply "eliminate obligations by just not making certain demands; and that seems out of keeping with the role of obligation."[47] We recognize this especially when we consider moral reformers, who have pointed out moral obligations that none of the existing societies at their time acknowledged.[48]

---

[40] Ibid., 234.

[41] Ibid., 235.

[42] Ibid., 238-41.

[43] Ibid., 242.

[44] Robert M. Adams, "Divine Command Metaethics Modified Again," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1979): 66-79

To ground moral obligation in a way that fits with his claims that obligation is grounded socially and yet overcomes the inadequacies of grounding obligation in human social relationships, Adams develops a divine command theory that makes God's demands the grounds of moral obligation. His divine command theory is heavily restricted. He does not claim it as a theory of value or of the good but limits its scope solely to the realm of obligation. Moreover, he presupposes his theory of the good when he claims that "x is obligatory/prohibited because it is commanded/forbidden by a loving

---

[45] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 248.

[46] Ibid., 245.

[47] Ibid., 247.

[48] Ibid., 248.

God." He assumes that God is by nature good and that therefore all of his commands will be good. He is able to escape the circularity objection that usually arises within divine command theories (what is commanded is good because God commands it, but God commands it because it's good) because he presupposes his account of the good in his argument about obligation, and his account of the good does not in any way rely upon God's commands.

Adams goes on to argue that it matters that the command actually be issued. He does not think counter-factual claims about what a perfect God would command if God existed are strong enough to motivate compliance. Nor does he think grounding the obligatory in God's will rather than God's explicit commands carries with it the strength needed for obligation. He argues that God cannot command something God does not will, but God can will something God does not command. Restricting the obligatory to God's commands opens up the realm of supererogation, for God wills what is best but only commands what is required. Acts that are divinely willed but not commanded are supererogatory. Adams's theory is thus immune to Urmson's critique of moral theories that do not provide space for the supererogatory acts of saints and heroes.

Devotion to God. Two final connected features of Adams's ethical framework that bear upon his account of saintliness are devotion and vocation. Within the context of his theory of the Good, Adams argues that devotion to the Good serves as an organizing principle in the life of the good person. He contrasts his view with both the view Susan Wolf rejects and the one she espouses. Recall that Wolf was particularly concerned to avoid allowing devotion to morality to rule out pursuits that are good from the point of view of individual perfection. Adams agrees with Wolf that we ought not to be maximally devoted to the well-being or rights of others or to society as a whole.[49] In fact, he thinks that substituting morality for religion is oppressive and idolatrous. He also agrees with her that ethical thought that is too moralistic or overly centered on personal relations is humanly intolerable because it overlooks intellectual and artistic enterprises as valid pursuits.[50] However, he disagrees with Wolf that one ought not to be maximally devoted to anything. He finds Wolf's view about the fragmentation of value "deeply disturbing" because she suggests that some "conflicts are between types of value so fundamental and so incommensurable that there is no well-defined point of view from which one can do justice to all the competing values."[51] Alternatively, Adams proposes that "an appropriate object for maximal or religious devotion should be larger than morality, though it should also provide a basis for a strong commitment to morality."[52] He believes that the appropriate object of maximal devotion is God and that we ought to conceive of God as being interested in intellectual and aesthetic interests as well as with the morality of personal relationships. Thus, "it should be possible to unite devotion to God with an interest in any good thing for its own sake." He contrasts his view of integration with Augustine's, which subordinates the love of all finite goods to devotion to God teleologically, making the former merely a means to the latter.[53] He proposes that a good individual will have a general disposition to be maximally devoted to God but that this devotion will not swallow up the person’s love for particular good things. The general disposition to love the Good will affect but not overshadow the love for particular goods. Adams uses the concept of the “glory of God” to help make sense of our ability to love God *in*, rather than *through*, created things:

---

[49] Ibid., 180-1.

[50] Ibid., 181.

[51] Ibid., 182.

[52] Ibid., 181.

[53] Ibid., 185-7.

> What interests me here is the *structure* of seeing and enjoying the glory of God in such a phenomenon. There are two essential moments in it. One is the moment of enjoying and admiring the created phenomenon...for what it is in itself. The other is a moment in which the created good is seen as fragmentary and pointing beyond itself, a moment that we may take as constituting a glimpse of a transcendently good object, a dim awareness of something too wonderful to be contained or carried either by our experience or by the finite objects we are perceiving.[54]

Adams goes on to say that these moments are normally simultaneous. So, my motives for loving a particular good are not separable from my love for God, but neither are they merely a means by which I enjoy God. They have their own intrinsic value *and* they point beyond themselves to God.

Vocation. According to Adams, the highest form of devotion to God is a friendship or alliance with God, where the individual enters into a covenant with God and agrees to share God’s interests.[55] The specific shape that alliance takes for each individual is a matter of vocation. Adams defines vocation first as “a call from God, a command, or perhaps an invitation, addressed to a particular individual, to act and live in a certain way,”[56] and then more specifically as “primarily a matter of *what goods are*

---

[54] Ibid., 194.

[55] Ibid., 196-8.

[56] Ibid., 301. See also Adams, *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 227-8.

given to us to love, and thus of *our part in God's all-embracing and perfect love*."[57] For Adams, a vocation accounts for singular judgments in ethics, making actions that are not universalizable mandatory for particular individuals. Some individuals, for example, may have it as their vocation to be martyred for a cause. It is certainly not required of everyone that they be martyred, but it may be true, and it is often felt as true by those called to be martyred, that that is something they *have* to do, and not to do so would bring about appropriate guilt and blame. A vocation also simultaneously impels and frees the person called, for it limits the scope of goods to be loved and things to be done for an individual to a manageable subset of all the diverse goods available in the world.[58] It motivates the individual because the vocation, or life project, is central to the individual's selfhood. While, as Bernard Williams and Susan Wolf argue, consequentialism must deny the validity of personal projects, Adams makes vocation central to the good life.[59] It also has the advantage over consequentialism of not requiring of humans godlike abilities to know the future or bring about maximal happiness in the whole world through our actions. Adams asserts:

> A vocation is more limited and more specific than responsibility for the whole future of the world. It may be very difficult, but it is always a path that we may actually follow; a sense that it is given to us as a real possibility, and one that engages enough of our love to motivate us to follow it, is an important mark of vocation.[60]

---

[57] Ibid., 302.

[58] Ibid., 292.

[59] Ibid., 299. See also J. C. C. Smart and Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 110-8, and Wolf, "Saints," 429-30.

[60] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 300.

On Adams's view, a vocation is more comprehensive than one's work, and everyone has one, even if not everyone is able to discern what it is. He argues that vocations take time to figure out and that the process of figuring out one's vocation is part and parcel of figuring out who one is and what one ought to do. He believes the quest to figure out one's vocation is difficult, that it often require listening for the voice of God, and that one cannot find one's vocation simply by looking to what is "natural" for one to do or by consulting what is expected of one by one's social institutions and arrangements. Often vocations require us to go against what is natural or expected, as was the case with the two examples Adams cites, Bonhoeffer and Kierkegaard, and as is probably the case with many of those we regard as saints. He believes that vocations, when properly discerned, give the individual overriding reasons to disobey *prima facie* obligations in a way that merely having strong desires do not. I may, for example, be justified in not doing what is necessary to preserve my life if my vocation is to be a martyr, whereas simply having a strong desire to die does not exempt me from that obligation.[61] Most of us are not called to be martyrs, and to be martyred for a cause would seem over and above what we are obliged to do, but for individuals with a vocation to martyrdom, there may be nothing supererogatory about martyrdom from their perspective or from God's perspective.

2.3 The Place of the Saints in Adams's Framework for Ethics

Adams explains the nature of the saints within the context of his Platonic-theistic ethical framework and his divine command theory of obligation. According to Adams, the saints' goodness *qua* excellence comes from their distinctive and therefore illuminating resemblance to God, their goodness *qua* well-being comes from their being *for* the Good in uncommon ways, and their obligations come from the especially demanding commands of a loving God.

---

[61] Having such a conception of vocation within his framework provides Adams with the resources to make a claim similar to that of Andrew Michael Flescher, who argues that there are some things that are required of individuals that would be supererogatory for others to do. Andrew Michael Flescher, *Heroes, Saints, and Ordinary Morality* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2003), 219-20.

The excellence of the saints. We see goodness *qua* excellence in the saints, but their goodness is not the sort of goodness we should necessarily imitate, for it is only a finite reflection of God's infinite goodness, and we may be called to another sort of resemblance. We can experience transcendence when we encounter the saints, either personally or through hagiography, and unless we are completely vicious, we can recognize in them a good that outstrips our categories.[62] To use Adams's terminology, we see the glory of God in the saints. While they may possess character traits or perform actions we would recognize as good, they also resemble the Good in ways totally foreign to our best conceptions of goodness. Adams writes, "they don't just do more of what we all know to do. More important, they envisage and do, and show others how to do, things that no one else had thought of doing."[63] This helps account for the reception of saints by their contemporaries, which is often mixed. Typically, saints are lauded by those most intimately connected with them, especially by those who are served by their sacrificial love, but they are often condemned by otherwise decent people who simply have too strong an attachment to a narrowly conventional or institutionally sanctioned morality. With respect to excellence, the saints do not serve as objects of imitation. Their goodness is too foreign and transcendent to be mimicked by non-saints.

---

[62] Todd Buras helped me see this point.

[63] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 56.

Saintly devotion and obedience. We learn about one possible way of being *for* the Good by studying the saints. One can be *for* the Good in a variety of ways, and we do not need to be *for* the Good in the ways the saints are to be good. For the saints, being *for* the Good means being devoted to God through their obedience and through their fulfillment of their vocation. They have a specific vocation that we may or may not understand, and they receive commands from God that we may or may not understand. Some of those commands may be universal, but the interesting cases are those that are personal. Saints may be commanded by God to do something God might not command us to do. God's commands oblige the saints to do things we are not obliged to do. The saints obey God's commands, and their doing so sometimes leads to actions that appear extreme, or odd, or even morally questionable by established social norms. The combination of the saints' devotion and obedience to God makes us think twice before dismissing or criticizing their seemingly eccentric or morally questionable actions. Even if we cannot fully understand how the abnormal actions of the saints are good, we can fairly easily acknowledge that they are *for* the Good, that they typically hear God's commands better than non-saints, and that they are usually more ready and willing to obey.[64] Because they are undoubtedly *for* the Good to an extent that we probably are not, we must view our own negative assessment of some of their character traits and actions with suspicion. Perhaps their bizarre or repulsive actions are justified by their having been commanded by a loving God.

---

[64] The notable exception to almost all thinking about saintliness is of course Nietzsche, and his influence on contemporary thinking about morality gives me pause when attempting to make claims about how "we" view the saints, for "we" are surely not as homogeneous in our admiration of the saints or the goods they stand for as Westerners were before Nietzsche.

Saintly vocations. Adams's discussion of vocation also solves a few puzzles about saintliness. Often we think of the saints as going above and beyond the call of duty. They do more than what is minimally required of them morally. Yet, when we consult the saints about their supererogatory deeds, we find that they do not think of them as supererogatory. To the contrary, they feel as if they simply *had* to do what they did.[65] To fail to do so they would be wrong in their minds, and they would experience guilt as a result.[66] Adams can make sense of this phenomenon by arguing that saints have individual vocations that oblige them to do things other people are not required to do. A related puzzle is that the saints often perform these deeds that appear supererogatory to the rest of us not out of a sense of duty but joyfully. According to Adams's account of vocation, this is because they view their vocation as central to their selfhood. Further, their vocation allows them to love the good without being paralyzed by the desperate need the world has for their services. They do not feel a duty to maximize happiness in the world or to attend to all the world's needs or to bring about every possible good. Instead, they feel called to a finite set of goods to be loved and a finite set of needs to be met, sets which call the saints out of complacency but do not overwhelm them. Finally, because the call is from God, they feel empowered to make a difference in the world.

---

[65] We may, for example, deem the actions of the Protestants of Le Chambon in rescuing Jews from the Holocaust to be over and above the call of duty, but when asked about their heroism or saintliness, they deny that there was anything exceptional about their actions. They were doing, in their minds, what anyone would do. Gandhi likewise believed that anyone could do what he did.

[66] Mother Teresa, for example, wanted the documents detailing the founding of the Missionaries of Charity to be burned because, in her mind, she was simply God's "little instrument." Mother Teresa to Archbishop Périer, February 8, 1956; quoted in Brian Kolodiejchuk, "Introduction" in Mother Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, 5. Later, after having her request denied, she writes with greater fervor, "I am only His instrument – why so much about me – when the work is all His [God's]. I hold no claim to it. It was given to me." Mother Teresa to Archbishop Périer, March 30, 1957; quoted in Brian Kolodiejchuk, "Introduction" in Mother Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, 6.

The one making the claim upon their life is also the source of their goodness, making possible the accomplishment of the task set before them.

Saints historically have preserved the critical stance Adams believes to be essential to the moral life, for saints have often served as moral reformers, calling into question some established social conventions or calling our attention to needs or ways of meeting needs we never thought possible. Paul the Apostle called into question the established morality of the Pharisees and Sadducees, preaching against outward obedience to the law without corresponding inward love for God and neighbor and demonstrating the value of self-sacrifice through his life and death. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, though her life, called into question the indifference of the developed countries towards those suffering from poverty and disease in India. Other saints call us back to goods that have been lost as a result of historical events. Benedict of Nursia, for example, helped to recover the value of community in the midst of the aftermath of the fall of Rome and with it the collapse of community. Finally, we acknowledge some saints simply for the extreme measures they take to call into question established norms and to affirm the preeminent value of total devotion to God. We see this most starkly in the lives of the desert fathers like Antony of Egypt and Simeon the Stylite. One cannot encounter such figures without at once being attracted and repulsed in such a way that makes one take stock of one's own life and principles. Such saints have some intrinsic excellence we would normally call moral, but what distinguishes them is their rhetorical excellence, for even though we rarely can affirm the way they express their devotion to God, their lives do challenge the rest of us to devote ourselves more fully to God, to search more intently for our vocation, and to have the courage to heed God's call on our lives. In affirming the revolutionary character of saintliness, Adams agrees with Karl Rahner, who says:

> They are the imitators and the creative models of the holiness which happens to be right for, and is the task of, their particular age. They create a new style; they prove that a certain form of life and activity is a really genuine possibility; they show experimentally that one can be a Christian even in 'this' way; they make such a type of person believable as a Christian type.[67]

The saints both call into question the dominant moral paradigm and show the way forward for those who will listen.

2.4 Adams's Contribution

I find Adams's account of saintliness appealing in a number of regards. First, Adams recognizes better than most that saintliness is best characterized religiously and that their moral qualities are best understood as acquired indirectly. Their devotion is not to morality but to God, and that devotion is what leads them to virtue. They are not necessarily perfect. They do not aim to maximize happiness. They are not typically ideal specimens of human flourishing. As a result, their goodness is not easily captured by modern moral theories. Modern moral theorists thus have good grounds for rejecting the saints, given their meta-ethical commitments; hence the general neglect of saintliness by modern moral theorists. I take it though, that many modern moral theorists want to retain the general concept of a saint (as a completely or extremely virtuous person), certain qualities we find preeminently in the saints (charity, genuine humility, unity of purpose, etc.), and certain popular real saints (especially the ones in the data set I established in chapter one like Francis of Assisi and Mother Teresa), but that they want them stripped of the religious aspects that keep them from fitting snuggly into their categories. These modern moral theorists do violence to the notion of saintliness and misrepresent the actual saints when they do so. The saints' devotion to God is essential to their moral goodness. As the saints themselves report, they would not possess their saintly qualities or perform their saintly actions were it not for God's grace and their deep devotion to God. What Adams argues, and I agree, is that modern moral theorists cannot legitimately invoke the saints if they strip them of their religious devotion. They must either abandon the idea that the saints are good (as Nietzsche and Sartre do), or they must take them as they are and adjust their categories to fit them.

---

[67] Quoted in Richard Kieckhefer and George D. Bond, eds., Sainthood: Its Manifestations in World Religions (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), 35.

[67] Karl Rahner, "The Church of the Saints," in *Theological Investigations*, III (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1963).

Adams says that the saints possess a sort of excellence that transcends the normally human, which comes as a result of their intense devotion to God. Saints appear to have a strong sense of vocation, of a life project, that gives unity to their understanding of themselves and of the purpose of their lives. This allows them to make what are often difficult decisions about conflicting goods with ease. In all of these observations, I find Adams to be on target.

2.5 Critical Assessment of Adams's Account

Nonetheless, I have three important concerns with Adams's account of saintliness to the extent that he has developed it in "Saints" and *Finite and Infinite Goods*: he overemphasizes the otherness of the saints; he does not give due weight to the spiritual practices or disciplines that make saintliness possible, the communities that develop and sustain those practices, or the institutions that support, protect, and regulate them; and he does not say enough about the emotions and virtues of the saints. In fairness to Adams, given that only a portion of his project references the saints, he should not be faulted for these lacunae; his meta-ethic may be able to incorporate whatever additions he would have to make to his account to address my concerns. Still, thinking through his omissions helps thicken the account of saintliness that emerges from engaging the various accounts of saintliness presented in this chapter.

The otherness of the saints. By overemphasizing the otherness of the saints, Adams overlooks their recognizable virtues and thus diminishes the extent to which the saints can serve as objects of imitation in moral education. For Adams, the saints are only imitable in that they resemble God, not in the *way* they resemble God; in that they are devoted to God, not in the *way* they are devoted; and in that they obey God's commands, not in the specific commands they obey. On his account of saintliness, the saints thus provide little guidance for would-be saints as they try to grow into saintliness.

Not all saints are as mysterious or bizarre as Adams makes them out to be, though, and our experience of them is not always like our experience of the sublime. More often, we see them as beautiful. In fact, the more virtuous the onlooker, the less strange the saints appear. Often, our estimation of the saints as strange is a matter of our own vices, many of which are ingrained in our cultures. Furthermore, if we attempt to study saints from outside of their tradition, as when modern secular philosophers attempt to make sense of Christian saints, they appear even stranger. When virtuous people within the same tradition as the saints view them, they admire them for their recognizable, admirable, and imitable virtues. Throughout church history, the saints have served as models for religious professionals and as objects of veneration for the masses, and the precedent for such imitation can be found in the Christian Scriptures.[68] The long tradition of spiritual mothering and fathering within religious orders especially points to imitability as well. The book of Hebrews enjoins readers to “show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”[69] Paul also urges the Christians at Corinth to imitate him as he imitates Christ.[70] Such exhortations suggest that the saints are imitable to a larger extent than Adams’s account allows.

Saintly practices. Second, Adams does not give due weight to the practices that help to cultivate saintly emotions, motives, motive dispositions, and virtues. Adams does acknowledge that the saints listen to and obey God, but he does not mention the disciplines involved in coming to hear the voice of God or being ready to obey God. Certainly we find rare cases in which saintly lives begin with a vision or a hearing of God’s call, but most hear the voice of God clearly only after following a long and arduous path of spiritual and moral discipline. Adams neglects this aspect of saintliness, I think, because his purpose in invoking the saints in *Finite and Infinite Goods* is to give preeminent examples of resembling God, being *for* the Good, and living a life devoted to God through one’s vocation. To make his points, he only needs the saints as they are closer to the end of their journey towards God and are accomplished virtue; he does not need an account for how they got there. In "Saints" he discusses briefly the growth of the saints in general terms; in *A Theory of Virtue* he discusses the moral growth of human beings in general, but even there he gives too little attention to the spiritual disciplines that allow the saints to hear the voice of God and know their particular vocation. In a similar vein, the saints' ability to construe the needy in a way non-saints cannot is probably best understood an ability that is given graciously by God, as Adams suggests it is, but once this gift is received it can be cultivated, and the history of the saints can be conceived as a tradition of cultivating the saintly emotions and virtues. Part of the tradition of cultivating love for the needy is the tradition of asceticism, the extreme forms of which Adams dismisses too quickly. Adams argues for disciplining our ethically indifferent motives for food, sex, rest, and entertainment, but criticizes asceticism for being overly fearful that these will make one lose control. He rightly affirms human vitality as an excellence. To deny these impulses completely, he says, would be to deny something good.[71] Yet, surely it is also excellent to do what is necessary to fulfill one's vocation, and if one has a particularly high calling, as the saints do, one must probably give up other excellences in the pursuit. The saints probably know better than we do what sort of disciplines best equip them for their tasks, and at any rate, the tradition of saints displays enough critique of saintly excesses by other saints to guard against pathology without abolishing the denial of worldly goods for the sake of saintliness. The spiritual disciplines contribute to the formation of the character of the saints, allow them to see or hear God clearly, and make it possible for them to see others as God sees them.

---

[68] Hawley makes a similar point in “Introduction: Saints and Virtues,” in *Saints and Virtues*, xvii.

[69] Hebrews 6:11-12, ESV.

[70] 1 Corinthians 4:16 and 11:1. In 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10, ESV, Paul praises the Christians in Thessalonica for following his example and for setting an example for other churches. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.”

---

[71] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 192.

Furthermore, the disciplines help them discern their vocation and live it out.[72] A fuller account of saintliness ought to bolster Adams's account by emphasizing how the spiritual practices contribute to the saints' growth in knowledge and fulfillment of their vocations.

Emotions, motives, and virtues. Third, Adams does not say enough about the emotions or virtues we typically find in the saints. Some of the virtues he would attribute to the saints one might infer from what he does say about them. He claims that they have a great capacity for joy, are charismatic, humble, perceptive, and courageous, are unswayed by the masses, have faith in and love for God, and exhibit benevolence towards other people.[73] Surely he is right in all of these ascriptions; however, as James's account proves, and as the work of Linda Zagzebski, Thomas Aquinas, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Robert C. Roberts show, there is much more to say about saintly dispositions.[74]

3. Linda Zagzebski's Divinely Motivated Saints

I turn now to examine Linda Zagzebski's work in *Divine Motivation Theory*. Her work on the emotions and motivating dispositions of the saints fills in an important gap I pointed out in Adams's account, and the structure and argument of *Divine Motivation Theory* itself shows why thinking of the saints only as moral exemplars is insufficient. I start by summarizing her view. I argue that her account of saintliness, particularly the one that emerges from part two of *Divine Motivation Theory,* is significant for my account of saintliness because like James and Adams but unlike Wolf, she argues that the saints' connection to God is what makes them morally good; like James but unlike Adams, she focuses rightly on the emotions of the saints and offers many valuable insights into their moral psychology; and she explains better than Adams does the extent to which the saints are imitable by non-saints. However, Zagzebski's account remains deficient insofar as she does not offer enough insight into the nature of the saints' connection to God; she (despite improving upon Adams's account) does not clearly enough delimit the extent to which the saints are imitable; like James and Adams, she neglects the role religious institutions, communities, and the spiritual disciplines play in helping the saints come to share God's motives; and she either does not discuss or does not give due attention to the specific virtues and gifts the saints possess. Still her work makes some important advances towards understanding saintliness, and when combined with Adams's insights, the account of saintliness that emerges is very attractive.

---

[72] Adams, "Saints," 396-7; Adams, *A Theory of Virtue*, 212-32.

[73] Adams, "Saints," 392-3, 398.

[74] I discuss Zagzebski's contribution in this regard below in this chapter and the contributions of the others in the next chapter.

3.1 Starting with Exemplars

At the outset of her project, Zagzebski proposes that we should start with moral exemplars, including saints, when we construct an ethical theory. One can imagine any number of reasons for starting with moral exemplars. Zagzebski's reasons are that she believes that "moral goodness" is a natural kind and that we can identify moral exemplars prior to knowing the natural characteristics or properties they possess that constitute their moral goodness. Thus, she finds Kripke and Putnam's direct reference theory well-suited to her purposes.[75] She utilizes direct reference theory to fix the reference of moral goodness by appeal to moral exemplars.

---

[75] According to Kripke and Putnam, we can give an ostensive definition to something before we know its nature. The name we give that thing is a rigid designator, meaning that it simply refers to "stuff

According to Zagzebski, with our pre-theoretical emotions, we can judge that someone is, for example, admirable, while someone else is not. In the process of our moral development, we have the ability to judge that the admirable person is a moral exemplar worthy of our imitation. The process goes something like this: We perceive through our emotions that a person R is admirable and that S is not. From there, we immediately move to "I want to be like R and not like S." Next, we develop the ability to make the moral judgment, "R is better than S." With enough experience of other people, we can make the jump to "R is a moral exemplar."[76] Hence, through our emotional experience, we are able to make direct reference to a moral exemplar before we even have the ability to form a concept of the morally good person. Once we have picked out moral exemplars, according to direct reference theory, we can then go about finding out what it is that makes the exemplar morally good.

---

like that." The meaning of the word used as a rigid designator at that point is just the stuff, not the nature of the stuff, because the nature of the stuff may not yet be available to us. To use an example from the history of science, it is clear that we were able to refer to water before we knew its chemical nature. When ordinary language users used the word "water," they used it to refer to the clear potable liquid that falls from the sky as rain, that collects in lakes, rivers, streams, etc., that freezes when cooled to zero degrees Celsius at sea level, that boils at 100 degrees Celsius at sea level, and so on. None of these descriptions are the nature of water, and the stuff we call "water" would still be water even if none of these descriptions were necessarily true. Eventually, scientists discovered that the nature of water is in fact H_2O. The only way they were able to say that water is H_2O, however, is if the reference of "water" had already been fixed by certain actual stuff. Scientists had to have the stuff called "water" available to them before they could determine that the stuff called "water" is by nature H_2O. An appeal to direct reference theory makes it possible for philosophers like Zagzebski to claim that moral goodness has a nature, but that we can discover its nature through empirical investigation, rather than by *a priori* means. Indeed, an appeal to direct reference theory may be crucial to her view because she claims, "We do not have criteria for goodness in advance of identifying the exemplars of goodness." So, just as ordinary language users can use the word "water" to accurately refer to water before knowing the true nature of water (H_2O), so we can use the phrase "moral goodness" without knowing the nature of moral goodness. Zagzebski claims that we fix the reference of "moral goodness" by using moral exemplars, or "persons like that," and then proceed with our investigation of the exemplars to find out what the nature of moral goodness is. Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, 41. Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980). Hilary Putnam, 'The Meaning of "Meaning",' in *Mind, Language and Reality, Philosophical Papers* 2, 215-71. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979). Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, 41.

[76] Ibid., 53.

3.2 Zagzebski's Exemplars

Most of the people we admire exemplify a particular virtue (or type of action), not complete virtue. Prior to forming a concept of a morally good person, then, but perhaps after the very primitive "I want to be like R," comes the judgment that "I want to be like R in a certain respect."[77] Perhaps we admire the benevolence of one person and the justice of another. Perhaps we admire the courage of a soldier or superhero but do not look up to them as exemplars of humility. While most exemplars are exemplars of a particular virtue, Zagzebski argues that certain figures are taken to be good in every respect. They are exemplars not only for particular roles and activities, but also for life in general.[78] She lists the Aristotelian *phronimos*, the Stoic sage, the Christian saint, and the Buddhist *arahant*. They are able to be good in virtually every situation. These figures need not be *perfect* or completely virtuous even characteristically. Just as we do not require perfect samples of H_2O to fix the reference of "water," we do not need perfect moral exemplars to fix the reference of "moral goodness." All we need are figures who are "defeasibly imitable."[79] These figures must be real persons though, because direct reference theory assumes that we can do an empirical investigation of those things to which we have directly referred so that we may discover their nature, which was hitherto inaccessible to us.[80]

---

[77] Here I am venturing beyond what Zagzebski explicitly claims, but I think it is consistent with her sketch of the development of moral judgment.

[78] Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, 56.

[79] Ibid., 56.

[80] Here Zagzebski clearly differs from Hursthouse whose completely virtuous person is ideal, not real and imperfect.

We first pick out people that the linguistic community agrees to call moral exemplars, such as Jesus, Socrates, the Buddha, and Gandhi. Then, having fixed the reference of "moral goodness" to those individuals, Zagzebski proceeds with her investigation to find out what it is that makes them morally good. Moral exemplars have the following qualities according to Zagzebski. They are typically good people to ask for help because they tend to give good advice. They have *phronesis* in Aristotle's sense, meaning they are practically wise, able to make good judgments about what is right in a given situation. One can turn to moral exemplars for advice because they are stable and reliable and because they are generally knowledgeable. They also exhibit peace of mind and are generally happy. Typically, they are prepared to face and handle tragedy when it strikes. Most are good in simple matters of human interaction, while some are also wise in difficult matters. Furthermore, while the complexity of modern life has made it difficult to be good in most situations, part of what makes an exemplar an exemplar is the ability to avoid complex and messy situations. Moral exemplars typically live simplified lives on purpose. They do not get themselves into situations, such as moral dilemmas, in which they will be forced to do things out of sync with virtue.[81]

As for their psychology, moral exemplars typically know a lot and reason well, but what separates them from other people is that they usually can tell a (sometimes very long) narrative of how they arrived at their insights, even though they do not typically know the origin of their insight. In other words, their wisdom often comes more from life experience than from theory. Many have sudden conversions that alter the way they perceive the world. They see the world and everything in it, especially themselves and other people, in a new light. They sometimes, though not always, have experienced a religious conversion, but even for religious converts, their conversion with respect to belief is only part of their conversion in perception, and these perceptual conversions are usually conversions of emotional perception.[82]

---

[81] Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, 56.

3.3 The Primacy of Emotions in Zagzebski's Moral Theory

Having investigated what it is that makes moral exemplars morally good, Zagzebski concludes that moral exemplars are persons who have good emotions. An emotion, according to Zagzebski is an affective state that has an intentional object. It is about, at, or toward something. The intentional object of an emotion falls under a "thick affective concept."[83] Emotions are partly cognitive because "the intentional object of an emotion is represented in the agent's consciousness in a way characteristic of the emotion."[84] Zagzebski claims that we recognize good emotions the same way that we recognize moral exemplars and water prior to investigation.[85] We need not know what makes certain emotions good and others bad prior to picking them out. We can look at examples of emotions that people have had in given situations and recognize those that are good without knowing what it is that makes those emotions good. To find out the nature of good emotions, we must complete a more extensive investigation. From her study of good emotions, Zagzebski finds that what makes an emotion good is that it fits its intentional object, that it reliably delivers the truth about something in the world. We do not find anger to be an appropriate way of construing an act of kindness by a friend, nor do we judge love a fitting construal of something that is actually hateful.[86] For Zagzebski, emotions are good if they fit the intentional object just as beliefs are good if they fit the world. Emotions are like beliefs in that they are partly cognitive and in that they have "something analogous to truth value."[87] Zagzebski writes, "an emotion is good just in case the standard judgment expressing it is true."[88] So, an emotion of love fits a lovable object, an emotion of pity fits a pitiable object, an emotion of fear fits a fearsome object, and so on.

---

[82] Ibid., 57.

[83] Ibid., 59-61.

[84] Ibid. 60.

[85] Ibid., 83.

Having claimed to have discovered what makes moral exemplars morally good, Zagzebski builds an entire ethical theory, where good persons, good acts, and good consequences are ultimately reducible to good emotions. She argues that emotions are genetically primary, that "they can serve as the primary concept in a comprehensive moral theory," and that "the value of emotion is metaphysically prior to the value of traits, acts, ends, and outcomes of actions. All the standard objects of evaluation of persons, their acts, and the consequences of their acts come into the world from good emotions."[89] Good emotions are intrinsically good to have, according to Zagzebski, and they are potentially motivating, which means they have characteristic ends.[90] When emotions characteristically lead to action, she calls them motivations. Good motivations are good emotions that characteristically lead to action. Hence, it follows that good motivations are intrinsically good to have and good actions are those actions that originate in intrinsically good motivations. People who characteristically are motivated to act on their good emotions have good motive dispositions, and good motive dispositions that are reliably successful at achieving their aim are virtues. Zagzebski writes, "A *virtue* is a deep and enduring acquired excellence of the human person that has two components: (1) a motive disposition, and (2) reliable success in bringing about the end (if any) of the motive."[91] The virtues, and hence virtuous persons, derive their value from their connection to intrinsically good emotions.

---

[86] I take it that the Biblical injunction to love one's enemies does not imply that we should love them insofar as they are hateful or vicious, but rather insofar as they are human beings, created in the image of God and not beyond the reach of God's grace and mercy.

[87] Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, 76.

[88] Ibid., 76.

[89] Ibid., 178.

[90] Ibid., 120.

When we want to know what sort of person we should strive to be, what sorts of actions we should and should not do, and what sorts of outcomes we should aim to bring about, we can look to the virtues of the exemplars, the actions they are motivated to do and to avoid, and the outcomes they are motivated to bring about. She argues that our acts can have direct or indirect value insofar as they approximate the acts of the moral exemplar. Acts have direct value if they are acts the exemplar characteristically would do and they done from the motivation the exemplar would have in that circumstance. Acts have indirect value if they are acts the exemplar would do, but are done from motives the exemplar would not have. Acts are good in every respect if they have direct value and are successful. Good outcomes are those states of affairs that the person with good motivations aims to bring about in action.[92]

---

[91] Ibid., 121-22.

[92] Ibid., 183.

3.4 Zagzebski's Divine Motivation Theory

Zagzebski derives the value of all other terms in her moral theory—motivations, actions, persons, and lives—from the goodness of an intrinsically good emotion. At the end of part one of *Divine Motivation Theory*, however, she raises a concern about the relativism of her own theory. Her worry is that having started with exemplars about whom different people disagree, she ends up with competing and incommensurable accounts of good emotions and thus of every other aspect of her theory. A Stoic sage, for example, would characteristically have a different emotional response to suffering than would the Christian saint. The emotions taken to "fit the world" in response to the accomplishment of some great deed would differ for Christian saints and Aristotelian *phronimoi*, for humility and gratitude are characteristic of Christian saints while being great-souled, and thus superior, self-sufficient, and ungrateful is characteristic of the *phronimoi*.[93] Within the communities in which one of these exemplars is honored, the exemplars may function in the way Zagzebski needs them to, but if one wants to know which of these exemplars to imitate, her theory provides no answer.

In the second half of *Divine Motivation Theory* Zagzebski attempts to overcome the relativism of her initial approach by arguing that "all moral value derives from God's motives. There are many exemplars of goodness in ordinary life, but the ultimate paradigm of goodness and the source of value is God."[94] To be good is thus to share God's motives, to imitate God insofar as possible. Since the God of orthodox theism is so different from human beings, Zagzebski argues for the importance of the Incarnation to bridge the gap between the motives of a perfect, transcendent God and those possible for a human person. The *imitatio Dei* becomes possible for human persons through their *imitatio Christi*.[95] Jesus thus serves as the prime moral exemplar in a Christian version of divine motivation theory, and the saints can be seen as those who attempt to imitate Jesus by sharing his good emotions and cultivating Christ-like motive dispositions and virtues. While she does not claim that making Jesus the exemplar solves the problem of relativism entirely or for everyone, she does believe that most non-Christians can affirm that he "had as good a claim to being a paradigmatic good person as any outstanding holy person in history."[96]

---

[93] See Robert C. Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions: a Psychology of Christian Virtues* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 137-9.

[94] Ibid., 185.

3.5 The Saints and the Imitatio Christi

We can construct a richer account of saintliness on the basis of part two of *Divine Motivation Theory* than was possible in part one (summarized above in section 3.2). The key feature of saintliness is sharing God's motivations and virtues as they are revealed in Christ, the ultimate exemplar. In Christ we find many emotions, but his primary motive disposition is to love and forgive, even at the cost of great suffering to himself. He exemplifies not only God's emotions, motives, and virtues but also the virtues the non-incarnate God could not have. She writes:

> God contains the perfections of all persons, human and nonhuman, but God does not have the perfections of every human trait. God has such virtues as justice, benevolence, mercy, forgiveness, kindness, love, compassion, loyalty, generosity, trustworthiness, integrity, and wisdom. God does not have courage, temperance, chastity or piety, nor does He have faith or hope.[97]

---

[95] Ibid., 233.

[96] Ibid., 234-5.

[97] Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, 227.

The saints share the emotions, motives, and virtues of Christ. Like Christ, they love God the Father and are motivated to do God's will. Their love for others is like Christ's love for them. They have a motive disposition to love those God sees as lovable, even when everyone else construes them as detestable. Jesus loved tax collectors and prostitutes, who were despised by the crowds, and he despised the Pharisees, who were typically construed by the masses as admirable. Similarly, we find the saints often loving the "wretched of the earth" and condemning people in positions of honor. Like Christ, they perceive with their emotions the "heart" of the person and act towards them in ways appropriate to their correct evaluation. Not only do they love what and who God loves, but they love the way God loves. Their love is thus (near) limitless. They also love for the same reason God loves. According to Zagzebski, God does not love for the sake of an end. He loves us because he wants to love us. So, on Zagzebski's account, the saints must also love others because they want to love them.[98]

That the saints are unified insofar as they share Christ's motives does not mean that their diversity or individuality is therefore crushed. They imitate Christ in ways that do not eliminate their uniqueness. She writes, "Variation in characters of such saints as Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Francis of Assisi, Philip Neri, and Therese of Lisieux is so striking that we need not worry that making Christ central in a person's life leads to a single model of moral excellence, much less to boring conformity."[99] Zagzebski acknowledges the importance of the Christian idea of vocation for maintaining the diversity of the saints, but says that it is an abstraction and cannot substitute for "a narrative of the life of the perfect self of any particular person."[100] She claims that "the perfect self for one person differs in important ways from the perfect self for another, and while the lives of Christ and the saints may show us the range of ideally good selves, it cannot show us the ideal self for any particular person."[101] Part of what we learn in studying the lives of the saints is that they are irreducibly particular. We can infer from this fact that we are also irreducibly particular and thus should not imitate the saints in an inflexible or straight-forward way. She claims that we can live out our lives in a variety of possible ways, that our individual narratives can take different paths to fulfill our vocations.

---

[98] Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, 237-40.

[99] Ibid., 257.

Zagzebski's fuller account of the saints that emerges from the second part of *Divine Motivation Theory* is stronger than the account she can offer in the first part for it overcomes the problem of relativism without eliminating an appropriate diversity with respect to the types of lives that qualify as saintly. By making God the source of all value attributions, she can narrow her scope to Christian saints and helpfully characterize both what makes them similar in terms of their moral and religious exemplariness and what makes them different from each other in terms of their life narratives, their emotional responses in different circumstances, and their motives in responding to those circumstances. Her account agrees with James's conviction that there are certain core features of saintliness, that those are best understood as emotional dispositions, and that those emotional dispositions are somehow connected to their relationship with the divine.

---

[100] Ibid., 257.

[101] Ibid., 257.

3.6 Zagzebski's Contribution

The account of saintliness that emerges from part two of Zagzebski's *Divine Motivation Theory* is important because she rightly attempts to connect their religious and moral aspects; she improves upon Adams's account by focusing rightly on the emotions of the saints and providing valuable insights into how they characteristically feel, what motivates them to perform saintly actions, and what makes their emotions good; and she more clearly delimits the ways in which the saints are imitable by non-saints than Adams does.

Moral and religious exemplarity. Zagzebski's account of saintliness, like Adams's, stands out as an exception to the rule among philosophical characterizations of the saints since James's *Varieties* by rightly emphasizing both their connection to God and their moral exemplarity and by attempting to give an account of the connection between the two aspects. As I have argued above in my discussion of Adams's account, saintliness is best understood as a religious phenomenon that leads to moral exemplarity. For Adams, the moral goodness of the saints comes from their resembling God and from their being *for* God, being devoted to God through obedience to commands, through symbolic acts of devotion, and through fulfilling one's vocation. For Zagzebski the moral goodness of the saints comes from their imitation of and subsequent sharing of Christ's motives. For her, the saints' religious devotion takes the form of imitation. Both understandings of saintly devotion rightly put the love of God at the center of the saint's motivational structure.

The emotions of the saints. Zagzebski, like James, focuses on the emotions of the saints. Though I will raise concerns below regarding Zagzebski's characterization of the love of the saints, I think her account of good emotions helps us make progress in accounting for why the love of the saints for the "wretched of the earth" is good. Most people agree that the saints are good for loving the seemingly unlovable, but given Zagzebski's claim that a good emotion is one that fits its intentional object, we may wonder if the saints' love of the wretched is mistaken. Nietzsche certainly thought it was. One way to solve the puzzle is to claim that the wretched are unlovable in one sense and lovable in another. The intentional object *qua* wretched is repugnant and thus the proper emotion would be one of disgust or some other emotion connected with aversion. However, the intentional object *qua* "incommunicable person" in Zagzebski's language or "child of God" in theological terms is lovable. Thus the proper emotion is one of love (*agape*). If the intentional object can be rightly construed as despicable or lovable, though, we still do not have an account of why the saints are morally better than those who construe them as unlovable. In part two of *Divine Motivation Theory* she solves the problem by making God's emotions the standard of goodness. The saints' construal of the wretched as lovable is good because that is how God construes the wretched.

Aside from providing insight into saintly love, Zagzebski's focus on the emotional perception of the saints makes her account appealing. In reading accounts of the lives of the saints and the writings of the saints themselves, we see exceptional perceptivity in the saints, an ability to know and feel the right way about people and objects. The saints have a reputation for seeing the heart of those they interact with, for loving the right things and not being enamored with external appearances, for seeing things as they really are, and for giving good advice, even to strangers. All of these abilities are plausibly attributable to a heightened emotional perceptivity.

Imitability. I argued above that Adams overemphasizes the otherness of the saints, making it difficult to know how non-saints can imitate them. In contrast, Zagzebski invokes the saints precisely to serve as moral exemplars for aspiring saints, though she puts reasonable limits on the degree to which they are imitable. Unlike Adams, who uses the saints merely as illustrations of elements of his ethical framework, Zagzebski starts her investigation with real people that she believes are exemplars of life in general like the saints. Without them and without our recognizing them as exemplars worthy of our imitation, she could not get her exemplarist moral theory off the ground. On Zagzebski's account, we ought to imitate the emotions, motives, motive dispositions, and virtues of the saints. We ought to do actions and aim to bring about outcomes the saints would be motivated to do and bring about. She counter-balances her claims about their imitability by introducing the caveat that all human persons are incommunicable, that they have irreducible uniqueness that makes them ultimately inimitable. For her, the saints are exemplars of life in general; they are good in virtually every situation. However, they are also diverse. They each have their own personalities and their own life narratives that we cannot copy. Zagzebski thus carefully delimits the extent to which the saints are imitable, avoiding over-stressing their otherness as Adams does while recognizing their uniqueness and diversity.

3.7 Critical Assessment of Zagsebski's Account

Despite its many merits, Zagzebski's account remains deficient insofar as she does not properly characterizes the relationship of the saints to God; she either does not discuss or does not give due attention to the specific virtues and gifts the saints possess; like James and Adams, she neglects the role religious institutions and communities and the spiritual disciplines play in helping the saints come to share God's motives; and she (despite improving upon Adams's account) does not rightly delimit the extent to which the saints are imitable.

Zagzebski's characterization of the saints' relationship with God. My first contention is that the saints' relationship to God is best characterized primarily by devotion and reliance and only secondarily and in a limited way by imitation. I will give a fuller account of the relationship the saints have with God in the next chapter, but for now I will simply say that it becomes clear from reading about the saints that they love God deeply, that they worry very much about their standing with God, that they are deeply grateful for Christ's atonement and continual dispensations of grace to them, and that they rely wholly on God's power rather than their own. They desire to be like Christ, and in the ways that are possible for mere humans, they are indeed more Christ-like than non-saints, but some of the ways that they are good—and therefore ought to serve as exemplars to non-saints—are ways that cannot be captured by their imitation of Christ. In particular, they possess virtues only morally imperfect persons can possess like a contrite heart, the humility that is grounded in recognition of one's sin and one's reliance upon God's grace, the gratitude appropriate to those who have received unmerited grace, sympathy with other sinners, and the virtues needed for combating one's own sin.

Zagzebski's moral theory, by contrast, says very little about the saints' intimacy with God or about the virtues the saints possess that Christ does not. We do not find in her account the "friendly continuity" or of mystical union that James identifies or the devotion Adams discusses nor their sense of utter dependency upon God I noted above, and these seem to be essential to saintliness. I am not arguing that Zagzebski denies that the saints have a special relationship with God or that her account lacks the resources needed to characterize that relationship in illuminating ways.[102] My contention is not that Zagzebski's account of saintliness completely misses the relationship the saints have with God. Rather my contention is that she does not discuss some important features of the saints' relationship with God and that had she taken those features seriously, she would have recognized that there are ways the saints are good that are not connected to their imitation of Christ. There are ways in which the saints are exemplary in their relationship with God that are ways Christ cannot be. Christ is not the ultimate exemplar of the virtues connected to sinfulness and dependency upon unmerited grace because Christ is sinless and does not need grace. I turn now to a fuller discussion of some of the virtues the saints possess that Zagzebski does not discuss as a result of her limited investigation into the relationship the saints have with God.

Missing or misunderstood saintly virtues. The saints possess some emotions and virtues Zagzebski does not discuss, particularly those emotions and virtues that fall under categories that do not apply to Christ like those connected with sinfulness and dependency upon grace. They also possess virtues that Zagzebski would have no difficulty ascribing to them but about which she lacks the resources in her theory to give as rich of an account of them as does the account I will propose in chapter five.

---

[102] She does assume that the saints have a relationship with God, arguing that they would feel guilt if they hurt God in her discussion of the relative merits of divine motivation theory, divine command theory, divine preference theory. Imitation also would seem to assume a prior relationship, for imitation typically takes place within the context of a relationship. Furthermore, imitating Christ involves imitating his love for God. See Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, 258-70.

Contrition and the sort of gratitude proper to the recipients of grace are two emotion-virtues Zagzebski does not discuss and would have difficulty including if she insisted that all moral value finds its basis in Christ's motives. Robert C. Roberts describes the emotion-virtue of contrition as feeling that one's self has been marred by one's sin, that one has offended God, that one needs God's merciful forgiveness, and that one must change one's sinful ways.[103] Roberts points to the example of David, who is contrite after Nathan exposes his adultery and murder. Augustine's *Confessions* serve as an excellent example of saintly contrition as well. Because Christ never experienced having committed a sin himself, he never exhibited contrition. Yet it is a virtue, and the saints are exemplary in exhibiting it. The second saintly virtue Zagzebski does not discuss is the sort of gratitude that one feels for having been mercifully forgiven. Again, Christ never needed to be forgiven for sins he committed because he never sinned. He is the forgiver, not the forgiven. Yet we find this sort of gratitude in the lives of the saints. Whatever gratitude Christ exhibits is of a different sort than the gratitude the saints exhibit, for Christ is deserving of whatever gifts he receives (as in the case of the woman who washed his feet with expensive perfume). The saints, by contrast, are not deserving of God's grace. Their gratitude is thus different than Christ's gratitude, and their gratitude is the sort non-saintly humans should strive to attain.[104] Neither contrition for sin nor gratitude for undeserved gifts are emotion-virtues we find in Christ, but we do find them in the saints. Saintly goodness is thus not simply derivative of Christ's goodness.

---

[103] See Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions*, 97-113, especially 107.

I turn now to a virtue the saints possess, viz. love for the wretched, of which Zagzebski's theory cannot give a sufficiently rich account. Typically, as Roberts points out, the saints who are exemplary for loving the wretched construe them as (1) lovable because they see Christ personified in them, and so their emotions fit the lovable intentional object, Christ, and (2) lovable because they are loved by Christ and belong to Christ, which makes them wonderful and thus lovable. Roberts draws those insights from a prayer composed by Mother Theresa in which she says that she loves Jesus in the poor: "Though you hide yourself behind the unattractive disguise of the irritable, the exacting, the unreasonable, may I still recognize you, and say: 'Jesus is my patient, how sweet it is to serve you.'"[105] As they love (*agape*) the wretched, the saints implicitly say, "S is wonderful because S personifies Jesus Christ and is loved by him; may S's true interests be promoted."[106] If Roberts is correct, then Zagzebski's analysis must be off the mark, for in loving the wretched, the saints would not share Christ's motive. I am not convinced that Christ loves the saints because he sees himself personified in them; but even if he does, there is a clear difference between the saints' love of the wretched

---

[104] Aquinas discusses the difference between the thanksgiving of the innocent and that of the penitent in *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1947), I-II.106.2.

[105] Mother Teresa's prayer for daily use in her Children's Home; quoted in Roberts, *Emotions: An Essay in Aid of Moral Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 292.

[106] Ibid., 294.

because they are Christ's and Christ's love of the wretched *because they are his*. By way of illustration, my motive to love my friend's children is quite different than the motive my friend has for loving his own children. I love my friend's children because they are his, and thus the type of love I have for them is the love of friendship, but he loves his children because they are his, which means that his love for them is familial, the love of attachment.[107]

The saints see the potential lovability of the wretched and they love to actualize that potential. James thinks this is an important feature of saintliness: they love in order to bring about a change in the wretched, and beyond that, they love in order to bring about a change in the world, to usher in the kingdom of God.[108] This teleological structure of the saints' love is not consistent with Zagzebski's theory. She argues that to resemble God, the saints cannot love someone for the sake of something else. This is so (she insists in her discussion of the end for which God created the world) because God's love has no *telos*; God loves us because that is what a loving being characteristically does. However, I am not convinced that God loves us *qua* sinners this way, for God hates sin. It seems more reasonable to say that God loves us *qua* his creation and loves us *qua* sinners as potentially redeemed, which is to say that God loves us for a purpose, to make us fully lovable. The saints, it seems to me at least, do the same with the wretched.

The absence of religious practices, communities, and institutions. Zagzebski, like James and Adams, neglects the important roles spiritual disciplines, religious communities, and religious institutions play in helping the saints grow in understanding and virtue. Spiritual disciplines like the reading and memorizing of Scripture, prayer, meditation, silence, fasting, chastity, poverty, and so on, have been developed by the saints over time as ways to help them grow in their understanding of God, focus their attention on God and away from worldly distractions so that they can accurately hear God's voice, prepare to receive God's grace and act on God's instructions, and be strengthened for battles against internal and external evils. These practices develop in the context of communities that provide instruction and accountability in those practices. Religious institutions, when they are doing their job well, support those practices and those communities and regulate abuses. Zagzebski's does not include these aspects of the saintly life into her account of saintliness. She could probably incorporate them without much difficulty, but her omission may be telling. For her, the kind of imitation that matters for moral development is the imitation of good emotions, not the imitation of practices. I will argue in chapter five, section 4.5, that engagement in practices is more important to the development of virtue than is the imitation of emotions.

---

[107] See Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions*, 285-9.

[108] See ibid., 69-72 for an interesting discussion of the motive Christians have to bring about the kingdom of God.

Problems with Exemplarism. Zagzebski believes "The most common exemplars are models for only a limited range of behavior" and that "people typically imitate a person only in a restricted range of behavior."[109] In addition to exemplars for particular roles of human activity and their related virtues, she also claims "there are persons who are exemplary for their lives in general."[110] While I am in full agreement with Zagzebski's first claim, I am skeptical about the second one. I believe the reason we can identify people as exemplary and desire to imitate them is because we know the criteria for success in the range of behavior at which they are best. As I explain this point, the grounds for my skepticism about Zagzebski's second claim will become clear. When we admire an exemplar, we know the purpose they are attempting to accomplish and see that they accomplish it well.

---

[109] Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, 54-5.

[110] Ibid., 56.

Zagzebski gives the example of a cook as a model of a limited range of behavior. We know A is a good cook because he produces delicious food, presents it beautifully, and does it all with efficiency. The particular personality of the cook, the specific methods he uses, the kind of food he prefers to cook, and so on do not matter to us when we say "A is a good cook." Nor do the emotions of the cook, so long as they do not inhibit his ability to create delicious and attractively presented food efficiently. The emotions may matter more in the case of exemplars of certain roles. If B is an exemplary mother, we can know B is exemplary in the same way we know A is an exemplary cook because we know the purpose of mothering. I am not claiming that the role of mother is exactly the same across cultures, but I think it is true that in any culture, good mothers share aims and the properties needed for the achievement of those aims. All good mothers love their children, protect them from danger, do what they can to nourish them and keep them healthy, and educate them in various skills, practices, and virtues. There is more to mothering, for sure, some features of which are common to mothering across cultures and some of which is specific to mothering within specific cultures. Knowing the purpose of mothering makes possible the ascription of exemplarity to B. Having the emotion of love (among others) is essential to good mothering, but it is not sufficient. The reason it is necessary is twofold. First, it motivates the mother to do the other things all good mothers do. Second, exhibiting love is an important aspect of moral education, for the child needs to learn to love so that the child can be good in the roles the child will play, including the role of being a child. In both the cases of the cook and the mother, it is clear that we need to know the nature of the practice or the role to say that the practitioner or the occupant of the role is good.

I am skeptical about Zagzebski's claim that we know by direct reference that the saints are exemplars of life in general or that they are good in nearly every situation. If we cannot pick out exemplars of practices and roles without knowing the nature (and hence the purposes) of those practices and roles, I do not see how we can pick out exemplars of life in general without knowing human nature and the purpose of life. Yet Zagzebski claims she does not need to rely on a theory of human nature in her moral theory. Furthermore, when we examine the lives of the real saints, we tend to find that they are exemplars not of life in general but of some particular role or some particular set of virtues. Typically, as John A. Coleman argues, the saints display in extraordinary fashion the virtues conspicuously lacking in their society, though they may be mediocre or average with respect to other virtues.[111] In chapter five, I affirm Coleman's insight and argue that the saints are in a certain sense exemplars of life in general, but only because they are exemplars of a particularly important role and of the practices that help them be good in that role.

---

[111] John A. Coleman, "Conclusion: After Sainthood?" in John Stratton Hawley, ed., *Saints and Virtues* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), 220.

4. Criteria of Adequacy and Conclusions

Testing Wolf's, Adams's, and Zagzebski's accounts against the criteria of adequacy reveals why Adams's and Zagzebski's accounts are superior to Wolf's. By some criteria Adams's account is superior to Zagzebski's, and by other criteria Zagzebski's is superior to Adams's. On no criteria does Wolf's account appear strongest. Applying the criteria of adequacy test also reveals the deficiencies of Adams's and Zagzebski's account and justifies my search for an alternative account that better meets the criteria in chapter five.

5.1 Scope

With respect to scope, two observations are worth mentioning. Unlike James, all three accounts discussed in this chapter refer to very few saintly people. Wolf only mentions Francis of Assisi, Mother Teresa, and the fictional Dickensian character, Agnes Copperfield. Loving Saints and Rational Saints, as Adams rightly pointed out, are simply theoretical constructs for her. They do not accurately characterize a set of real saints. Zagzebski mentions Jesus, Socrates, Gandhi, the Buddha, Francis of Assisi, Augustine, Aquinas, Philip Neri, Therese of Lisieux, and Dostoevsky's Father Zossima; as I pointed out in section 3.4 an exemplarist approach that includes such a diverse (though small) set of exemplars must be relativistic. In the second part of *Divine Motivation Theory*, Zagzebski limits herself to Christian exemplars and thus avoids the problem. Adams mentions Albert Schweitzer, Thomas Aquinas, Bach, Fra Angelico, Francis of Assisi, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mother Teresa. He also considers the possibility of Van Gogh being a saint given his excellence in painting and his devotion to the Good. When it comes to the question of the scope of saints their theories could cover, Zagzebski's and Adams's accounts are far superior to Wolf's account. Wolf's account cannot apply to a broad range of saints; in fact, one might wonder if it could ever apply to any real people. Zagzebski's account does illuminate some key features of saintliness we find in the agreed-upon list of saints, and she is particularly insightful about their emotional intelligence and their motive dispositions. Adams's account, I pointed out, overemphasizes the "otherness" of the saints, so his account could be taken to exclude some figures that ought to be considered saints but are "too ordinary" to meet his high standards of holiness. I think, for example, of saints like Philip Neri and Augustine of Hippo, whom many people find rather approachable and imitable. However, his discussion of vocation broadens the scope of possible saints in a promising way.

5.2 Internal Consistency

In evaluating the recent philosophical accounts of saintliness for consistency, I will limit my assessment to how consistent the philosophers' theories are when applied to the data set they mention. Susan Wolf's descriptions of saints do not appear to be consistent with the few saints she mentions by name, for Francis of Assisi's and Mother Teresa's lives were not dominated by a desire to be moral. Rather, the objects of their devotion were God and those they served, in whom they saw the image of God. Zagzebski's account appears to be consistent with respect to Francis of Assisi, Jesus, Augsutine, Aquinas, Philip Neri, Therese of Lisieux, and perhaps Gandhi. Setting aside questions regarding what the real Socrates was like, I do not know if he could be characterized as sharing the motives of God. On Plato's account, he is clearly "*for* the Good," he does claim to follow his *daimon*, and he does exhibit some important saintly virtues like wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice. I leave it to Buddhist scholars to decide if the application of Zagzebski's account fits the Buddha, whether, for example, the Buddha can be said to have emotions or motive dispositions at all.[112] Adams's account does appear to apply well to his set of data, and he uses the individuals he calls saints specifically to illustrate his points.

5.3 Conservatism

With respect to conservatism, Wolf's account only captures half of the traditional account of saintliness. Traditionally, saintliness has been understood as both moral and religious exemplars with the virtues flowing from the saints' devotion to God and their fellow human beings. Since Wolf only discusses the moral exemplar, her account does not meet the criterion of conservatism. Zagzebski's and Adams's accounts fit better, though they attempt to capture the saintliness of non-Christians with their theories, which would appear odd to traditionalists. That they take this route is not necessarily a problem for their theories, but it does put them at odds with the tradition. Zagzebski's focus on the virtues of the saints, her attention to their emotions, and her assertion that they are proper objects of imitation square well with the tradition. However, I raised concerns about her ability to capture the intimacy with God the tradition attributes to the saints. We find none of the intimacy or dependency upon God in Zagzebski's account that we find in traditional accounts or even in the accounts of James and Adams. Adams's focus on the saints' ability to reveal God's goodness, on their devotion to God through their vocations, and on their desire to hear God's commands and follow them makes his account quite conservative. Adams's ability to make sense of why it is that the saints see themselves as "just doing their duty" when observers are convinced that their actions are supererogatory is a valuable feature of his account. However, traditional accounts of saintliness say much more about saintly emotions, motives, motive dispositions, and virtues and the practices, communities, and institutions within which they develop them.

---

[112] Stanley J. Tambiah describes the life of Thai Theravāda Buddhist forest monks as one that involves seasons of retreat for meditation and of return to the community for teaching. While in retreat, they grow to know the four noble truths (and thus eliminate desire and ultimately a sense of self), so at least for a time they attempt to eliminate emotions and motives. When they return, they resume a life a meditation and ascetic discipline in which they cultivate universal compassion and attempt to limit their desires. It would seem, then, that the Buddhist *arahant* can possess some of God's motives, like compassion, but that the *arahant*'s goal is ultimately to be rid of all motives. See Tambiah's "The Buddhist Arahant: Classical Paradigm and Modern Thai Manifestations," in *Saints and Virtues*, 111-26.

5.4 Simplicity

Wolf's account of saintliness is simple. For her, saintliness simply is maximal devotion to morality. However, as noted above her account fails to characterize the data accurately. Simplicity does not count as a virtue of a theory if it fails to explain the data. Zagzebski's account is not quite as simple, but she does not unnecessarily complicate her account. For her, saints are those whose motives are the same as God's in virtually every situation. This formulation brings together the moral and religious aspects of saintliness and does a fairly good job of characterizing the data. Some of the aspects of saintliness she omitted in *Divine Motivation Theory* such as the spiritual disciplines and the social context in which they are practiced she could presumably build in to a richer account without contradicting her simple account. Adams's account has two core elements. First, he believes that the saints resemble God, and second, he believes that the saints are *for* the Good. Both features seem necessary for accurately characterizing the saints, for the first explains their excellence and the second explains the specifically moral focus of their goodness.

5.5 Fruitfulness

As should be clear from the discussion above, Wolf's approach does not tell us much about the nature of real saints. Zagzebski's approach draws attention to the motives of the saints, and careful study of the motives of the saints may reveal more important insights into the nature of saintliness. Her account certainly is fruitful insofar as it helps in the process of discovering unrecognized saints and in proving someone reputed to be a saint unsaintly. Take, for example, two individuals, A and B, and assume A is reputed for being a do-gooder while B goes largely unrecognized by the public. Imagine then that A's biographer investigates A's life and finds that according to reliable people close to A, A's motives were almost entirely self-serving, that A sought a reputation for virtue but did not share God's motives. Zagzebski's account helps us realize that such a person is not a saint despite initial appearances. A's actions would have indirect value but not direct value, to use Zagzebski's terms. Imagine B's biographer who finds that B, though unrecognized as saintly beyond her closest companions, did indeed share God's motives and served as an exemplar to those people. Again, Zagzebski's account proves fruitful. Adams's account urges us to look in the saints for excellence and devotion to God. His account may be fruitful if it generates further insights into the ways in which humans can exhibit divine excellence. Studying the ways in which the saints are devoted to God could also generate further insights into how the saints grow in both their relationship with God and in their moral goodness. Adams's account, like Zagzebski's, helps us separate the saints from the non-saints and to identify new cases of saintliness as they present themselves. An approach that emphasized spiritual practices more than do Zagzebski's and Adams's approaches would be more fruitful because it would generate more insights into how the saints become saints. An approach that focused on the roles of the saints would also be more fruitful because it would help explain how the saints' relationship to God transforms one's other relationships.

5.6 Conclusion

Adams and Zagzebski thus provide important insights into the nature of saintliness. Adams recognizes that the saints resemble God's infinite goodness in some finite way, that their resemblance to God accounts for their holiness, which Adams argues often makes them appear bizarre and foreign to us, that they are *for* the Good, that they are extremely devoted to God, and that their devotion to God issues forth in a specific vocation. Zagzebski points out that the saints share God's motivations and thus God's virtues. She, like James, focuses on their emotions, arguing that they fit the world. However, neither account tells us enough about the specific virtues the saints possess, how the saints grow into saintliness through practices, or how their intimate relationship with God transforms other aspects of their lives. In chapter five, I develop a creative account of saintliness that utilizes role-centered moral theory as developed by J. L. A. Garcia and Sarah Harper and draws on insights from Thomas Aquinas and Alasdair MacIntyre to fill in the lacunae left by James, Adams, and Zagzebski.

CHAPTER FIVE

Friendship with God

In chapter four, I illustrated what happens when moral philosophers emphasize either the moral or the religious aspects of saintaragraphliness at the expense of the other. My critique of Susan Wolf's account of saintliness showed how conceiving of the saints purely as moral exemplars misconstrues them and makes them unattractive ideals to which non-saints should aspire. Robert Adams's account rightly stresses the saints' devotion to God, but his emphasis on their resemblance to God pushes him to overemphasize their otherness. His account of their loyalty to God is illuminating in some significant ways, but he neglects to discuss in sufficient detail the emotions, motives, motive dispositions, and virtues of the saints and the practices that make growth in those areas possible. He also does not discuss the communities in which the practices are sustained and advanced, the institutions that support and regulate those practices, or the traditions of thought and practice that provide the context in which the saints live their lives. Linda Zagzebski's account of saintliness improves upon Adams's account by stressing the imitability of the saints and by giving a richer account of the emotions, motives, motive dispositions, and virtues of the saints. However, her account is lacking in that she describes the saints' connection to God as one of imitation when the form of connection is better described in terms of personal relationship. Like Adams, Zagzebski neglects the role of specific practices, communities, institutions, and traditions that make saintliness possible, and her account could be improved by more attention to the specific virtues and gifts the saints possess.

My purpose in this chapter is to develop a creative account of the saintliness that improves upon the work of my interlocutors (primarily James, Wolf, Adams, and Zagzebski), utilizing concepts from role-centered moral theory. I am not committed to the view that role-centered moral theory is a moral better theory in all respects than those offered by Adams and Zagzebski. Nor am I committed to the claim that Adams and Zagzebski have no resources in their own meta-theories to do better than they have done. In fact, I think they might incorporate some of the insights I offer below into their theories. I think there are good reasons to believe role-centered moral theory is superior to James's demand satisfaction consequentialism and to the Kantian and Utilitarian theories Wolf discusses, but my purpose here is not to defend that claim either. My contention here is that thinking of the saints in terms of the roles they play provides a simple way to pull together the insights of James, Adams, and Zagzebski and the insights I have made along the way as I criticized their errors and omissions.

1. Summary of Insights

1.1 Religious Aspects of Saintliness

The best accounts of saintliness unite the religious aspect of saintliness with the moral aspect. James, Wolf, and Zagzebski each provide philosophical accounts of saintliness that do this. Regarding the religious aspect of saintliness, we learn from James that they believe in the existence of an Ideal Power, they experience friendly continuity with it, they find joy and freedom in surrendering themselves to its will, and that the resultant shift in emotional center typically leads the saints to engage in ascetic practices and to grow in virtue. For James, the connection between the religious and the moral is in the shift of emotional center. Adams argues that saintliness is best described in terms of devotion to God rather than to morality, and that the moral aspect of saintliness flows from their devotion to and reliance upon God for their growth. He describes their connection to God on the one hand as resemblance to God and on the other hand as devotion or loyalty to God, obedience to God's commands, and adherence to God's plan through their vocations. Zagzebski agrees that saints resemble God insofar as they imitate Christ; they come to share divine incarnate emotions, motives, and virtues, and doing so is what makes them moral exemplars. I take the substance of all of these insights to be correct, and in what follows I incorporate them into my creative account.

1.2 Moral Aspects of Saintliness

Regarding the moral aspects of the saints, all three accounts highlight the love or charity of the saints. For James, the saints exhibit loving and harmonious affections that allow them to love the people non-saints have difficulty loving. Their charity is their most valuable attribute in pragmatic terms, and without the charity of the saints, the world would be a much worse place. For Adams, the saints' love of God makes possible their love for others. Their love is not calculative in the sense of trying to figure out how to maximize the amount of goodness they create through their love. Instead, the saints love what God calls them to love, and they trust that God will take care of the rest of the world by other means. For Zagzebski, the love of the saints can be an emotion, a motive, a motive disposition, or a virtue. As an emotion saintly love involves feeling a characteristic way towards lovable objects. Their love is good according to Zagzebski because their loving emotions fit their intentional objects: they love what is actually lovable. Saints have the motive of love when their loving emotion pushes them to act in a loving way towards the object of their love. Saints are typically disposed to be motivated to love the lovable, so they also possess loving motive dispositions. Finally, love is a virtue in the saints insofar as they are reliably successful in bringing about what they are motivated to do out of love. Zagzebski discusses several forms of love – friendship, erotic love, familial love, and *agape* – and presumably she would attribute at least the last of these to the saints, though the others probably exist in many of the saints as well.[1] Aside from love, the saints exhibit other emotions like joy, peacefulness, pity, compassion, and virtues like courage, strength of soul, justice, *phronesis*, temperance, humility, perceptiveness, gratitude, empathy, trust, loyalty, repentance, and knowledge.

Regarding the saints' acquisition of the virtues, James, Adams, and Zagzebski are not as illuminating. Adams and Zagzebski argue that the virtues are developed through social practices, but neither of them discusses the specific practices the saints employ. James discusses the saints' ascetic practices like fasting, chastity, poverty, penance, and obedience, but he is selective in his endorsement of them. Zagzebski alone argues that the saints grow as they interact with other exemplars while James and Adams neglect the communities that contribute to the growth of the saints.

James, Adams, and Zagzebski put limits on the extent to which the saints are imitable. All want to affirm that we ought to imitate the saints in some ways. For James, the limiting factor is our personal capacities. For Adams, it is vocation, for not everyone is called to the same vocation as the saints. We ought to imitate the saints whose vocations dovetail with ours and not try to be like those whose vocations differ. For Zagzebski, imitability is limited by the incommunicable uniqueness of individual persons. Since each person is unique, no person can or should imitate exactly any other person. The saints show us how to live ideal or close to ideal versions of their own lives. When we imitate them, we can do so at a general level to be sure, but some creative translation is required if we are to glean specific insights into how we ought to live our lives. Saintly vocations and incommunicability may help explain why saints do acts that seem eccentric and bizarre to us, as Adams points out; these features also explain why certain acts that rightly are supererogatory for non-saints are, for the saints, "within the call of duty," as J. O. Urmson and Andrew Michael Flescher point out.[2]

---

[1] Linda Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 122.

1.3 Aspects of Saintliness Absent from or Inadequately Described in James's, Adams's, and Zagzebski's Accounts

In my assessment of the accounts of James, Adams, and Zagzebski, I have pointed out the lack or misunderstanding of several important features of saintliness. First, none of the accounts on offer provides a sufficient account of how the saints become saints or how they grow morally and spiritually. James sees a connection between the conversion and mystical experiences of the saints and their growth, but surely there is more to their growth than these experiences, for many non-saints have similar experiences. For them, such experiences may be transformative, but not to the degree they are for the saints. He also discusses their ascetic practices, but he sees those practices primarily as a consequence of saintliness, and he is critical of the effectiveness of some ascetic practices in bringing about genuine moral growth. Zagzebski and Adams argue for the importance of social practices in the formation of virtue, but they do not examine the practices that contribute to the cultivation of saintly virtues. Furthermore, the practices that contribute to saintliness take place in communities of practitioners (monasteries, convents, religious orders, missions) that sustain and advance the tradition of thought (theology) and practice (spiritual disciplines), and those practices are supported and regulated by institutions (congregations, religious orders, or church bodies). James neglects all of these except institutions, which he disparages unjustly, as I pointed out in chapter two. Adams and Zagzebski give little attention to any of these aspects of saintly formation. Zagzebski's assertion that exemplars grow in wisdom when they interact with other exemplars is helpful, but insufficient.

---

[2] J. O. Urmson, "Saints and Heroes," in *Essays in Moral Philosophy*, ed. A. I. Melden (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1958), 201. Andrew Michael Flescher, *Saints, Heroes, and Ordinary Morality* (Washington, D. C.: Georgetown University Press, 2003), 219-20, 239, 252.

Second, I am not convinced that James, Adams, or Zagzebski have adequately characterized the relationship which the saints report having with God. James says the saints experience friendly continuity with the Ideal Power and he recounts story after story of saintly intimacy with the divine. However, his replacement of the God of Scripture with the vague, amorphous, story-less Ideal Power or "the More" weakens his account. None of the saints in his account characterize the person with whom they are intimate as an Ideal Power or as "the More," and it is difficult to imagine what a relationship with such an abstract being would look like. Adams and Zagzebski describe the relationship the saints have with God as one of resemblance or imitation. It is characterized by love, devotion, and loyalty. Resemblance requires no personal relationship. I can resemble someone about whom I know nothing. Imitation usually requires a relationship of some sort, and most imitation takes place within the context of close relationships, but it is also possible to imitate someone with whom we have no special relationship, as when fans imitate their heroes or when readers imitate fictional characters. Love, devotion, and loyalty are essential to special relationships, but the kind of love, devotion, and loyalty required depends on the type of relationship. Adams describes the religious life as one of friendship with God and discusses the nature of that friendship in a few passages.[3] In *Divine Motivation Theory* Zagzebski tells us nothing about the specific nature of the saints' relationship to God. I contend that the deficiencies in James's, Adams's, and Zagzebski's accounts of the moral goodness of the saints can be overcome (without losing any of their best insights) by rightly characterizing the relationship the saints have with God.

2. A Role-centered Approach

In recent decades, some moral philosophers have pointed out that our moral lives are largely lived out in the context of special relationships and that Enlightenment moral theories seem ill-suited to account for the special responsibilities we have in those special relationships, especially those we do not choose like familial relationships.[4] Role-centered moral theory, as developed by J. L. A. Garcia and Sarah Harper, takes the social roles people play to be the central feature of the moral life. Garcia and Harper argue that we can derive all other aspects of moral theory from moral roles. They explain our purportedly general or role-independent responsibilities in terms of special or role-relative responsibilities.[5] I present a sketch of role-centered moral theory not to defend it against all objections, but rather to suggest that it provides a better framework within which to understand saintliness than do those offered by James, Adams, and Zagzebski. If role-centered moral theory provides the best framework within which all the features of saintliness I have discussed can find their place, then that is certainly a virtue of the theory, but I am not committing myself here to the claim that its being able to do so makes it a better moral theory in all respects than those advocated by Adams and Zagzebski.

---

[3] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 196-8, 252-3.

[4] Shelly Kagan, *Normative Ethics* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1998), 126. Samuel Scheffler, "Relationships and Responsibilities," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 26 (1997): 189-90. Christina Hoff Sommers, "Filial Morality" *The Journal of Philosophy* 83, no. 8 (August 1986): 439-56. Michael O. Hardimon, "Role Obligations" *The Journal of Philosophy* 91, no. 7 (July 1994): 333-63. Lionel K. McPherson, "The Moral Insignificance of 'Bare' Personal Reasons" *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 110, no. 1 (July 2002): 29-47. Diane Jeske, "Families, Friends, and Special Obligations" *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 28, no. 4 (December 1998): 527-55. Philip Pettit and Robert Goodin, "The Possibility of Special Duties" *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 16, no. 4 (December 1986): 651-76. Dorothy Emmet, *Roles, Rules and Relations* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966). R. S. Downie, *Roles and Values: An Introduction to Social Ethics* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., l971).

2.1 Role-centered Morality

Role-centered morality takes the roles people play to be the central feature of the moral life. As Garcia puts it, "A person's moral life comprises certain salient relationships or roles she stands in. To be morally good or bad is to be good or bad in such roles as friend, parent, offspring, spouse, neighbor (in the scriptural sense), confidante, informant, promiser, etc."[6] Harper, whose work fills in the sketch provided by Garcia, says moral roles are "exhaustive of the moral life."[7] Garcia and Harper deny the distinction between ethics (the realm of feelings, desires, inclinations, motives, virtues, and so on) and morality (the realm of duties, actions, principles and laws, rights, and so on). They also reject the bifurcation of the duties we have within the context of special relationships and the duties we have independent of any special relationships.[8]

---

[5] I am using Harper's terminology here to distinguish between those responsibilities we are said to have to all human beings regardless of their relationship to us and those that we have only by way of our special relationship to them. Because Harper and Garcia reduce the latter to the former, they ultimately deny the existence of role-independent responsibilities. Their doing so is controversial, but I find their doing so by means of neighbor love to be appealing and to be illustrated well in the lives of the saints. J. L. A. Garcia, "Norms of Loving," in Christian Theism and Moral Philosophy, ed. Michael Beaty, Cartlton Fisher, and Mark Nelson (Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 231-3. Sarah Harper, "Role-centered Morality," (Ph.D. dissertation, Boston College, 2007), 69, 121-3.

[6] Garcia, "Love and Absolutes in Christian Ethics," in *Christian Philosophy*, ed. Thomas Flint, 162-99 (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1989), 163.

Roles are relationships between a role-agent (i.e. mother, teacher, friend, employee) and a role-respondent (i.e. child, student, friend, employer). When we say "A is a good R," where R refers to a role, A is the role-agent we are evaluating. The role-agent is defined not just in terms of rationality but also in terms of her desiderative and affective qualities, for we typically think that being good in a role requires not only reasoning properly but also feeling and desiring the right things.[9] The person to whom A is a good R is the role-respondent. According to Harper, "a moral role is a system or complex of attitudinal responses to persons, where the attitudes in question are characteristically deep, stable, and widespread."[10] Moral roles are thus ones that require a consistent and deep level of engagement on the part of the role-agent to meet the deep, stable, and enduring needs, desires, and preferences of the role-respondent. Since the attitudinal responses characteristic of moral roles are stable and enduring, they are connected with the virtues. Moral roles require responses that are just, temperate, wise, caring, etc. Moral roles are also those roles about which there is widespread agreement across time and cultures and social classes regarding what is required of a person in that role.[11] Wherever or whenever we look, we find people wanting friends, mothers, husbands, and so forth, and though what is expected of people filling those roles may include culturally specific needs, desires, and preferences, what matters for a role-centered theory are those properties that are common to all cases.

---

[7] Harper, "Role-centered Morality," 54-61.

[8] Harper discusses these bifurcation in depth in Ibid., 2-10. For proponents of the division, see Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985), 14 and Ronald Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 485n1.

[9] Harper, "Role-centered Morality," 64.

[10] Ibid., 132-3.

Focus on roles does not diminish the importance of individuality, for "the responses that constitute moral roles are 'special' responses," meaning they are responses to specific individuals.[12] Part of being good in my role as the friend of David is that I must respond to David's particular interests, needs, desires, etc. Hence, Harper argues that "moral roles are essentially ways of actively caring about the well-being of particular others."[13] This is something all good mothers, fathers, friends, and siblings know. Being good in those roles is not simply a matter of following the rules of the role or of checking off a list of requirements; being good in those roles requires careful attention to the specific needs of each unique role-respondent in ways appropriate to the relationship.

Garcia's and Harper's theory is "patient-focused," meaning that they take the perspective of the role-respondent to be the one that matters when we evaluate the relative goodness or badness of the role-agent in a moral role. According to Garcia, what separates centrally moral roles from those that are either centrally nonmoral or only potentially moral is that it is natural for one to want someone to fill them in one's life, and it is not a part of one's nature to be averse to filling them.[14] This account privileges our perspective *qua* role-respondent. Harper agrees that moral roles are roles that are important to role-respondents (not role-agents or society as a whole).[15] Such a distinction helps us understand why the role of husband or mother or friend is morally-constitutive while that of a pimp is not, for the pimp, insofar as he fulfills his role as pimp, does not will the good for his employees, whereas the husband or mother or friend, to be good in those roles must indeed will the good to the wife, child, or friend to whom they are role-related.[16]

---

[11] Ibid., 83.

[12] Ibid., 82.

[13] Ibid., 85.

The importance of the virtues in role-centered morality. Love or care is the central virtue of all moral roles. Garcia argues that the other "principal virtues of interpersonal morality can be seen as forms of loving, of willing people certain goods."[17]

---

[14] J. L. A. Garcia, "Love and Absolutes in Christian Ethics," in *Christian Philosophy*, ed. Thomas Flint, 162-99 (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1989), 163.

[15] Harper writes, "From the perspective of the role-respondent, the difference that a role makes reflects the needs, desires, preferences, and interests that the role-respondent has with respect to the role-agent. In other words, when role X makes a difference to role-respondent B, it is because B needs, wants, prefers, has an interest in, or is benefited by having someone who is her X. That is to say that B needs, wants, prefers, has an interest in, or is benefited by having someone who responds to her in the way that an X does. For example, the role of 'mother' makes a difference to my son in that he wants and is benefited by having someone who responds to him in the way that mothers tend to respond to their children, namely, by nurturing him....Consequently, let us conclude that the perspective of the role-respondent is the morally relevant perspective, and that it is necessary in order for a role to qualify as a moral role that it be important to the role-respondent, or make a difference to her in terms of reflecting certain needs, desires, preferences, and interests that she has with respect to the role agent. Harper, "Role-centered Morality," 79-81.

[16] It may be important to note that the relative "distance" between role-agent and role-respondent matters when it comes to moral assessments of role-agents. More is required of a friend or family member than of a stranger. Harper argues that both the self (the "closest" of all relationships) and that of stranger (those "furthest" from the role-agent) can be role-respondents. A Christian role-centered approach regards strangers as neighbors to whom charity is due but does not require that we love those neighbors as much as we do our family, friends, and other special relations. A neighbor, however, may demand my attention under special circumstances, as when he is in danger, and I must be more willing to allow a neighbor to become a friend (or even adoptive family member) if God calls me to do so.

[17] Garcia, "Norms of Loving," 232.

To will goods to the other requires the possession of other important virtues: to know which goods to will to the other and how best to help the other obtain those goods requires prudence, to know how to adjudicate goods between various others in competition for those goods requires justice and prudence, to be willing to sacrifice one's own goods for the sake of the other requires and generosity, and so on. Focusing on the virtues of role-agents is essential to understanding what it means to be good in a role, for what is required of role-agents to make them good in their roles is determined by the needs, desires, preferences, and interests of the role-respondents, and typically what the role-respondents need, desire, prefer, or are interested in includes but goes beyond what typical deontological approaches require. Deontological approaches like Kant's only require that the role-agent be motivated to act for the sake of duty, whereas often what a role-respondent needs, desires, etc. is that the role-agent feel a certain way, desire certain things, and be interested in doing what they do. As Aquinas puts it:

> Since, then, virtue works towards the good, for someone to have virtue he must be disposed to work towards the good in a good manner, that is, willingly, readily, with pleasure, and also reliably. Such are the criteria for doing things in a virtuous way; they can only be met where those who are doing something love that good for the sake of which they are doing it.[18]

To be good in the role then, the role-agent must not only do what they are obliged to do but must also feel the right way about doing it.[19]

---

[18] Thomas Aquinas, *Disputed Questions on the Virtues*, ed. E. M. Atkins and Thomas Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 118.

[19] Robert Kruschwitz suggested the following point of clarification regarding what it means to feel the right way about doing what is required of one in one's role. Aquinas seems to suggest that one ought to be disposed to take pleasure in doing the actions necessary for bringing about the good for the beloved. However, it seems that a mother, for example, ought not to take pleasure in the act of punishing her children when they do wrong. Indeed, good mothers typically find it very difficult to punish their children but do so out of a sense of duty to do what is required to lovingly care for the child. In response, one might

A good husband must do more than simply fulfill husbandly obligations like providing for, protecting, and making household decisions with his wife. His wife needs and desires that he, *inter alia*, share interests with her, that he be interested in her feelings and her desires, that he share in her joys and sorrows, that he feel loving affections towards her, that he wants to spend time with her, that he feels gratitude towards her when she blesses him and forgivingness towards her when she harms him, and so on. A wife's good involves her husband's emotional and motivational disposition towards her, and thus to be good in his role, the husband must be so disposed. Thus, the desiderative and affective qualities of the role-agent are integral to our evaluation of that role-agent's moral goodness. An enumeration and complete discussion of all the virtues required for discharging well all of the morally-constitutive roles is beyond the scope of my project, but I will return to how the virtues of the saints can be construed as those qualities that help them fulfill the requirements of their particular moral roles below.

2.2 The Appeal of Role-centered Morality as a Moral Theory

If role-centered morality is a viable moral theory, it has a number of appealing features. First, role-centered morality fits the long-standing belief that as Aristotle put it, we are essentially *zoon politikon*, social animals. If morality is grounded in some aspect of human nature, as most moral philosophers have argued, then our sociality would seem to be a reasonable place to look for what grounds morality. It is natural to think of one's self as constituted by roles, at least the parts that are significant for the moral aspects of

---

argue that a good mother should be disposed to take pleasure in construing her action as part of her loving care for her child, even though she ought not to take pleasure in the action of punishing.

our lives, and it is natural to think of oneself as a moral success when one is good in one's roles and as a moral failure if one is bad in one's roles. J. L. A. Garcia writes:

> Intuitively we think that to lack the loyalty that would make one a good friend, to lack the compassion that would make one a good fellow human being, to lack the devotion that would make one a good offspring, are moral failings, just as intuitively we think that being a bad shortstop or a bad liar is not a moral failing.[20]

Recent anti-liberalism arguments by Alasdair MacIntyre, Michael Sandel, and J. W. Glaser against the "abstract and ghostly" autonomous self assumed by Enlightenment and existentialist philosophers of have argued persuasively that we are essentially "persons-in-relations," that to strip away one's roles and relationships is to lose at least part of the self. Their arguments support an approach to understanding the moral life that makes human relationships the central feature.[21]

Second, it appears natural to speak in terms of roles when we ascribe goodness to people outside of philosophical contexts. Think for example of instances when one's life is assessed as a whole, as in posthumous biographies and eulogies (and the various conversations about the deceased during the grieving process). If A was a morally good person, the way that is typically expressed is in terms of A's goodness with respect to the social roles A played in relation to others, particularly those who would be interviewed or researched by the biographer or those who would attend A's funeral. We hear from those closest to A that he was such a great friend, that he treated his co-workers like they were his brothers, that he was a caring husband and father, and so on.[22] Rarely in such contexts do we hear anything like A obeyed the categorical imperative or maximized general happiness. Of course, that people typically speak in this way does not prove that the theory is correct, but assuming the theory is plausible on other grounds, its affinity with the common sense view counts as a virtue.

---

[20] J. L. A. Garcia, "Morally Ought Rethought," *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 20 (1986), 85. Robert Adams calls attention to the importance of roles in *A Theory of Virtue*, though he does not explicitly connect saintliness with moral roles. He writes, "The types of social contexts in which individuals are likely to be found, and the roles they are likely to play in those contexts, are relatively durable, and often morally significant, characteristics of the individuals....We should not underestimate the pervasiveness of our dependence on social roles. It seems unlikely that any child makes much progress in virtue, or even in life, without learning to be reasonably good at a number of social roles, before becoming capable of very much critical distance. We are social animals, and arguably even more dependent on collaboration than our distant ancestors whose economies involves less elaborate division of labor." Adams, *A Theory of Virtue*, 142-3.

[21] Alasdair Maclntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 32. Maclntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (Chicago: Carus Publishing Company, 1999), 108. Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 62-4. J. W. Glaser, *Three Realms of Ethics* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1994), 13.

Third, Christians have good reason to be attracted to a moral theory that takes relationships to be the central feature of the moral life, for the God they worship and who created them is a Trinity of persons-in-relations. Moreover, the relationships among the persons of the Trinity are defined in terms of roles: Father, Son, and Paraclete (advocate or counselor). The relationship between the persons of the Trinity can also be described as a kind of friendship. As creatures made in the *imago Dei*, we should expect that sociality is one of the ways in which we are like God. John A. Coleman asserts, "The goal of the moral life, is a friendship with God that mirrors the 'friendship' existing within God himself: the Trinity."[23] Since God is goodness and God is essentially relational, being like God in our relationships is good.

Fourth, Garcia argues that role-centered morality "has a pleasing richness, for not only does the vocabulary of virtues and vices seem most sensible in the context of roles, the same is true of duties and rights, goodness and badness, and of 'ought'-evaluations."[24] In other words, role-centered morality is equally able to incorporate the insights of virtue theory and deontological theories. Garcia also claims the theory demystifies moral 'ought'-judgments, allows for a victim-oriented account of obligation (rather than having the victim just be the locus on wrong-doing as on utilitarian, equalitarian, and divine command theories), and does a better job of explaining the moral importance of special personal relationships like friendship and familial relationships than do universalist moral theories (i.e. those that attempt to find moral principles or laws that apply to all people in all circumstances regardless of their personal relationships).[25]

---

[22] My claim here is supported by Adams in *A Theory of Virtue*, 90.

[23] John A. Coleman, "Conclusion: After Sainthood?" in Hawley, ed., *Saints and Virtues*, 217.

2.3 The Appeal of Role-centered Morality for Understanding Saintliness

The role-centered approach to understanding the moral life is appealing for my discussion of saintliness because much of the literature outside of philosophy calls the saints the "friends of God" or uses some other moral role like "disciple," "child," or "servant" of God.[26] Thinking of the saints in terms of the roles they play in their relationship with God and others runs throughout the history of thinking about the saints, so a moral theory that agrees with and fills out what is meant by such attributions will thus be appealingly conservative.

---

[24] Garcia, "Love and Absolutes in Christian Ethics," 167.

[25] Ibid., 166.

[26] John 15:12-16. Lawrence S. Cunningham, *A Brief History of Saints* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 3, 131. Benedicta Ward, "'Those by Whom the World is Kept in Being': The Social Aspects of the Text," in *The Lives of the Desert Fathers: The Historia Monarchorum in Aegypto*, trans. Norman Russell (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1981), 30. Norman Russell, trans., *The Lives of the Desert Fathers*, 146. Aquinas, *Disputed Questions on the Virtues*, 116-7, 120, 129, 133. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I-II. 65. 5 and II-II. 24. 2. Coleman, "Conclusion: After Sainthood?" 217-8, 221. Paul Wadell's *Friendship and the Moral Life* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 120-41 is particularly helpful on Aquinas' view. For recent discussions of friendship with God by Protestant authors, see Robert C. Roberts, *Taking the Word to Heart: Self and Other in an Age of Therapies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 252-69 and Stanley Hauerwas, "Practicing Patience: How Christians Should Be Sick," in *Christians among the Virtues: Theological Conversations with Ancient and Modern Ethics*, with Charles Pinches (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), reprinted in *The Hauerwas Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 348-66. Hauerwas also discusses Aquinas' view of friendship with God in "How 'Christian Ethics' Came to Be" in

A role-centered approach to understanding saintliness makes the intimate relationship between the saints and God the central feature of saintliness, so it cannot be easily lost in the process of explaining the extent to which saints are moral exemplars, as I noted happens in Zagzebski's exemplarist approach. Furthermore, we need not fear losing the moral exemplarity of the saints by focusing on their devotion to God because a role-centered approach takes being good in one's roles to be exhaustive of one's moral goodness. The saints' being good in their relationship with God is thus partially constitutive of their overall moral goodness.

Role-centered morality can account for the saints being exemplars while avoiding two problems with Zagzebski's exemplarism. On a role-centered account, the saints are exemplars of a particular role. We know the saints are exemplary because we know enough about the role to know what makes them good in the role. I noted earlier the problem with Zagzebski's claiming that someone is an exemplar without specifying of what they are exemplary. If, as Garcia and Peter Geach argue, "good" in the statement "St. So-and-so is good" is an attributive or adjunctive adjective and not a predicative adjective, then we need a noun that good modifies.[27] A moral role can serve as the noun modified by "good," and we have a well-defined sense of what it takes to be good in a

---

The Hauerwas Reader, 37-50 and in "The Difference of Virtue and the Difference It Makes: Courage Exemplified." *Modern Theology* 9, no. 3 (July 1, 1993): 249-64.

[27] Peter T. Geach, "Good and Evil," in *Theories of Ethics*, ed. Philippa Foot (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 65. J. L. A. Garcia, "Goods and Evils," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 47, no. 3 (1987): 385-412.

moral role. Thus, when we say that St. So-and-so is an exemplar, we can specify what we mean. St. So-and-so is an exemplary R. Specifying a role in which the saints are exemplary overcomes another problem with Zagzebski's account because a role-centered approach clearly delimits the extent to which the saints are proper objects of imitation. We need not make the stronger claim that the saints are exemplars of life in general, as Zagzebski does. Instead, we can say that saintliness is primarily about being exemplary in a particular role.

3. The Roles of the Saints

The saints in the data set I established in chapter one—Francis of Assisi, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Teresa of Avila, Thomas Aquinas, Ignatius Loyola, and Paul the Apostle—occupy a variety of moral roles. All were the children of their parents. All had close friends. None had spouses.[28] Francis, Mother Teresa, Teresa of Avila, and Ignatius were founders and leaders of religious orders, and Paul was one of the key leaders of the early church. Mother Teresa served as a nurse. She was also disciple of her spiritual guides. Teresa of Avila was subject to her confessors, Francis Borgia, Pedro Ibáñez and others, and to her spiritual guide, Peter of Alcantara. Thomas Aquinas was a teacher, member of a university faculty, and the member of the Dominican order and thus subject to his authorities within the order. Before that he was a student of Albert the Great. All except Paul were subject to the leadership of the papacy and found their identity to a significant degree in their membership in the Catholic Church.

---

[28] There is some speculation that Paul had a wife at one point, but it is clear that at the time of his writing 1 Corinthians that he was not married. See 1 Corinthians 7:8-9.

In some of these roles, these saints were exemplary, but I do not think their being exemplary in those roles is the reason we attribute saintliness to them.[29] In some roles, we need not think these saints were exemplary. Superior nurses to Mother Teresa can be found easily, though she was probably exemplary insofar as nursing requires care and concern for the spiritual and psychological well-being of patients. Teresa of Avila, Francis, and Thomas Aquinas all disobeyed their parents' wishes when they took their religious vows. Teresa even ran away from home. Considered independently of their relationship with God, they were not good children. Finally, none of the saints in the data set were married. Given that husband and wife are very important moral roles for those who occupy them, we must conclude that the saints cannot serve as exemplars of the good life for them.

Two roles common to all of the saints in the data set that emerge are that they are members of the Christian community, the Church (in the case of the data set, all were members of the Roman Catholic Church, though I do not see any compelling reason why we cannot extend the data set to include all members of the invisible church), and that they stand in some intimate relationship with God. I will follow Aquinas in referring to this intimate relationship of love as one of friendship, though (as my discussion below will show) the relationship is complicated by the fact that God is a different sort of person than the other persons with whom human persons are friends. Traditionally, the saints' membership in the Christian community is dependent upon their friendship with God. To become God's friend is to be initiated into the community of other friends of God, the

---

[29] John A. Coleman points out that "While Christian saints such as Saints Thomas Aquinas, Augustine, and Jerome were teachers, exceptional teaching ability was by no means understood as prerequisite for sainthood." Coleman, "Conclusion: After Sainthood?" 215.

Church. Thus the central role of the saints is that of the friend of God. In what follows, I investigate the nature of that role, what it requires, what virtues are needed to discharge it well, and what effects discharging it well has on other aspects of the saints' lives.

4. Friendship with God

In this section, I elucidate some of the key aspects of the saints' role as the friends of God. After I analyze the nature of friendship with God, I examine the influence of grace on the saints' acquisition of and growth in this role. I investigate the character of the friends of God, including their emotions, motives, motive dispositions, and virtues. Then I discuss the connection between friendship with God and vocation. Finally, I consider the traditional practices associated with developing friendship with God, the communities within which those practices are advanced, and the institutions that sustain and regulate those communities and practices.

4.1 The Nature of Friendship

According to Aristotle, human friendship is a union of persons on the basis of "shared recognition of and pursuit of a good."[30] In what follows, I will be restricting myself to discussion of what John M. Cooper labels "character friendship."[31] Aristotle believes friendships can be based on pleasure or usefulness, but that the highest form of friendship is one based on shared pursuit of the good by people of equally good character.[32] Character friends are drawn together by shared recognition of and admiration for the moral goodness in the other. Aristotle argues that friendship itself is a virtue. Aquinas disagrees, arguing that it is the effect of virtue, that people love others who are like them because they possess virtue.[33] For both, friendship is essential to the good life, for we gain goods through friendship that cannot be had any other way, such as fellowship, accountability, self-knowledge, the social virtues, and ultimately, as Aquinas will argue, the knowledge of God.[34] In short, we cannot become good without having good friends. For Aristotle, friendship is preferential, exclusive, and reciprocal. We become friends with people we prefer, and we do so in a way that is exclusive of those we do not prefer or prefer less ardently. Our preference is based in large part on commonality with respect to our shared recognition and pursuit of the good and with respect to our degree of virtue. It requires living, conversing, and working together for a long time. It is reciprocal because it involves reciprocal benevolence.[35] If one person does not reciprocate, the friendship breaks down. Robert Adams and Alasdair MacIntyre emphasize the importance of friends sharing in a good common project.[36] MacIntyre writes, “We are to think then of friendship as being the sharing of all in the common project of creating and sustaining the life of the city, a sharing incorporated in the immediacy of an individual's particular friendships."[37] Good friendships are productive of good community, a community that begins in the shared project of the friendship itself. It is, for Aristotle, the foundation of the good *polis*.

---

[30] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 155.

[31] John M. Cooper, "Aristotle on Friendship," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amelie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), 308.

---

[32] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 1999), 1156b6-7.

[33] Aquinas, *Disputed Questions on the Virtues*, 30.

[34] See Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life*, 51-69 for an excellent treatment of Aristotle's views on friendship.

[35] Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, 1559, 1561.

[36] Adams, *A Theory of Virtue*, 196-7.

Role-centered morality can affirm all of the propositions above. It characterizes friendship as a relationship between two persons. The role of friend consists in a characteristic set of attitudinal responses by the role-agent to the role-respondent. Primarily, good role-agents ought to care deeply for the well-being of their friends in ways that respond to the particular needs, interests, desires, etc. of the friends for the friends' sake. Good friends take joy in their friends success and mourn their friends' losses. Good friends give their friends that which their friends cannot give themselves but which is necessary for the friends' good, namely another self, a companion to enjoy goods, share projects, keep her accountable, and reveal aspects of themselves that are inaccessible by introspection alone. Good friends must possess the virtues needed for being good in the role. They must be loving, compassionate, kind, and empathetic. They must be just in their treatment of their friends, but just in a way that is generous and which weighs the friends' good above their own. They must be prudent, knowing how to respond to their friends in particular situations on the basis of their knowledge of the friends and of the situation. They must be temperate. When their friends make mistakes, they cannot become easily angered. They must prove their loyalty through courage when their friends are in danger of physical or emotional attack. They must have as their goal their friends' real good, helping their friends steer away from merely apparent goods, and they must put her friends' real good above their own selfish desires. When they are wronged, they must be forgiving, and when they wrong their friends, they must be repentant. Such virtues and many others are required for being a good friend. They are learned in the context of friendship, and they are partly constitutive of a good friendship. Growth in virtue is motivated by the natural, preferential love friends have for one another. Because they love, they are willing to be challenged to grow in virtue.

---

[37] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 156.

4.2 The Nature of Friendship with God

In discussing friendship with God, I draw primarily from Thomas Aquinas and from Paul Wadell's work on Aquinas regarding friendship with God. Friendship with God is, according to Aquinas, a special kind of friendship and can be called a friendship only by analogy because one of the friends, God, is vastly superior and in many respects different than a human friend.[38] As the friends of God, the saints are role-agents and God is the role-respondent. God as role-respondent does not have needs the way human role-respondents do, and thus is not benefited by the role-agent. God does have interests and desires, and wills that certain things be done. God can "live with" the saints and share projects like building the kingdom of God. From the perspective of the role-agent, the saints' friendship with God is preferential, exclusive, and reciprocal. The saints clearly prefer God above all others; indeed they are sometimes criticized for being so wrapped up on their relationship with God that they forget the practical needs of others. This was James's worry about some of the extreme mystics and ascetics. It is not reciprocal in the sense of being equal, for the saints' love for God not only falls short of God's love for them; God's love is the cause of their love for God. However, their friendship with God is reciprocal insofar as it requires love and sacrifice on the part of the role-agent in response to God's love to sustain and grow the friendship. Without love and sacrifice on the part of the human role-agent, the friendship breaks down.

---

[38] Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life*, 126.

By contrast, God's love for the saints is not preferential, exclusive, or reciprocal. God does not "show partiality," but loves all those who bear God's image equally.[39] Nor is God's friendship reciprocal, at least not in the same way that human love is reciprocal, for human reciprocity involves receptivity and equality. When A and B are both human persons and A is the friend of B, the friendship is reciprocal just in case when A gives B x, then B gives the equivalent of x in return to A. When God is the role-respondent, God's reciprocity is neither receptive nor equal, for God is (according to classical theism) pure act and therefore incapable of being passive or receptive. Furthermore, God's love for human friends is never equal to their love for God because God's love always exceeds and precedes theirs as the primary cause of their love for God. However, God can and does choose to humble himself so that we can be friends with him, and in this sense, God's love is reciprocal.[40]

We might be tempted to think that God's lack of preference, equality, and reciprocity diminishes the friendship between God and human beings or suggests that humans simply cannot be the friends of God. However, this is not a problem in the way it would be for a human whose love of his friends was not preferential, exclusive, and reciprocal because God's capacity for love is limitless, for God is Love. God can love all humans equally and completely at the same time. Humans have very limited resources; they must often decide between depth and breadth when it comes to their friendships. To take on more friendships may require taking attention away from other friends. To deepen a particular friendship sometimes requires neglecting other friends, at least for a time. Not so for God; a friend of God's may feel herself to be loved with an intensity of love much greater than that we typically find In the most exclusive, intimate human friendships, and yet the friend of God can still affirm God's universal love for all people, as my analysis in chapter two of Margaret Mary Alacoque's religious experiences showed.

---

[39] Romans 2:11, ESV.

[40] Robert C. Roberts, *Taking the Word to Heart: Self and Others in an Age of Therapies*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), 260-1.

The ultimate goal of friendship with God is union with him. In the meantime, we can experience a friendship with God that is an *inchoatus* or foretaste of our eventual union with God.[41] The saints, on Aquinas' view, have an intimacy with God in this life that comes very close to the beatitude they will experience in heaven. He distinguishes between those who are beginning their journey towards virtue, those who are making progress, and those who are perfect.[42] Aquinas calls the saints this dissertation is about "wayfarers." They are the friends of God who have made significant progress towards perfect virtue but have not yet reached perfection because perfection is only possible when they are united with God in the next life. In his "Disputation on the Cardinal Virtues," Aquinas distinguishes between three levels of virtue: virtues that are wholly imperfect because they lack practical wisdom, virtues that achieve right reason but are not unqualifiedly good because they fall short of their ultimate end, union with God, and virtues that are unqualifiedly good because they achieve the ultimate end. The first sort of virtue is possible for one who lacks practical wisdom but has some degree of some virtue or another. The second type of virtue is the type Aristotle describes the *phronimos* as having, which is sufficient for imperfect happiness in this life. The *phronimos* in possessing *phronesis* possesses all of the virtues. The last form of virtue is only possible for the person who possesses divinely infused charity and all the other virtues through charity. For Aquinas, wayfaring saints are the persons who possesses this third form of virtue insofar as is possible for human beings prior to the beatific vision.[43] Most clearly to the point, Aquinas writes in the "Disputation on Charity," that there are three meanings of "complete" when thinking about whether one can possess complete charity in this life. He writes, "We have to conclude that only God possesses complete charity simply speaking. Human beings may possess charity complete in relation to their nature, but not in this life. Even in this life, we can possess charity complete in relation to the stage of time."[44] By the latter he means that one can possess as much charity as is possible given the stage of development one has reached. The saints then possess as much charity as is possible for fully developed wayfaring human beings. Friendship with God in this life is characterized by the possession of charity and the highest possible degree of union with God in this life, one that is episodic, transient, and restricted.

---

[41] Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life*, 126.

[42] Glossing Gregory, he writes, "Now in every human effort we can distinguish a beginning, a middle, and a term; and consequently the state of spiritual servitude and freedom is differentiated according to these things, namely, the beginning – to which pertains the state of beginners – the middle, to which pertains the state of the proficient – and the term, to which belongs the state of the perfect." ST: II-II.183.4

---

[43] Aquinas, *Disputed Questions on the Virtues*, 253-4.

[44] Aquinas, *Disputed Questions on the Virtues*, 167-9.

4.2 Grace and its Effects

Essential to Aquinas's view on friendship with God is his belief that the friendship itself and every virtue and gift given by God in the context of the friendship are only possible by grace. The saints confirm this view in their self-deprecating comments and seemingly overblown exclamations of gratitude and dependency on God. Mother Teresa writes, "God uses my nothingness to show His greatness."[45] The Apostle Paul writes:

> For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.... Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord![46]

If Aquinas is right, then the saints' way of speaking about their needy condition is neither disingenuous nor turgid but accurate. Every attribution of goodness to the saints must be qualified and contextualized within the story of God's grace to the saint.

For Aquinas, grace does five things in the life of all Christians. First it "heal[s] the soul." Then it causes the soul to "desire good" followed by giving it the ability to "carry into effect the good proposed, and then persevere in it. Finally, God's grace helps the Christian "reach glory."[47] Once healed, any person, virtuous by Aristotle's standards or not, is put on the path towards union with God and thus on the path to virtue. Grace also makes possible the possession of the gifts, the beatitudes, and the fruits of the Holy Ghost, which I discuss below. The important question for this investigation is how it is that a previously vicious person grows in grace to become a saint.

---

[45] Mother Teresa, *Come Be My Light: The Private Writings of the Saint of Calcutta*, (New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2007), 267-99.

[46] Romans 7:18-19, 24-25, ESV.

[47] ST: I-II.111.3

By grace God infuses charity into the soul of the developing saint. Aquinas does not believe that charity is infused in proportion to each man's natural capacity but rather is given as God wills.[48] Whatever amount is given according to God's will is then received by burgeoning saints in accordance with their preparation for grace. Initially, recently justified saints must simply persist in fighting off sinful urges. After they have mastered that, then they are ready to "aim at progress in good," by adding to their charity. Finally, they are able to "aim chiefly at union with and enjoyment of God, which belongs to the perfect who "desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ."[49] This last stage of growth is the special reserve of the saints. Attaining union with an enjoyment of God is reserved for those in heaven, though a foretaste of beatitude is possible for the saints. At each stage, the grace of God strengthens would-be saints in their tasks.

The key to growing in grace is simply not refusing the grace that is offered. When redeemed persons cooperate with God's grace, allow God to move their free will, God grants more grace to persevere in grace.[50] As they cooperate with God's grace, then, by refusing to refuse it, spurning the advances of lesser goods, they grow in readiness to act in accordance with grace and therefore moral goodness.[51] That the infused virtues, the gifts, the beatitudes, and the fruits of the Holy Ghost are gifts and yet the saints spend much of their energy preparing themselves to hear the voice of God through spiritual disciplines is no contradiction for Aquinas, for to be offered a gift and to receive it are separable events. The offering is not dependent upon the condition of the recipient, but the receiving of it is. All are equally offered the gifts, but those offered the gift differ in their receptivity of grace. For Aquinas, all Christians must have some receptivity for grace, but to become saints, they must devote their lives to preparing for grace. Aquinas balances the view that "he who is better prepared for grace, receives more grace" with the claim that "man prepares himself, only inasmuch as his free-will is prepared by God." God, according to Aquinas, "dispenses His gifts of grace variously, in order that the beauty and perfection of the Church may result from these various degrees; even as He instituted the various conditions of things, that the universe might be perfect."[52]

---

[48] ST: II-II.24.3

[49] ST: II-II.24.9

[50] See Mark D. Jordan's "Goodness and the Human Will" in *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology*, ed. Scott MacDonald (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 148-9.

[51] Aquinas writes, "Charity does not actually increase through every act of charity, but each act of charity disposes to an increase of charity, in so far as one act of charity makes man more ready to act again according to charity, and this readiness increasing, man breaks out into an act of more fervent love, and strives to advance in charity, and then his charity increases actually" (ST: II-II.24.6).

4.3 The Character of the Friends of God

The effect of grace is growth in character. By grace, the saints are given friendship with God and the means to become good friends of God. Being a good friend of God requires the possession and exercise of the virtues. For Aquinas, virtue in general is a good habit of mind, by which we live righteously and of which no one can make bad use.[53] The virtues are moral, intellectual, and theological, with the moral and intellectual virtues being acquired through habituation and the theological virtues being infused by grace. God works the infused virtues into us without our aid. We receive them as unmerited gifts, not as the fruits of habituation. Having the theological virtues makes possible different sorts of actions than are possible for those who only possess the moral and intellectual virtues.[54]

---

[52] ST: I-II.111.4

[53] Based on Aquinas's revisions of the proposed definition offered in ST: I-II.55.4.obj.1

Of the virtues, charity is the most excellent, and it is the presence of charity that perfects the other virtues. Charity in itself is God's gracious gift of divine friendship to human beings. It is God's unmerited love for us that directs us to him.[55] The charity of the saints is something foreign in a sense, for it comes from without and is not what we would expect to find in a sinful human being. It does not advance the saints towards their natural *telos*, but rather perfects the saints by pointing them towards their supernatural *telos*. The alien nature of charity is perhaps what makes the saints seem so "other" at times. John A. Coleman calls the saints "liminal figures" for this reason. He writes:

> Saints as liminal figures, function to break down and transform ordinary notions of virtue. One way to understand how this happens is provided by classical Thomist theory. According to Aquinas, one virtue–love, or charity–is so fundamental that it stands apart from the others and serves as their ultimate form, transfiguring them.[56]

God's charity towards human beings makes possible their charity towards God. Their entire lives are given direction and purpose by the presence of charity. They grow to view every good in their lives as gifts from God to be put in the service of God. Those who have received charity love God above all else and submit to God's commands willingly.[57] Out of their love for God, those who possess charity love all else, including their neighbors, themselves, irrational creatures, and the rest of creation. We thus find friendship with God generating friendship with others and care for all else. Most astonishingly, though, we find that charitable people are able to love their enemies, for in loving God, they are able to put their animosity aside and love God through their enemies as their creator and as potential friends of God.[58]

---

[54] Mark D. Jordan, "Theology and Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, ed. Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 239-41.

[55] ST: II-II.23.1

[56] Coleman, "Conclusion: After Sainthood?" 217.

[57] ST: II-II.24.12

Perfecting Virtues. For Aquinas, charity is the form of the rest of the virtues because it directs man to his final end, union with God.[59] The saints, by possessing charity possess in perfected form all the other virtues. Aquinas makes a helpful distinction between what he calls "social or human virtues," "perfecting virtues," "perfect virtues," and "exemplar virtues." The social and human virtues as enumerated by Aristotle are present in both the *phronimos* (the man who possesses practical wisdom and through it all the virtues Aristotle enumerates) and the saint. The perfecting virtues are those virtues possessed by the saints and by those who have the potential to become saints, or in Aquinas' words, those "who are on their way and tending towards the Divine similitude."[60] The perfect virtues are "the virtues of those who have already attained to the Divine similitude...such as the virtues attributed to the Blessed, or in this life, to some who are at the summit of perfection." These virtues are possessed by the saints alone, and people can probably be considered saints even if they have not quite attained the level of perfect virtue. Having the perfecting virtues to a large extent or exercising them to the benefit of the church or the needy is probably sufficient for saintliness. The exemplar virtues are the virtues of God. Humans cannot possess the exemplar virtues because of their finite and composite nature. By attaining to the highest level of Divine similitude possible in this life, the saints fulfill as best they can the need for friends to be like in character. The virtues they possess make possible their sharing goods and good projects with God.

---

[58] ST: II-II.25.8

[59] ST: I-II.62.4, II-II.23.8

[60] ST: I-II.61.5

To "strive onward even to Divine things," humans need the perfecting virtues, which are the moral and intellectual virtues but transformed by the presence of the theological virtues, which come from God and direct the soul towards God.[61] According to Aquinas, "the theological virtues are those whereby man's mind is united to God."[62] Because the end towards which the theological virtues are directed surpasses human nature, namely union with God, and because that end is only known by us through divine revelation, the theological virtues must be infused by God's grace, not habituated through practice.[63] According to Aquinas, the theological virtues differ from the intellectual and moral virtues insofar as they are directed to different ends:

> [The] infused moral virtues, whereby men behave well in respect of their being "fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Eph. 2:19), differ from the acquired virtues, whereby man behaves well in respect of human affairs.[64]

The theological virtues consist in faith, which allows one to receive supernatural principles, hope, by which the will is directed to its supernatural end, and charity, by which the will is transformed to will as God wills it.[65] Transformed and given direction by the theological virtues, the moral and intellectual virtues become perfecting virtues.[66] Those who possess the perfecting virtue of prudence no longer contemplate the things of this world but rather direct their minds to God alone. Their temperance no longer focuses only on moderation of sensible pleasures but rather "so far as nature allows, neglects the needs of the body."[67] The human virtue of fortitude is the virtue that strengthens one physically and mentally to do something fearful because it is good.[68] The perfecting version of fortitude "prevents the soul from being afraid of neglecting the body and rising to heavenly things."[69] Justice as a social virtue regards dealing fairly with other people, but as a perfecting virtue involves the soul agreeing to follow the path towards union with God through the exercise of the other perfecting virtues.[70]

---

[61] Ibid.

[62] ST I-II.68.8

[63] ST: I-II.62.1

[64] ST: I-II.63.4

---

[65] ST: I-II.62.3

[66] On the transformation of the moral and intellectual virtues by the presence of charity, John A. Coleman writes, "The fact that we are trying to become God's friend inculcates a different, specifically religious, sense of the virtues – something beyond what Aristotle analyzed in the *Nichomachean* [sic] *Ethics*. By seeking to do the good as God does the good, we experience the gift of love for God, which, according to Thomas, transvalues the natural virtues. Coleman, "Conclusion: After Sainthood?" 217. Paul Wadell puts it thus: "A virtue's perfection, its achievement of excellence or goodness, depends on the love which formed it. That is why the virtues are displayed differently in really holy people, in the friends of God we call saints. Virtues are stretched to their perfection in the saints because God's love has so perfectly transfigured them that it becomes the form and principle of all they do....In this respect, the saints, the very ones who seem so unlike us, are the ones in whom the virtues are normatively displayed, the people against whom our own goodness must be measured." Paul Wadell, "An Interpretation of Aquinas' Treatise on the Passions, the Virtues, and the Gifts from the Perspective of Charity as Friendship with God" (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 1985), 162; quoted in Coleman, "Conclusion: After Sainthood?" 218. See also Aquinas, ST: I-II, 65.3.

[67] ST: I-II.61.5

[68] See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, III.6-8 and ST: II-II.123-124.

[69] ST: I-II.61.5

[70] Ibid.

We find the perfecting virtues to varying extents in all Christians who are progressing towards union with God. In the saints, we find either the perfecting virtues to a great extent or we find the perfect virtues. For Aquinas, the perfect virtues come closest to imitating the exemplar virtues of God. Aquinas writes, "Thus prudence sees nought else but the things of God; temperance knows no earthly desires; fortitude has no knowledge of passion; and justice, by imitating the Divine Mind, is united thereto by an everlasting covenant."[71] These virtues are possessed by the saints in heaven and by some saints while they are alive. The perfect virtues appear to be so detached from the things of this world and so closely assimilated to God's nature that it would seem that they could be ascribed only to the most extreme ascetics and mystics.

Saintly prudence. We find the perfecting and perfect virtues when we examine the lives of the saints. In this section I recount examples of perfecting and perfect forms of the cardinal virtues, starting with prudence. The saints take seriously Paul's exhortation to "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth."[72] We find perfecting prudence in the lives of the contemplatives such as Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, and in Thomas Aquinas himself. Whether living lives of solitude and asceticism or giving advice to visitors, we find in the desert fathers the virtue of having a "single eye...directed towards God."[73] A fourteenth century English mystic writes of contemplation:

---

[71] Ibid.

[72] Col. 3:2 ESV.

[73] Ward, "Introduction," 29.

> Contemplation means having in one's mind the joyful song of God's love and all the sweet praise of angels. We call this 'jubilation,' which is the goal of the prayer of perfection and of devotion in this life. That is the possession of the truly happy mind, which sees with spiritual eyes the Everlasting Lover and calls out with a loud voice in praise of him. It is the ultimate and really perfect form of death to this life.[74]

Francis of Assisi writes, "The truly pure of heart are those who despise the things of earth and seek the things of heaven, and who never cease to adore and behold the Lord God living and true with a pure heart and soul."[75] We also find perfecting prudence, however, in the lives of those who serve the world in practical ways, for in both the active and contemplative life we find a union of the saint's will with God's will. Their focus is on hearing God's voice and doing what God would have them do. Those who engage the world do so without thinking about the world apart from its relation to its Creator. In his famous "Canticle of Brother Sun," Francis exhibits perfecting prudence as he praises God through his creation.[76] Mother Teresa exhibits the same virtue in seeing Christ in the poor. She opens her book, *One Heart Full of Love*, with "I am deeply grateful to God for allowing me to share with you, so I can bring you the joy and gratitude of our people, the poor, under whose distressing appearance Christ is hidden."[77] Thus, we see prudence transformed by charity into a kind of knowledge that sees God by withdrawing from the things of this world or by engaging them.

---

[74] Gordon L. Miller, *The Way of the English Mystics: An Anthology and Guide for Pilgrims* (Ridgefield, CT: Morehouse Publishing, 1996), 36.

[75] Francis of Assisi, *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*, trans. by Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap. and Ignatius C. Brady, O.F.M. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1982), 32.

[76] Francis of Assisi, *Francis and Clare*, 38-9.

[77] Mother Teresa, *One Heart Full of Love*, ed. José González-Balado (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 1988), 1.

Saintly temperance. Perfecting or perfect temperance also appears regularly in the lives of the saints. Perfecting temperance is for Aquinas directed at loving union with God and therefore falls under a different species than temperance directed at the perfection of human appetites:

> In the consumption of food, the mean fixed by human reason, is that food should not harm the health of the body, nor hinder the use of reason: whereas, according to the Divine rule, it behooves man to "chastise his body, and bring it into subjection" (1 Cor. 9:27), by abstinence in food, drink and the like. It is therefore evident that infused and acquired temperance differ in species; and the same applies to the other virtues.[78]

Hence, we find the saints often denying themselves food, drink, sex, and bodily comforts beyond what is reasonable considering their natural *telos*. In pursuing the supernatural good, saints must detach themselves further from worldly pleasures and endure worldly pains cheerfully. Hence, for Aquinas, perfecting temperance is associated with abstinence, chastity, fasting, and sobriety. In its perfected form, temperance manifests itself in the lives of the saints as humility, meekness, and purity, which Aquinas numbers among the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the beatitudes. Francis of Assisi presents a good example of perfecting temperance when he says that he would experience perfect joy not in the growth of his order, but in not getting upset after being turned away from lodging when he is bloody and freezing after a long winter journey.[79] Some of the extreme ascetics, whom James labeled as pathological, Aquinas would likely commend for their perfecting or perfect temperance. Those with perfect temperance on Aquinas's schema must surely appear pathological from the standpoint of worldly human flourishing, but bodily flourishing is not the goal of the possessor of perfect temperance. One who "knows no earthly desires" should not be expected to go to great lengths to satisfy them. The asceticism of Antony of Egypt and other desert fathers is of this sort. Interestingly, Aquinas could also agree with James in condemning the excesses to which some of the ascetics went, for Aquinas does not recommend some of the means to which the "pathological" saints went in order to deny themselves, such as purposefully inflicting pain upon themselves; and he would certainly not approve those who took positive pleasure in pain itself, for to take pleasure in pain is to have an earthly desire, and a disordered one at that. A fine but important line divides those who take pleasure in the pain and those who take joy in the endurance of pain or in sharing the pain with Christ. The former are pathological; the latter are saintly.

---

[78] ST: I-II.63.4

[79] Francis of Assisi, *Francis and Clare*, 166-7.

Saintly fortitude. We find perfecting and sometimes perfect fortitude most clearly in the martyrs, who are called upon by God to be witnesses of their faith through their deaths. Aquinas claims that martyrdom is an act of fortitude in defense of what is just and true against persecution that is commanded by charity and receives its merit thereby.[80] Perfecting fortitude makes it possible to love God and neighbor without fear of bodily harm. Perfect fortitude involves complete fearlessness in the face of danger. Motivated by love for God, the martyr demonstrates perfect virtue and is strengthened by the Holy Spirit both physically and mentally beyond what is naturally possible. Hence we find Perpetua and Polycarp fearless, even joyful in the face of their demise and

---

[80] ST: II-II.124.1-2

Stephen praying as Christ did for his murderers as they stone him.[81] Perpetua is reported to have asked for a pin to straighten her hair so that in her victorious death she might not appear to be mourning, and when the moment of her martyrdom was at hand, she apparently steadied the hand of her executioner, drawing his dagger-gripping hand to her throat.[82] Polycarp reportedly requested that he not be nailed to his pyre and then willingly remained on it as the flames engulfed his body, praising God all the while.[83] Aquinas extols the fortitude of "the Blessed Tiburtius, [who]while walking barefoot on the burning coal, said that he felt as though he were walking on roses."[84] Such supernatural courage and delight in the face of bodily pain is only possible according to Aquinas with "the copious assistance of God's grace, which has more strength to raise the soul to the Divine things in which it delights, than bodily pains have to afflict it." Hence, martyrdom is a specific action that is the result of a cardinal virtue (fortitude) being put in the service of a theological virtue (charity) and assisted by the gratuitous grace of God.

---

[81] Acts 7:54-60, ESV.

[82] Tertullian, "The Passion of the Holy Martyrs Perpetua and Felicitas," in *Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 3, Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian.* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 705.

[83] Polycarp prayed "O Lord God Almighty, the Father of thy beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the knowledge of Thee, the God of angels and powers, and of every creature, and of the whole race of the righteous who live before thee, I give Thee thanks that Thou hast counted me, worthy of this day and this hour, that I should have a part in the number of Thy martyrs, in the cup of thy Christ, to the resurrection of eternal life, both of soul and body, through the incorruption [imparted] by the Holy Ghost. Among whom may I be accepted this day before Thee as a fat and acceptable sacrifice, according as Thou, the ever-truthful God, hast foreordained, hast revealed beforehand to me, and now hast fulfilled. Wherefore also I praise Thee for all things, I bless Thee, I glorify Thee, along with the everlasting and heavenly Jesus Christ, Thy beloved Son, with whom, to Thee, and the Holy Ghost, be glory both now and to all coming ages. Amen." See "The Encyclical Epistle of the Church of Smyrna Concerning the Martyrdom of the Holy Polycarp," in *Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 1, The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenæus.* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 42.

[84] ST: II-II.123.8

Saintly justice. Perfecting justice requires giving God and the things of God what is due, which means giving God one's whole life. Aquinas writes, "[perfecting] justice consists in the soul giving a whole-hearted consent to follow the way [to heavenly things]." By whole-hearted consent, I believe Aquinas intends complete and utter devotion to the point of death if necessary. Hence, possessing perfecting justice involves possessing perfecting prudence, temperance, and fortitude, for to consent to striving for heavenly goods is to consent to the means to achieving them. Those who possess the perfecting virtue of justice participate in God's redemptive work by submitting themselves to God's plan and doing God's work. They give what is due to God: their whole lives. As a result, we find the saints often on the front lines of the battles against political and social injustice. The early Christian martyrs opposed the injustice of the Roman authorities who required them to sacrifice to the emperor. Charles Lwanga, Joseph Mkasa, and the other Ugandan martyrs stood up against the tyrant Mwanga and paid for it with their lives.[85] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Edith Stein, and Maximilan Kolbe opposed the horrendously unjust Nazi regime and swallowed the bitter pill of martyrdom with saintly resolve.[86] We also find the saints on the front lines of spiritual battles, risking their lives to bring the Gospel to the unreached. The stories of Patrick, of Francis Xavier, of Jim Elliot and Nate Saint are well-known, and they like many others followed the examples set by the Apostle Paul and the disciples after the great commission.[87] Many paid with their lives for their commitment to God's plan, and some exhibited perfect justice, particularly as the hour of their martyrdom drew near.

---

[85] David Hugh Farmer, *Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, Fifth Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 330.

[86] Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, trans. by Eric Mosbacher, Peter and Betty Ross, Frank Clarke, and William Glen-Doepel, ed. Edwin Robertson, rev. and ed. Victoria J. Barnett (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000) and Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010). Farmer, *Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, 304-5.

The gifts. Even with the infusion of the theological virtues, human beings are not properly prepared to be moved by God to do the sorts of acts that exemplify salvation. For that, humans need the gifts of the Holy Ghost. Like the virtues, the gifts are habits, and like the theological virtues they are infused by grace, but they differ from the virtues in perfecting the recipient for acts higher than those of virtue. He writes:

> Now it is manifest that human virtues perfect man according as it is natural for him to be moved by his reason in his interior and exterior actions. Consequently man needs yet higher perfections, whereby to be disposed to be moved by God. These perfections are called gifts, not only because they are infused by God, but also because by them man is disposed to become amenable to the Divine inspiration...the gifts perfect man for acts which are higher than acts of virtue.[88]

These gifts, according to Aquinas, are "perfections of man whereby he is disposed so as to be amenable to the promptings of God" or "habits whereby man is perfected to obey readily the Holy Ghost."[89] They include those gifts that perfect speculative reason (understanding, counsel, and wisdom), those that perfect the practical reason (knowledge), and those which perfect the appetitive power (piety, fortitude, and the fear of the Lord). According to Aquinas, the gifts are "habits whereby man is perfected to obey readily the Holy Ghost."[90] Having a place for the gifts of the Holy Spirit and recognizing the receptivity the saints have to the call of God is a strength of Aquinas's account of saintliness, for not only do we see the gifts he mentions present in the lives of the saints, but we also hear from them that all they are doing when then demonstrate those habits is heeding the calling of God.[91] We find the disposition to hear the promptings of the Holy Spirit in saints from the Old Testament patriarchs like Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Joseph to the judges and the prophets, to John the Baptist and Mary, to the disciples who heeded Christ's call to "Follow me,"[92] to the early martyrs, the monastics, the scholars, leaders, and artists of Christendom, to the humanitarians and political activists of our day. All report hearing the voice of God and acting on the divine call on their lives. What Robert Adams calls vocation, what James calls the "sense of friendly continuity of the ideal power with our own life," Aquinas calls the gifts of the Holy Spirit, by which "man is disposed to become amenable to the Divine inspiration.[93] We see examples of the gifts in the lives of the saints, and we often associate particular saints with particular gifts. We recognize, for example, the understanding of Thomas Aquinas, the counsel of Paul to the churches, the wisdom of Augustine of Hippo and

---

[87] On Patrick, see J. B. Bury, *Ireland's Saint: The Essential Biography of St. Patrick*, ed. Jon M. Sweeney (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2008). On Xavier, see Orazio Torsellino, *The Admirable Life of S. Francis Xavier* (1632). For Elliot, see Elisabeth Elliot, *The Shadow of the Almighty: The Life and Testament of Jim Eliot* (New York: Harper, 1958). On Nate Saint, see Steve Saint, *The End of the Spear* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishing, 2005).

[88] ST: I-II.68.1

[89] ST: I-II.68.2-3

---

[90] ST: I-II.68.3

[91] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, for example, in his chapter "The Call to Discipleship" in *The Cost of Discipleship* makes a strong case for the centrality of hearing the call to follow Christ in the life of the saint.

[92] Matt. 9:9. Jesus uses the phrase "Follow me" to address would-be followers six times in Matthew's Gospel, four times each in the Gospels of Mark, Luke, and John. The disciples, upon hearing these commands appear adequately prepared to drop what they were doing to follow Jesus. In the case of the rich young man in Matthew 19:16-22, Jesus command proved too difficult; he was unable to receive the gift because his hands were too full of worldly possessions. In Aquinas's language, his love of "sensual happiness, being false and contrary to reason, [was] an obstacle to future beatitude" (ST: I-II.69.3).

[93] ST: I-II.68.5

Anselm, the knowledge of Benedict of Nursia, Ambrose of Milan, and Gregory the Great, the fear of the Lord of Abraham, the fortitude of Stephen or Perpetua or among Protestants of Luther, Bonhoeffer and Elisabeth Elliot, the piety (in the form of mercy) of Mother Teresa. We also see examples of the gifts in saints we would not normally associate with that particular gift. For example, many of the wisest men of his day consulted with Antony of Egypt, a self-avowed fool, for counsel and were satisfied.[94] Francis of Assisi, too, not known for his scholarship, demonstrated the gift of understanding in starting his voluntary poverty movement, an idea given to him in one of his many visions, which served as a much needed check on the corruption of the 12th-13th century church.[95]

The fruits of the Spirit. For Aquinas, all saints produce the fruits of the Holy Spirit, as enumerated by Paul in his epistle to the Galatians: charity, joy, peace, patience, long suffering, goodness, benignity, meekness, faith, modesty, contingency, and chastity.[96] The fruits of the Spirit can be regarded as the end towards which the saints as metaphorical trees rooted in the soil of the Holy Spirit aim, or they can be regarded as acts.[97] When we refer to the good deeds of the saints, we are typically referring to the fruits of the Spirit. We describe their works as good because they charitable, joyous, peaceful, patient, and so on. Performing actions like these is not limited to the saints; all those who possess the Holy Spirit can do them, but we do find the saints doing them more often and often with greater effectiveness.

---

[94] See Athanasius, *Life of St. Anthony*, para. 39, 41, and 72 for his claim to be a fool and para. 62, 72-80 for instances of his God-given wisdom.

[95] Francis of Assisi apparently heard a voice from a crucifix in a dilapidated church say, “Go and repair my house, which you see is falling down.” At the time, Francis took the claim literally and repaired the building in which he heard the voice, but over time it became clear that his calling was much broader in scope. Farmer, *Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, 203.

[96] Gal. 5:22-23 and ST: I-II.70.3. Paul lists “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control,” which Aquinas expands to twelve by separating goodness into goodness and benignity (the will to do good and the execution of that will in action respectively) and by separating self-control into contingency (from continent) and chastity.

[97] ST: I-II.70.2

Examples of the fruits of the Spirit in the saints abound. I will focus on joy and long-suffering here because we find them brought together in an unusual way in the saints. We find in the saints the overwhelmingly consistent theme of their taking joy in suffering. Paul writes:

> For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith — that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.[98]

Peter, echoing Paul, urges his readers to "rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.[99] The saints take joy in their suffering because they construe it as sharing in Christ's sufferings. Thomas Aquinas was known to "weep copiously, almost in a literal sense living through the passion of Christ" during Mass.[100] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, while suffering in prison, wrote, "Christ suffered as a free man alone, apart and in ignominy, in body and spirit; and since then may Christians have suffered with him."[101] This joy is not a pathological or masochistic joy, as James suggests it is. Nor is it best understood as arising from the strength of soul they gain as a result of their willing self-surrender to God. I think seeing the saints as the friends of God makes good sense of it, for there are two types of suffering that can be construed as positive by people of sound mind: suffering that is necessary for accomplishing a significant task and suffering that increases empathetic intimacy. As God's friends, the saints take joy in both types of suffering. They sometimes take joy in their suffering because it accomplishes God's purpose, but they also at times take joy simply in sharing Christ's suffering, in increasing their empathetic intimacy with Christ. As Aelred of Rievaulx writes:

---

[98] Philippians 3:8-11, ESV.

[99] 1 Peter 4:13, ESV.

[100] Robert Barron, *Thomas Aquinas: Spiritual Master* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2008), 22-23.

[101] Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Touchstone, 1971), 14.

> How advantageous it is then to grieve for one another, to toil for one another, to bear one another's burdens, while each considers it sweet to forget himself for the sake of the other, to prefer the will of the other to his own, to minister to the other's needs rather than one's own, to oppose and expose one's self to misfortunes![102]

In Aquinas's *Commentary on Job*, he argues that those who are closer to God suffer more.[103] The fruits of the Spirit of joy and long-suffering we see dramatically in the lives of the saints make sense in the context of their friendship with God; outside of that context, their joy in suffering seems pathological (as James sees it) or bizarre and foreign to the experience of non-saints (as Adams sometimes characterizes the saints).

---

[102] Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship*, trans. M. Eugenia Laker (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2008), 128.

[103] See Eleonore Stump, "Biblical Commentary and Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, ed. Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 263-264. Stump quotes Aquinas's Commentary on Job, in which he writes "It is plain that the general of an army does not spare [his] more active soldiers dangers or exertions, but as the plan of battle requires, he sometimes lays them open to greater dangers and greater exertions. But after the attainment of victory, he bestows greater honor on the more active soldiers. So also the head of a household assigns greater exertions to his better servants, but when it is time to reward hem, he lavishes greater gifts on them. And so neither is it characteristic of divine providence that it should exempt good people more from the adversities and exertions of the present life, but rather that it reward them more at the end." Thomas Aquinas, "Expositio super Job, Chapter 7:1-4" in *The Literal Exposition on Job: A Scriptural Commentary Concerning Providence*, trans. A. Damico and M. Yaffe (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 146.

The beatitudes. We find the beatitudes to some degree in all Christians and nearly perfected in the saints. Beatitude is the goal of the saintly life, and while beatitude is not fully achievable in this life, the constituents of beatitude, the beatitudes, can be achieved to some extent by the saints. The beatitudes are the habits the saints acquire through the continued performance of acts of virtue and acts of the gifts.[104] According to Aquinas, the beatitudes help the saints become more withdrawn from external goods and honors than do the virtues.[105] While the theological virtues are necessary for union with God, which exceeds human capacity, their presence does not require disregard (*contemptus*) of all other goods. The beatitudes, on the other hand, make possible such disregard of temporal goods for the sake of eternal goods. Non-saintly Christians may place worldly goods in their proper place below God and neighbor, but only the saints completely renounce the goods of this life. Such a renunciation often results in a "freedom and elation" to use James's words, that makes possible the great acts of charity he lauds. Thus we find in the ordinary Christian only a "preparation for, or a disposition to future happiness," but we find in the saints "a kind of imperfect inchoation of future happiness...even in this life."[106]

---

[104] Aquinas writes, "We hope to obtain an end, because we are suitably moved towards that end, and approach thereto; and this implies some action. And a man is moved towards, and approaches the happy end by works of virtue, and above all by the works of the gifts, if we speak of eternal happiness, for which our reason is not sufficient, since we need to be moved by the Holy Ghost, and to be perfected with His gifts that we may obey and follow him. Consequently the beatitudes differ from the virtues and gifts, not as habit, but as act from habit." ST: I-II.69.1

[105] ST: I-II.69.3

The saints possess the beatitudes pertaining to sensual life, namely that they are poor in spirit, disregarding of riches and honors; that they are meek, being undisturbed by the irascible passions; and that they mourn, being undisturbed by the concupiscible passions. They also possess the beatitudes pertaining to active life, hungering and thirsting after justice, accomplishing the works of justice with an ardent desire no matter the cost; that they are merciful, by reverence for God, considering only the needs of those on whom they bestow their gratuitous bounty— the poor, the maimed. Finally, they possess the beatitudes pertaining to the contemplative life, namely that they are clean of heart, experiencing no disturbance from the passions; and that they are peacemakers, dwelling in harmony with even their unlovable neighbors.[107]

Possessing the beatitudes is clear sign of sanctity, according to Aquinas. We can find the fruits in all who are truly Christians, but the beatitudes only in those who are on their way to becoming saints in the more restrictive sense, just as we find the perfecting virtues to some degree in all the redeemed but the perfect virtues only in the saints. Aquinas writes:

> More is required for a beatitude than for a fruit. Because it is sufficient for a fruit to be something ultimate and delightful; whereas for a beatitude, it must be something perfect and excellent. Hence all the beatitudes may be called fruits, but not vice versa. For the fruits are any virtuous deeds in which one delights: whereas the beatitudes are none but perfect works, and which, by reason of their perfection, are assigned to the gifts rather than to the virtues.[108]

---

[106] ST: I-II.69.2

[107] ST: I-II.69.1-4

[108] Ibid.

We find these perfected works in the lives of the saints. We recognize among many others Antony of Egypt, Francis and Clare of Assisi for their poverty of spirit, Teresa of Avila for her sorrow, William Wilberforce and Martin Luther King Jr. for their hungering and thirsting after justice, John of God and Mother Theresa for their mercy, Therese of Lisieux for her purity of heart, and Francis of Assisi, Catherine of Siena, and Dag Hammarskjøld for their peacemaking.

In the beatitudes we see the extremes of saintliness William James was so intent to understand, in some cases praising the saints and in other cases criticizing them as unhealthy. Of the extreme tendencies in the saints, James sees the drive for purity as one of the most destructive. He lists purity as one of the practical consequences of the inner conditions of saintliness. For him, purity is an increased sensitivity to "spiritual discords" and an intense focus on "the cleansing of existence from brutal and sensual elements."[109] The drive for purity results in extreme asceticism towards oneself and intolerance towards others. Aquinas, on the other hand, does not see cleanness of heart in the same light. For him, it is both the absence of "inordinate affections," as we find most excellently in the purity of many virginal saints, and the clear sight of God devoid of heretical notions, as we find in the early church fathers and the doctrinal reformers. The first sort of cleanness is the result of the "virtues and gifts belonging to the appetitive power," while the other is the result of the gift of understanding.[110] Aquinas has neither the Romantic nor the modern psychological concepts of repression that James and later thinkers have in mind when they critique asceticism. For him, purity of heart and mind is necessary for loving union with God, and its result is not a psychological disorder but beatitude. While James is right to critique the extreme lengths to which some ascetic saints go to achieve purity of heart, and while the quest for purity of mind has at times lead to overzealous persecution of heretics and non-Christians, the drive for purity has in the lives of genuine saints produced great fruit morally, spiritually, and intellectually. Those whose quest for purity ended in the loss of charity towards themselves and others Aquinas would not number among the saints.

---

[109] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: New American Library, 1958), 236.

[110] ST: II-II.8.7

The virtues of acknowledged dependence. In *Dependent Rational Animals*, MacIntyre finds a place for virtues Aquinas but not Aristotle made central to the good life for human beings, the virtues he calls the virtues of acknowledged dependence.[111] For, he argues, we all spend significant portions of our lives in a state of utter dependence upon others to provide for our basic needs. Without those others at times when we are very young, very old, or very injured, we would die. We receive from them care we will likely never have opportunity reciprocate, so we pay our debt to them by helping others who are in need when we are capable of giving it. MacIntyre argues that this is essential to the survival of the species and that it is quite natural for us to do it. Particularly, we find the virtues of acknowledged dependence in social roles like that of mother and teacher in the early stages of the child's life. We see them in the role of a proxy, a friend who speaks for those who cannot speak for themselves. The virtues MacIntyre explicitly calls virtues of acknowledged dependence are generosity, *misericordia*, truthfulness, gratitude, "courtesy towards graceless givers, and forbearance towards inadequate givers."[112]

---

[111] In the preface to *Dependent Rational Animals*, MacIntyre writes "I was first struck by [Aquinas and Aristotle's differences with respect to the virtues of acknowledged dependence] when reading a prayer composed by Aquinas in which he asks God to grant that he may happily share with those in need what he has, while humbly asking for what he needs from those who have, a prayer that in effect, although not by Aquinas's own intention, asks that we may not share some of the attitudes of Aristotle's *megalopsychos*." MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, xi.

MacIntyre is careful to avoid doing theological ethics, and even in *Dependent Rational Animals*, he argues that the virtues of acknowledged dependence can be considered secular virtues, despite Aquinas's connecting them with charity, which can only be infused by grace. However, in his more recent work, Edith Stein, MacIntyre seems interested in exploring the nature of grace and its relation to the virtues of acknowledged dependence. He discusses, for example, Adolf Reinach's arguments regarding gratitude towards God and Anna Reinach's peace in the midst of her grief over Adolf's death.[113] Stein saw in Anna's peace "Jesus presenting himself to her...as both human and divine, as someone to be trusted unconditionally, as someone whose gift is an inner peace that comes only as a gift, as something that cannot be willed or otherwise contrived and that has no psychological explanation in purely natural terms."[114] Stein, even before her conversion, also discusses the "state of resting in God, of complete relaxation of all mental (*geistige*) activity, in which you make no plans at all, reach no decision, much less take action, but rather leave everything that is future to the divine will 'consigning yourself entirely to fate.'" For her, "the sole prerequisite for such a mental (*geistige*) rebirth seems to be a certain receptivity."[115] Stein was soon after converted to Catholic Christianity and the Carmelite Order upon reading Teresa of Avila's autobiography. There, MacIntyre notes, she was struck by four features of Teresa's life. MacIntyre's insights are worth quoting in full here:

---

[112] Ibid., 126.

[113] MacIntyre, *Edith Stein: A Philosophical Prologue 1913-1922* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 147-8.

[114] Ibid., 164.

> First, she understands the experience of God's presence as something that in those who undergo it has a history, the history of a life of prayer. We grow or fail to grow in our apprehension of God and we have to identify our limitations at each stage of that growth and be instructed as to how to move beyond them. The life of prayer is a life of learning. Secondly, she identifies the obstacles and difficulties that arise at different stages and the conflicts through which we have to move to overcome them, especially the obstacles, difficulties and conflicts that arise initially from our strong attachments to so much in ourselves and in our worldly environments that prevents us from acknowledging God's presence. Thirdly, she rejects a false spirituality. We are human beings with bodies, not angels, and it is as such that we pray. And it is the human nature of Jesus through which we come to apprehend his divine nature. God discloses himself through that embodied human nature to our embodied humanity. Fourthly, Teresa is always open to the possibilities of delusion and illusion. But what those possibilities are is also something that has to be learned. We do not bring with us from our previous life an adequate grasp of the criteria of illusion, a set of rules which would prevent us from being deceived.[116]

Stein grasped in Teresa's life points that I have stressed in developing my account of saintliness. She recognizes the importance of spiritual discipline to prepare one for grace (the experience of God's presence), the need the saints feel to overcome the vices and distractions that keep them from hearing God's voice, and the difference between Christian spirituality and Gnostic spirituality. Her insights ought to give us pause before criticizing the "unhealthy" habits and practices of the saints. While Teresa of Avila clearly recognized that she was not immune to delusions and illusions, she did come to realize that learning to discern what God is truly communicating and what is hallucination is part of the process of spiritual growth. As outsiders, we may not be in the best position to judge whether or not purported saints like Henry Suso or Margaret Mary Alacoque are delusional or saintly. Their practices and visions may appear bizarre, even monstrous, and perhaps they are. Or perhaps their practices are the intentional and systematic spiritual experiments designed to increase their ability to sense God's presence. According to Teresa, the only way to find out is to enter into the life of prayer like the saints do, to embark on an unpredictable and difficult journey with God and learn to hear his voice.

---

[115] Ibid., 165.

[116] Ibid., 167-8.

While MacIntyre does not endorse Stein's or Teresa's views explicitly, his interest in the nature of our dependence on God and of our ability to grow and learn from our experiences with God bespeaks an acknowledgment that there is more to the good life than what can be had by the possession of the secular virtues, that we are dependent not only upon other human beings but upon God, and that part of being virtuous is acknowledging that dependence. Saintly practices bring into sharp focus the human condition. We are dependent rational animals, dependent not only on each other but on God's grace to survive and flourish. The spiritual disciplines encourage the development of the virtues of acknowledged dependence: just generosity, misericorida, truthfulness, gratitude, obedience, and the acknowledgment of their need for grace. In making themselves more dependent on God, they equip themselves to help those who have become dependent unintentionally. Their lived experience of dependence helps them to know more fully their nature as dependent rational animals than the rest of us do who can only acknowledge our dependence when we think about our distant past as babies or our distant future in old age. The saints, following Jesus' words, humble themselves and become like children, and in doing so they become great.[117] All of this, of course, runs counter to the common sense Aristotelian position, which suggests that the best way we can prepare to help the dependent is for us to become as fully independent as possible.[118] Once all of our needs are met, so the thinking goes, we will be able to devote ourselves to the needs of others. The saints tend to operate under a different assumption. For them, the way to prepare themselves to serve others is to make themselves independent of worldly goods and often of worldly wisdom (independent practical reason) and make themselves as wholly dependent on God as possible.[119] The common sense view is right insofar as it argues that the saints need first to be filled before they can fill the needs of others, but it is wrong in its assumptions about how that filling takes place. For the saints, God does the filling through grace. Out of an overflow of charity, they are able to meet the needs of others. Robert Adams is exactly right when he says "The substance of sainthood is not sheer will power striving like Sisyphus (or like Wolf's Rational Saint) to accomplish a boundless task, but goodness overflowing from a boundless source."[120] Another aspect of saintly dependence that the common sense view overlooks is the continual nature of the dependence. It is not as if the saints fill up on grace and then dump it onto the needy. Instead, their dependence on God is analogous to a hose's dependence on the spigot; if God's grace does not continually flow through them, they are useless. In the words of Harper Smyth's hymn, the saints are "channels of blessing" for the "love of God" to flow to others.[121]

---

[117] Matthew 18:3-4, ESV reads "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

[118] Robert C. Roberts's discussion of the ingratitude of Aristotle's great-souled man is especially insightful on this point. *Spiritual Emotions: a Psychology of Christian Virtues* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 137-9.

[119] Dietrich Bonhoeffer confirms this in writing, "When a man really gives up trying to make something of himself – a saint, or a converted sinner, or a churchman (a so-called clerical somebody), a righteous or unrighteous man,...when in the fullness of tasks, questions, success or ill-hap, experiences and perplexities a man throws himself into the arms of God...then he wakes with Christ in Gethsemane. That is faith, that is *metanoia*, and it is thus that he becomes a man and a Christian." *The Cost of Discipleship*, 24-5.

[120] Robert Adams, "Saints," 396

If Aquinas is right, then all humans share their dependence upon God for their existence and sustenance, their ability to will and do anything at all, their ability to will and do good in particular, and their ability to achieve ultimate happiness. This sort of dependence is shared by those who flourish by Aristotelian standards and by those who are suffering. Acknowledging their equality with the suffering with respect to their dependence on God makes it possible for the saints to give humble care (*misericordia*) and just generosity to those the Aristotelian great-souled man could never help.[122] We see this acknowledgment of equality in dependence on God in the thought and lives of the saints from the very earliest stages of Christianity. Some historians attribute much of the early growth of the Church to the early Christians' ability to acknowledge their equality with each other and their shared dependence on God. According to them, Christianity spread quickly among the poor, the sick, and the women of the Roman Empire, those people whom the classical world generally ignored and subjugated, because the very wealthy and highly educated members of the Church humbled themselves and gave of their time and resources to show God's love to them.[123] We find in the saints' actions that they purposefully humble themselves with respect to worldly goods in order to acknowledge to themselves and to those in their care the heavenly reality of their equality before God.

---

[121] Harper G. Smythe, "Make Me a Channel of Blessing" (1903).

[122] For MacIntyre's discussion of *misericordia* and just generosity, see *Dependent Rational Animals*, 121-126, and 157-160.

4.4 Friendship and Vocation

Robert Adams argues that friendship is a shared project itself and that it typically involves the friends sharing in other projects.[124] According to Adams, "a readiness to embrace good common projects for their own sake, and to participate in them loyally and well, is a virtue."[125] This is certainly true of friendship with God. For the friends of God, growing their friendship with God is a kind of project itself. They care about it for its own sake just as they love God for God's sake. The saints spend a lot of time and energy working on their relationship with God, often to the exclusion of other good projects. Below I discuss some of the practices they engage in to grow in their knowledge and love of God. For now, it will suffice to say that for the saints, improving their friendship with God is their top priority. They view their other projects as part of and subordinate to their overarching and controlling project of advancing their friendship with God.

A substantial part of growing in friendship with God is sharing God's projects through a vocation. The saints want God's good, not in the sense of wanting to fill a need God has, but rather in the sense of wanting what God wants. They say "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10, KJV) not merely as wishes but as resolutions to act upon God's will.[126] They build God's kingdom in various ways particular to their vocations. Some build God's kingdom through teaching, like Aquinas, Teresa of Avila, and Paul did. Others are called to evangelism, as were Paul and Ignatius Loyola. Still others were called to ministries of service like Mother Teresa. And some were called to live prophetic lives, calling the church out of its vices and back towards virtue, as was certainly the case with Francis of Assisi. Saintly vocations thus arise out of the saints' friendship with God, and whatever goodness we wish to ascribe to them for their good deeds originates first in their relationship with God.

---

[123] See Palmer, R. R., Joel Colton, and Lloyd Kramer, *A History of the Modern World to 1815*, Tenth Edition (New York: McGraw Hill, 2007), 16 and Rodney Stark, "Live Longer, Healthier, and Better: the untold benefits of becoming a Christian in the ancient world." in *Christian History* 57 (1998): 28-30.

[124] Adams, *A Theory of Virtue*, 84-94.

[125] Ibid., 90.

4.5 Practices, Traditions, Communities, and Institutions

Practices. On my view, the saints grow morally as they are initiated into the spiritual practices; their growth in the practices leads to improvement of their emotions, motives, and the virtues. In other words, they typically acquire the emotions indirectly by means of the practices rather than directly by way of imitation of the emotions of their mentors. Zagzebski's neglect of the practices and her insistence that we learn emotions directly through imitation of the emotions of those we admire thus appear to me to be unjustified. Those starting out in the spiritual disciplines often report not feeling the way they know they should feel at first.[127] After much practice, the right feelings emerge. Practices aim at goods that can only be acquired through spiritual disciplines, some of which are good emotions, but others of which are not. The practice of meditation, for example, aims at the emotions of peace and joy but also at a harmonious relationship with God and neighbor (*shalom*). The practice of fasting does not primarily aim at cultivating any particular emotion but rather at focusing attention on God's voice so that one can do what one is called by God to do. Fasting is a means to achieving one's *telos*. The goods of harmony with God and achieving one's *telos* or flourishing as the individual God has made one to be are intrinsic goods, so far as I can tell.

---

[126] Francis of Assisi, for example, certainly prayed this way. See Francis of Assisi's "The Prayer Inspired by the Our Father," in *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*, 105.

[127] cf. the discussion of Teresa of Avila's growth through the discipline of prayer above.

According to Aquinas, to grow in friendship with God is to grow in grace, and to grow in grace, one must prepare for grace. This preparation takes place largely through spiritual disciplines, through practices, experiments in virtue passed down from one saint to the other, and usually originating in Christ's example (i.e. his time in the wilderness, his prayer in solitude, his poverty, his fasting, his virginity, and his surrounding himself with a small inner circle of disciples). Aquinas devotes large, often neglected sections of the *Summa Theologica* to describing the acts and practices that prepare one for increase of grace, including especially acts of charity but also of the other virtues, along with saintly practices like worship, contemplation and meditation, prayer, adoration, sacrifice, oblations and tithes, abstinence and fasting, voluntary poverty, the taking of religious vows, the taking of the sacraments, and the offering of contrition, confession, and satisfaction for sins.[128] These practices and others serve as a means to strengthening friendship with God.

Friendships grow as friends get to know each other more intimately. Such growth requires conversation, the art of speaking and listening carefully with the purpose of coming to know each other and the matter at hand more deeply. The saints learn to listen to God through reading and memorizing Scripture, through meditation practices, through contemplation, and through prayer. They apprentice themselves to other friends of God who can help them hear God's voice. They speak to God in prayer and confession individually and corporately, revealing themselves honestly and openly to themselves and to God. As Teresa of Avila puts it, "Contemplative prayer [*oración mental*] in my opinion is nothing else than a close sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us."[129] Being able to engage deeply in conversation requires the removal of distractions and interruptions, and many of the other spiritual disciplines aim at removing them. Abstinence and fasting help the saints disengage from the distractions of sex and food. Oblations and tithes reorient the saints' disposition toward worldly goods, helping them to view them as gifts rather than deserved possessions. Giving them up takes away their need to give them their care and attention. Those who engage in voluntary poverty commit their entire lives to complete renunciation of possessions, and they report a degree of freedom from want unknown to those who possess much.

---

[128] ST: II-II.32, 81-91, 146-7, 149, 151-2, 179-82, 189; III.60-90; III Supp. 1-15, 34-40.

The saints glean knowledge of God in their conversations with God, and part of that knowledge is knowledge of what God is doing in the world. The spiritual disciplines not only prepare the saints to hear God's voice but also to heed God's call, to engage in shared projects with God. Those projects often require virtues that are developed in the context of the spiritual disciplines. Anthony of Egypt, for example, engaged in ascetic practices to train his body as a soldier would in preparation for demonic attacks.[130] His practices instilled in him the courage, temperance, and wisdom he needed for fighting in God's spiritual war. Mother Teresa's prayer and asceticism prepared her well for her ministry among the poor in India. To nurse the dying indigents, she needed to live like them, and to be able to do that, she needed to prepare herself to renounce the comforts and customs of her native Albania. Francis of Assisi's ascetic practices prepared him well to serve the poor and to criticize the opulence of the thirteenth-century church. To demonstrate the love God called him to show to the poor, he had to be willing to surrender his cloak or his food at a moment's notice, and to do that, he had to have his body hardened against the elements and against the pangs of hunger. Thomas Aquinas, to accomplish all he did intellectually in his short life, needed unparalleled discipline of mind. By all accounts, Aquinas' work ethic and ability to concentrate were unmatched. According to one account, he could dictate to four secretaries at once.[131] His intense prayer life (according to legend he would even levitate), from which he had to be roused by his brethren to resume his studies, is sometimes overlooked by those who study Aquinas merely as a philosopher.[132] The well-known story of his mystical experience towards the end of his life, after which he is reported to have said "All that I have written seems to me nothing but straw...compared to what I have seen and what has been revealed to me," by no means came *ex nihilo*.[133] His life of devotion to God through prayer, meditation, study, and voluntary poverty prepared him to receive whatever it was God communicated to him at the late moment in his life. The spiritual disciplines thus serve not only to deepen the saints' love and knowledge of God, they prepare them practically to serve God through their vocations.

---

[129] St. Teresa of Jesus, *The Book of Her Life*, 8, § in *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, tr. K. Kavanaugh, OCD, and O. Rodriguez, OCD (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1976), I, 67.

---

[130] Athanasius, *Life of St. Anthony*, para. 7.

[131] Farmer, *Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, 503.

[132] Paul Burns, *Butler's Lives of the Saints: New Concise Edition* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 46. G. K. Chesterton, "St. Thomas Aquinas." *The Spectator*, February 27, 1932.

Communities. Spiritual practices are means to achieving the goods needed for friendship with God. However, the friends of God rarely engage in the practices alone, and those who attempt to pursue God alone find that avoiding the friendship of other friends of God is nearly impossible. The saints tend to attract followers who are willing to chase them into the deserts and mountains in pursuit of wisdom. Eremetic monasticism, though not completely eradicated, eventually became institutionally regulated and in large part gave way to cenobitic monasticism in the West.[134] Those who engage in the practices share the pursuit of the goods and therefore are naturally brought into friendship with each other. Relationships of mentorship, accountability, and fellowship are common among the saints, and we find the friends of God developing tightly-knit communities in which they engage in and develop the practices that deepen their friendship with God. Religious communities are schools of friendship; by growing in friendship with others, the saints grow to be closer friends with God and as they grow in their friendship with God, they grow closer to each other. These communities of friendship play a vital role in the growth of saintliness. Saints learn how to be better friends of God from each other, the strengths of one helping to overcome the weaknesses of another, the perspective of one enlarging the outlook of another. Because their friendships are based on the shared pursuit of the highest good, God, their friendships are of the deepest sort possible in this life. The communal aspect of saintliness, too often neglected by philosophers trying to identify the qualities of individual saints in isolation from other saints, is essential to the saints' growth in sanctity, and a role-centered approach to understanding saintliness is well-suited to account for it because it takes the saints' relationships to be central to their moral exemplarity.

---

[133] Josef Pieper, *The Silence of St. Thomas: Three Essays*, trans. John Murray, S. J., and Daniel O'Connor (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 1999), 38-41.

[134] Roman Catholic Canon Law 603 reads §1 "Besides institutes of consecrated life, the Church recognises the life of hermits or anchorites, in which Christ's faithful withdraw further from the world and devote their lives to the praise of God and the salvation of the world through the silence of solitude and through constant prayer and penance. §2 Hermits are recognised by law as dedicated to God in consecrated life if, in the hands of the diocesan Bishop, they publicly profess, by a vow or some other sacred bond, the three evangelical counsels, and then lead their particular form of life under the guidance of the diocesan Bishop."

Traditions. Robert Bellah and his colleagues argue that "without tradition there can be no vital communities," and they are surely correct, for vital communities are those that find the meaning of their existence in a story that has a past, a present, and a future.[135] The earliest communities of saints consisted of those who knew Jesus as personal friends or who had entered into friendship with someone who had. They were communities of memory and hope, memory of what Jesus had taught and done and hope of his return and of the full realization of God's kingdom. Communities of saints since then have perpetuated the memory and hope, bringing the past to bear upon their own circumstances and establishing the kingdom of God in the present in preparation for Christ's return. Within those communities, the saints have passed down and extended spiritual practices and generated new ones with the goal of deepening their friendship with God and preparing the world the culmination of its story (*eschaton*). The history of the thought and practices of the saints ought to be viewed as a living tradition, one that involves agreement about the ultimate hope, the kingdom of God, but sometimes involves disagreement, different perspectives, and different approaches. The theology of Augustine of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas, and Teresa of Avila, though all orthodox, certainly include disagreements and different approaches to knowing God. Aquinas's work in which he draws from and often criticizes the work of previous theologians, many of them saints like himself, illustrates well the diversity and disagreement that can flourish within the context of a tradition. Likewise, all of the spiritual practices have a history of continual invention, discovery, and revision. The practices are passed down from one generation of saints to another, but they are never left exactly the same. They are adjusted to historical, cultural, and geographical conditions. Sometimes later saints criticize earlier saints for the way they engaged in the practices, but despite disagreements the substantial agreement about the ultimate goal of the community of memory and hope unites the saints in a tradition of thought and practice that provides the context for and meaning to their personal narratives. We cannot understand the saints rightly without understanding their place in the tradition of friendship with God.

---

[135] Coleman, "Conclusion: After Sainthood?" 208, writing on Robert Bellah, et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985), 152-5.

Institutions. As I discussed in my critique of James's exaggerated criticism of religious institutions, while it is possible for institutions to corrupt the practices and disrupt the organic process of spiritual and moral growth of communities, institutions can also play an important role in the development of saintliness. Institutions support communities of the friends of God by providing them with resources and by sanctioning their practices and communities so that their influence can be extended to a broad audience. They also regulate their practices so that they steer clear of excesses that would impede rather than facilitate growth in their relationship with God. The saints themselves overwhelmingly support their ecclesiastical institutions and the smaller institutional bodies to which they belong like religious orders, mission boards, and local church bodies. The desert fathers were known to pay homage to ecclesiastics who visited them, giving way even to deacons when it was time to pray together.[136] Monastic saints and saintly members of religious orders like Thomas Aquinas, Teresa of Avila, Mother Teresa, Francis of Assisi, and Ignatius Loyola all placed themselves under the leadership of their superiors and ultimately under the guidance of the Catholic Church. Ignatius Loyola is famous for his obedience to the Roman Catholic Church and, though expressed in what may seem to many as hyperbolic terms, he makes clear the importance of religious institutions for his own spiritual development. Many saints also played institutional roles themselves, serving as popes, bishops, abbots and abbesses, priests, elders, deacons and deaconesses, and pastors. The dismissal of institutional religion by James, and the neglect of the role institutions play in the lives of the saints by Adams and Zagzebski is thus unwarranted. Role-centered morality, by making relationships primary, is able to acknowledge the important role institutions in the moral and spiritual development of the saints.

5. Friendship with God and Other Moral Roles

A role-centered account of saintliness not only accounts well for the saints' intimacy with God, but it also explains how and to what degree the saints are moral exemplars in the other roles they play. First, by making their friendship with God their central concern, the saints grow in virtues that help them improve in other moral roles. Second, loving God draws them to love those God loves, particularly those neglected by everyone else. Third, because their friendship with God is their most important role, they are able to settle conflicts between roles more easily.

---

[136] Norman Russell, trans., *The Lives of the Desert Fathers*, 54.

Being the friend of God typically helps the saints become better friends with others. Many of the virtues the friends of God develop in strengthening their relationship with God serve them well as they care for other human beings. They grow in charity and other virtues, which help them be better friends, teachers, brothers and sisters, church leaders, and so on. What strikes me as special about the saints is that their friendship with God often leads them to love those whom no one else can love. In chapter four, I discussed how the saints construe the wretched as being bearers of Christ's image so that the saints see themselves as loving Christ in the person of the wretched. I argued further that the saints love the unlovable because God loves them as unique and irreplaceable parts of creation. Finally, I argued that the saints love the unlovable so that they become lovable. They see the potential in them to become friends of God and choose to show them love as a means to that end. Put in the context of friendship with God, I think this surprising and beautiful aspect of saintliness comes into clearer focus. On Aristotle's conception of friendship, friends are brought together by a shared conception of and pursuit of the good. If A and B are friends, then they share the pursuit of the same good. If B and C are also friends on the same basis as A and B are friends, then it would be natural (circumstances permitting) for A and C to become friends. The saints' preferential and exclusive love for God naturally draws them into a love for those God loves. However, God's love (*agape*) for his children, as I noted above, is not preferential, merited, or exclusive. In becoming friends with God, then, the saints learn not only to love preferentially but also non-preferentially. Saintly non-preferential love does not take the form of loving every human beings in a shallow way but rather of loving deeply those whom they otherwise would not love (the wretched, strangers, their enemies). We thus find in the saints' friendship with God a possible solution to the paradox of loving the unlovable.[137]

One of the challenges for role-centered morality is that roles, even moral roles, sometimes come into conflict. What ought we to do when what is required of us as a husband or father comes into conflict with what is required of us as a citizen or employee? Ought a husband to leave his wife and children to fight in a just war? How ought he decide between taking a job that pays less but affords him more time with his family and one that pays more but requires more hours away from home? Greek tragedy is rife with dramatic examples of this sort of conflict, which the tragedians used to call into question the role-centered morality of Heroic society, as MacIntyre has pointed out.[138] What is Antigone to do when as the sister of her dead brother she is supposed to bury him but as subject to her king she is supposed to leave his body exposed? Knowing how to act when this happens does not seem to be decidable by reference to roles, for it is the roles themselves that conflict. The saints show us how to avoid some conflicts and how to resolve others. As Zagzebski points out rightly, the saints often avoid getting themselves into moral dilemmas.[139] They tend to live simple lives of devotion to God and to those God calls them to serve. When they experience conflict between what is required of them in their friendship with God and what is required of them in some other relationship, their relationship with God takes precedence over their other moral roles. We see this clearly in the lives of Francis of Assisi and Thomas Aquinas, who had to disappoint their parents by taking religious vows, and in the lives of some of the martyrs like Perpetua, who had to abandon her family to witness for Christ. When their other roles come into conflict, they consult God for the wisdom to make the right decision. They view each of their other relationships as being directed towards and by their relationship with God, so instead of viewing the role conflict as one role against another, they view their decision about what to do as falling under the purview of their relationship with God. Their decisions emerge from their conversations with God, not from their arbitrarily choosing to value one relationship over another or weigh the requirements of one role over the requirements of another. Paul's life as a missionary and martyr illustrates this point well. He clearly held dear his friendships with people in his hometown and in the churches throughout the region of his travels. He greets them lovingly through his letters, tries to stay involved in their affairs, and longs to return to be with them.[140] Yet, he finds himself pulled in many directions; his friends are spread out all over the Mediterranean, and he is called to evangelize people he does not yet know.

---

[137] I am grateful to Michael Beaty for helping me think through this point.

[138] See MacIntyre, "The Virtues at Athens," in *After Virtue*, 131-45.

---

[139] Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, 56.

[140] Romans 1:8-15, 1 Cor. 16:5-9, 2 Cor. 1:15-24, Phil. 1:8-14, 2 Tim. 4:6-18.

Paul, though longing to be with his friends, follows God as he makes his decisions.[141] It is not as if Paul does not feel the conflict between his roles, but his prioritizing his friendship with God helps him to make the right practical decisions when human practical reasoning is not up to the task. The saints' friendship with God thus not only draws them into friendships with those whom non-saints typically avoid, but it also helps them make important and difficult decisions when their other moral roles come into conflict.

6. Imitation of the Saints

From the discussion above, we can glean some insights into the extent to which we ought to try to imitate the saints. First, it seems clear that we ought to imitate them by cultivating our own friendship with God. Doing so informs our other moral roles by giving them a deeper purpose and settling conflict between them when they present conflicting demands. Being the friend of God also transforms our character, especially by the introduction of charity, in ways that transform our social identity. Our strangers and enemies become neighbors and our superiors and inferiors become our equals before God.

Second, more specifically, the saints are imitable in their other roles when those roles dovetail with ones we play. Becoming the friend of God may lead to our taking on some of those roles like missionary or member of a religious order, or it may just entail remaining in the roles we had prior to becoming the friend of God but becoming better in them and understanding them as being connected to a higher purpose, which both exalts those roles and places a limit on their ability to dominate our lives. The saints who share our historical or social context may also be imitable in ways specific to the context. We are likely to find some commonality with saints of different times and places, but more than likely, we can glean the most practical help by studying those whose lives are most like ours. In addition, Zagzebski is right that we are all unique individuals, and we see individuality and eccentricity in spades in the saints, but it is also the case that we can identify ourselves with certain saints more than others because we share personality types or traits. One person may find in Francis of Assisi a helpful guide while thinking Thomas Aquinas too intellectual or Teresa of Avila too mystical, while others will find Francis too simple or too ebullient. Saints come in diverse forms, and we need not imitate all equally or expect ourselves to exhibit the qualities of every saint.

---

[141] Perhaps the most dramatic example of Paul's following God against his initial wishes is in Acts 16:6-10 in which Paul is "forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia" and then again in Bithynia.

The saints are clearly imitable with respect to the specific role they play in bringing about God's kingdom through their vocations. We ought to be like the saints by attending to what God is telling us as individuals to do rather than blindly copying the specific actions or intentions of the saints we admire. In part one of *Divine Motivation Theory*, Zagzebski argues that we all (including the saints) learn by imitation of exemplars, and she is right to an extent about that, though I think we also learn virtue by hearing instruction and obeying (as Adams points out) even when we do not have an exemplar to imitate. In part one she allowed for a wide range of exemplars, which allowed for more flexibility in imitation, though, as I have pointed out, still not enough. When she makes Christ the ultimate exemplar in part two, imitation does not tell us enough about how we should act, what and who specifically we should love, what is optional for us and what is required, or how we can grow in the virtues necessary to do what we are called to do. Jesus, like all humans, lived a particular life in a particular time and social context, and we have a limited narrative of his life. We can see in Jesus many emotions, motives, motive dispositions, and virtues that we ought to strive to attain, and we can follow his instructions. Imitation of Christ at a general level is very helpful. However, we do not get a good sense of how to go about cultivating the emotions, motives, motive dispositions, or virtues he exhibited because was a perfect human and we are not. We do not glean from studying Jesus' life how he would go about fighting a deeply embedded vice, for he had none. Furthermore, his life purpose was different than ours. None of us are called to die for the sins of mankind, and he was not called to do things like be a husband and raise four children. Finally, because his historical and cultural context was different than ours, his example provides only limited guidance when it comes to living out our diverse, historically and culturally embedded vocations. Knowing the character of Christ and studying his teachings certainly gives us helpful guidance when we confront situations specific to our historical and cultural context and our callings in those contexts, but we need more than that to know how to feel and act here and now.

We need not only to imitate Christ but to allow Christ to work in and through us as we see the saints do in their specific circumstances. What distinguishes the saints from non-saints is their creative engagement in their particular situations in conjunction with God. God is at work at all times and in all places and the saints come along side him to build the kingdom of God. They place themselves at his disposal and grow in the roles and virtues necessary for doing the specific work God has called them to do. They need not share all of God's emotions or motives or virtues or be exemplars of life in general.

They are exemplary friends of God. That is what matters. If we aspire to be God's friends, we need more than exemplars. We need Christ dwelling in us through the Holy Spirit, uniting us to God through friendship. We need, as John Coleman puts it, "God acting not outside us but from within."[142] In the context of an intimate friendship with God, we can engage in conversation with a God who is eternal, omnipresent, and personally involved in our particular lives about what we ought to do and how we ought to do it.

7. Criteria of Adequacy Test

Conceiving of the saints as the friends of God better meets the criteria of adequacy I set forth at the outset of this dissertation. A role-centered approach is able to meet the criteria best because it incorporates the best insights of the other approaches I have covered without sharing their flaws. Role-centered morality is consistent with virtues-based theories, especially the version developed by Aquinas: he understands the saints as the friends of God, discusses their virtues, their gifts, their fruits of the Spirit, their beatitudes, and their growth towards perfection, and enumerates some of the practices they engage in to increase their intimacy with God. MacIntyre's work extends Aquinas' work by discussing the importance of the virtues of acknowledged dependence. A role-centered approach is also consistent with many of Linda Zagzebski's convictions about the saints and about moral life in *Divine Motivation Theory*. Her contention that the saints share God's motives is correct because as the friends of God, the saints love what God loves. Robert Adams's sense that the saints derive their power to do good from their devotion to God, his notion that the saints each have particular vocations, that the saints have reasons to obey God’s loving commands, and to a certain extent his assertion that the saints resemble God also mesh with a role-centered approach. A role-centered approach also shares James’s convictions that the saints possess an intimate relationship with the divine that transforms them emotionally and disposes them to “loving and harmonious affections.”[143] His listing of saintly practices, despite some misplaced criticism of them, matches some of the practices of the friends of God as well, and his description of their moral psychology is often illuminating, especially when he recounts testimonies of the saints’ communion with God. A role-centered approach suggests that the saints need not be morally perfect, or be the Loving Saints or Rational Saints that Wolf depicts, but it does acknowledge that the saints are exemplars of important virtues, gifts, and beatitudes, and of the most important moral role human beings can play.

---

[142] Paul Wadell, "An Interpretation," 183; quoted in Coleman, 218.

7.1 Scope

With respect to scope all of the saints agreed upon as saints by the philosophers in this study (Francis of Assisi, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Teresa of Avila, Thomas Aquinas, Ignatius Loyola, Paul the Apostle, Benedict of Nursia, Anthony of Egypt, and Terese of Lisieux) count as the friends of God. Though diverse in calling and personality, each made their friendship with God their top priority in life, and each claimed that whatever saintly virtue was attributed to them came completely as a gift from God. All thought themselves unworthy of being the friend of God, but all were recognized as God’s friends by their contemporaries and by their later venerators.[144]

---

[143] James, *Varieties*, 236.

[144] Gandhi’s conception of God is not that of a personal being with whom one can have friendship but rather of an abstraction. Gandhi claimed “Truth is God,” and he did all that he did in service of that

7.2 Internal Consistency

The account I have proposed can be consistently applied to each member of the set. Indeed, nearly all of those called saints by my interlocutors fit under the umbrella of the friends of God. The so-called "political saints" like Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. fit in a qualified sense, but I take it that that is what the modifier "political" is meant to convey. Their "saintliness" primarily refers to their political leadership, their sacrifices for their ideals, and their veneration by their followers. My account is broad enough to contain a rich diversity of saints, but it is also strict enough to limit the proper usage of the term only to those who truly qualify. Figures venerated as saints by some, such as Stalin and Hitler, clearly do not qualify as good friends of God. Finally, it allows for qualified attributions of saintliness to those who falls short of saintliness but are either on their way towards saintliness or are lacking in some important qualities. One can be a friend of God's without being a good friend to God, and one can be a relatively good friend of God but fall short of the intimacy the saints experience with God. The role-centered approach thus meets the scope and consistency criteria as well as or better than do the other accounts.

---

truth. For Gandhi, the "Truth" includes love and non-violence. Because the personal God with whom the saints have friendship is Truth according to orthodox Christian conceptions, we can say that Gandhi is a friend of God in a highly qualified way. As I argue below, Gandhi better fits the concept of a political saint. He engaged in some similar practices as the Christian saints before him, and he possessed some of the same emotions and virtues they possessed, but his goals were primarily political. The Buddha cannot be said to be a friend of God, so far as I can tell. His practices share some similarities with those of the Christian saints, and he developed some virtues similar to those of the saints, but his primary goal was not friendship with God but enlightenment and the deliverance of himself and his followers from suffering. Those who have attributed saintliness to Gandhi and the Buddha have typically done so because they hold that saintliness is primarily a matter of possessing extraordinary powers and charisma and of exhibiting great virtue, often generated through asceticism. My account of saintliness views these attributes as occasional effects of the true source of saintliness, friendship with God, not as essential to saintliness.

7.3 Conservatism

The fact that the saints have been called the friends of God since the fourth century is a mark in its favor according to the criterion of conservatism. It arises out of the Christian tradition of reflection upon saintliness and is consistent with the saints' self-understanding. It fits best with Aquinas' account but preserves that which is best from the other accounts I have analyzed. While role-centered moral theory is a fairly recent development, it shares key features with virtues-based approaches, which have their roots in the beginning of recorded philosophy, and as MacIntyre argues is connected with some of the earliest recorded accounts of what it means to be good.[145] The account is thus tied to and contributes to strong traditions of thinking about the saints and about moral goodness.

7.4 Simplicity

My approach is also simple without being simplistic. Saints are diverse, and they possess a vast array of qualities that appear essential to their saintliness. Understanding the saints as the good friends of God allows for one to bring focus to all of those qualities. Whatever virtues, motives, motive dispositions, or emotions the saints possess, whatever actions they perform, whatever beliefs they hold are explicable in terms of their friendship to God, for all either make them good in their friendship with God or flow out of their friendship with God. In including God in my account, I have not needlessly multiplied entities, for as I have shown in my treatment of exclusively moral exemplarist accounts, one cannot adequately understand the saints without reference to their devotion to God.

---

[145] MacIntyre *After Virtue*, 122-3.

7.5 Fruitfulness

Finally, I believe the role-centered account of saintliness should prove fruitful in illuminating the qualities of the saints, in understanding their motivational structure, in identifying previously unknown cases of saintliness, and in rightly stripping non-saints of their saintly reputations. That this account is capable of illuminating the qualities of the saints and their motivational structure should be clear from the fact that it makes possible deeper understanding and higher estimation of many of the saints William James (the most thorough student of saintliness of the philosophers I have treated) misunderstood or wrongly repudiated. To prove that the role-centered approach can help to identify new cases of saintliness or strip non-saints of their saintly reputation remains for others to do. If we take disputed cases, such as Protestants like William Wilberforce or Jim Eliot, who are not recognized as saints by some Catholics (and by Protestants who are wary of using the term "saint" in any way but the broad biblical sense of the term), or Augustine if Hippo, who is not recognized as a saint by Eastern Orthodox Christians, or Ignatius Loyola and Teresa of Avila, who as key figures in the Counter-Reformation would be rejected by many Protestants, we find that most likely all qualify as saints because all were good friends of God. A figure like Martin Luther King, Jr., for all his amazing contributions to the civil rights movement, was likely not a saint on this view, for though he was motivated to do good by his love for God, he too often ignored God's presence to satisfy worldly lusts to qualify as a good friend of God.[146] Finally, a fruitful theory is one that leads to deeper insights into the nature of saintliness. In thinking through the nature of the saint's friendship with God over the course of over four years, I have found it to be a fruitful way of understanding the saints' words and actions. I have recorded many of those insights in this dissertation. If the account is a fruitful one, we should expect more and deeper insights with more investigation.

---

[146] David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (William Morrow & Co., 1986), 375–6.

8. Conclusion: Saints and Moral Theory

The saints show us that what we should do is determined by who we are, and who we are is determined whose we are. Being the friends of God gives the saints an identity and a purpose that affects every other aspect of their lives, including their emotions, motive dispositions, motives, and virtues, their desires, intentions, and actions. It transforms their normal relationships with others, particularly those they would otherwise be averse to loving. Their goodness is measured not by the amount of happiness they generate in the world, nor by their adherence to rules of reason. They are not exemplars of right action, of every role, or of life in general, but they are good exemplars of friendship with God, of the qualities that make them good in that role, and of how being a good friend of God orders, unifies, and settles conflict between other moral roles. The saints (as they really are) are thus incredibly attractive (contra Wolf) and important for moral theory. Their attractiveness or usefulness is not apparent through the lens of Enlightenment moral theories that focus on right action, for the saints do not always do what is right according to those theories. Their attractiveness and usefulness is more easily seen in teleological and theological conceptions of ethics that focus not so much on right actions but on becoming the right sort of person. Within a teleological and theological moral theory, the saints are important because they serve as paradigms of a life integrated by commitment to the highest good, God. Saints are useful for moral education, for seeing the virtues, how they are acquired, and how they contribute to a living such a life. Those who believe friendship with God is the ultimate goal of life will find in studying the saints rich resources for their own pursuit as well as clear limits on their imitability. With the recent revival of teleological and theological ethics, we should expect to see a corresponding revival of interest in the saints, particularly among Christian moral philosophers. Zagzebski and Adams have already begun the revival, and I hope others will follow in their wake. For in the saints we find concrete examples of friendship with God. The saints invite us to join them in friendship as we share our pursuit of the One who loves us, who condescends to be our friend and to give us a life more purposeful and fulfilling than we can give ourselves.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adams, Robert M. “Divine Command Metaethics Modified Again.” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1979): 66-79.

———. *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

———. “Saints.” *Journal of Philosophy* 81 (1984): 392-401.

———. *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

———. *The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays in Philosophical Theology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship*. Translated by M. Eugenia Laker. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2008.

Alacoque, Mary Margaret. *The Revelations of Our Lord to St. Mary Margaret Alacoque*, *Imprimatur*: E. Morrogh Bernard Vic. Gen., Westmonasterii, 1954.

Allison, C. FitzSimons. *The Cruelty of Heresy*. Milwaukee, WI: Morehouse Publishing, 1993.

Anderson, Douglas R. “William James and the Wild Beasts of the Philosophical Desert.” In *Philosophy Americana: Making Philosophy at Home in American Culture*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2006.

Anscombe, G. E. M. “Modern Moral Philosophy.” *Philosophy* 33 (1958): 1-19.

Aquinas, Thomas. *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated by C. J. Litzinger, O.P. Notre Dame, IN: Dumb Ox Books, 1993.

———. *Disputed Questions on the Virtues*. Edited by E. M. Atkins and Thomas Williams. Translated by E. M. Atkins. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

———. *The Literal Exposition on Job: A Scriptural Commentary Concerning Providence*, translated by A. Damico and M. Yaffe. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989.

———. *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas*. Translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province. New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1947.

Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated by Terence Irwin. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 1999.

Athanasius. *Life of St. Anthony*. Translated by H. Ellershaw, Edited by Archibald Robertson. In *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 1V, Athanasius: Selected Works and Letters*, Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995. 188-221

Barham, Ross. "Philosophical Conceptions of Saintliness (Part 2)." Ross Barham: Truth, Rhetoric and Philosophy. http://rossbarham.wordpress.com/2008/04/19/philosophical-conceptions-of-saintliness-part-2/. (accessed July 1, 2009).

Barron, Robert. *Thomas Aquinas: Spiritual Master*. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2008.

Bellah, Robert et al. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985.

Bethge, Eberhard. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography* Translated by Eric Mosbacher, Peter and Betty Ross, Frank Clarke, and William Glen-Doepel. Edited by Edwin Robertson. Revised and edited by Victoria J. Barnett. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000.

Bird, Graham. *William James* (The Arguments of the Philosophers). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Books Ltd., 1986.

Bixler, Julius Seelye. *Religion in the Philosophy of William James*. Boston: Boston Marshall Jones, Co., 1926.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995.

———. *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Edited by Eberhard Bethge. New York: Touchstone, 1971.

Brennan, Bernard. *The Ethics of William James*. New York: Bookman Associates, 1961.

———. *William James*. New Haven, CT: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1968.

Brown, Peter. *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.

———. “The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity.” In *Saints and Virtues*. Edited by John Stratton Hawley. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987.

Bonaventure, *The Life of St. Francis of Assisi*. Edited by Henry Edward Manning. Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, Inc., 1988.

Burns, Paul. *Butler's Lives of the Saints: New Concise Edition*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003.

Bury, J. B. *Ireland's Saint: The Essential Biography of St. Patrick*. Edited by Jon M. Sweeney. Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2008.

Camus, Albert. *The Plague*. New York: Vintage International, 1991.

Cavanaugh, William T. *The Myth of Religious Violence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Chesterton, G. K. “St. Thomas Aquinas.” *The Spectator*, February 27, 1932.

———. *Saint Francis of Assisi*. New York: Sheed and Ward, Inc., 1923.

———. *St. Thomas Aquinas*. New York: Sheed and Ward, Inc., 1933.

Coleman, John. “: After Sainthood?” In *Saints and Virtues*, edited by John Stratton Hawley. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987.

Cooper, John M. “Aristotle on Friendship.” In *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, edited by Amelie Oksenberg Rorty. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980.

Copleston, F. C. *Aquinas*. Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1955.

Cunningham, Lawrence S. *A Brief History of Saints*. Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.

———. *The Meaning of Saints*. New York: Harper & Row, 1980.

———. *Saint Francis of Assisi*. Boston: Twayne, 1976.

Downie, R. S. *Roles and Values: An Introduction to Social Ethics*. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., l97l.

Dworkin, Ronald. *Sovereign Virtue*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000.

Edel, Abraham. “The Search for a Moral Philosophy in James.” In *The Philosophy of William James*, edited by Walter Robert Corti. Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1976.

Elliot, Elisabeth. *The Shadow of the Almighty: The Life and Testament of Jim Eliot*. New York: Harper, 1958.

———. *Through Gates of Splendour*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1957.

Emmet, Dorothy. *Roles, Rules and Relations*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1966.

"The Encyclical Epistle of the Church of Smyrna Concerning the Martyrdom of the Holy Polycarp." In *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 1, The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenæus*. Edited by Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004.

Farmer, David Hugh. *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*. 5th ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Flescher, Andrew Michael. *Heroes, Saints, and Ordinary Morality*. Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2003.

Fontinell, Eugene. "James: Religion and Individuality." In *Classical American Pragmatism: Its Contemporary Vitality*, edited by Sandra B. Rosenthal, Carl R. Hausman, and Douglas R. Anderson. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999.

Forbus, William Byron, ed. *Fox's Book of Martyrs: A History of the Lives, Sufferings and Triumphant Deaths of the Early Christian and the Protestant Martyrs*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1967.

Francis of Assisi. *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works.* Translated by Regis J. Armstrong and Ignatius C. Brady, O.F.M. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1982.

Frankfurt, Harry G. *The Reasons of Love*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004.

Gale, Richard M. *The Divided Self of William James*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Garcia, J. L. A. "Goods and Evils." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 47, no. 3 (1987): 385-412.

———. "Love and Absolutes in Christian Ethics." In *Christian Philosophy*, edited by Thomas Flint, 162-99. Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1989.

———. "Morally Ought Rethought." *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 20 (1986): 83-94.

———. "Norms of Loving." In *Christian Theism and Moral Philosophy*, edited by Michael Beaty, Carlton Fisher, and Mark Nelson, 231-60. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998.

Garrow, David J. *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference*. William Morrow & Co., 1986.

Geach, Peter T. “Good and Evil.” In *Theories of Ethics*, edited by Philippa Foot. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979.

Gelber, Hester Goodenough. “A Theater of Virtue: The Exemplary World of St. Francis of Assisi.” In *Saints and Virtues*, edited byJohn Stratton Hawley. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987.

Glaser, J. W. *Three Realms of Ethics*. Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1994.

Goodman, Russell. “William James.” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2009 Edition). Edited by Edward N. Zalta. http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2009/entries/james/ (accessed August 3, 2011).

Hardimon, Michael O. “Role Obligations.” *The Journal of Philosophy* 91, no. 7 (Jul 1994): 333-363.

Harper, Sarah. “Role-centered Morality.” PhD diss., Boston College, 2007.

Hauerwas, Stanley. “How ‘Christian Ethics’ Came to Be.” In *The Hauerwas Reader*, 37-50, edited by John Berkman and Michael Cartwright. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001. And in “The Difference of Virtue and the Difference It Makes: Courage Exemplified.” *Modern Theology* 9, no. 3 (July 1, 1993): 249-264.

Hauerwas, Stanley, and Charles Pinches. “Practicing Patience: How Christians Should Be Sick.” In *Christians among the Virtues: Theological Conversations with Ancient and Modern Ethics*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997. Reprinted in *The Hauerwas Reader*. Edited by John Berkman and Michael Cartwright. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001.

Hawley, John Stratton, ed. *Saints and Virtues*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987.

Hume, David. *An Enquiry Concerning The Principles of Morals* (1751). Edited by Tom L. Beauchamp. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Hursthouse, Rosalind. *On Virtue Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Ignatius of Loyola. *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*. Chicago: Loyola Press, 1992.

Jackman, Henry. “Jamesian Pluralism and Moral Conflict.” In *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 41, no. 1 (Winter 2005).

James, William. “The Dilemma of Determinism.” In *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*. New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1897.

———. *Human Immortality: Two Supposed Objections to the Doctrine*. New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1956.

———. “The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life.” *International Journal of Ethics* (April 1891): 330-354.

———. “On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings.” In *Talks to Teachers on Psychology: and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals*. New York: Holt, 1899.

———. *A Pluralistic Universe*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1996.

———. *The Principles of Psychology*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981.

———. “The Sentiment of Rationality.” In *The Writings of William James: A Comprehensive Edition*, edited by John J. McDermott. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.

———. “Some Problems of Philosophy.” In *The Writings of William James: A Comprehensive Edition*, edited by John J. McDermott. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.

———. *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature.* New York: Penguin Group, 1982.

———. “What Makes Life Significant.” In *Talks to Teachers on Psychology: and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals*. New York: Holt, 1899.

———. “The Will to Believe.” In *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*. New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1897.

Jeske, Diane. “Families, Friends, and Special Obligations.” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 28, no. 4 (Dec 1998): 527-555.

Johnson, Robert N. “Virtue and Right.” *Ethics* 113 (2003): 810–834.

Jordan, Mark D. “Goodness and the Human Will.” In *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology*, edited by Scott McDonald. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991.

———. “Theology and Philosophy.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*. Edited by Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Jurgensmeyer, Mark. *Gandhi’s Way: A Handbook of Conflict Resolution*. 1st Edition Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002.

———. “Saint Gandhi.” In *Saints and Virtues*. Edited by John Stratton Hawley. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987.

Kagan, Shelly. *Normative Ethics*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1998.

Kiekhefer, Richard. “Imitators of Christ: Sainthood in Christian Tradition.” In *Sainthood: Its Manifestations in World Religions*, edited by Richard Kiekhefer and George D. Bond. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990.

Kieckhefer, Richard and George D. Bond. *Sainthood: Its Manifestations in World Religions*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990.

Kripke, Saul. *Naming and Necessity.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980.

Levinson, Henry Samuel. *The Religious Investigations of William James*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1981.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984.

———. *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*. Chicago: Carus Publishing Company, 1999.

———. *Edith Stein: A Philosophical Prologue, 1913-1922*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005.

———. *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encylopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition*. Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1991.

Madden, Thomas F. *The New Concise History of the Crusades*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005.

McInerny, Ralph M. *Ethica Thomistica: The Moral Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1997.

McPherson, Lionel K. “The Moral Insignificance of ‘Bare’ Personal Reasons” *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 110, no. 1 (Jul 2002): 29-47.

Mecklin, John. *The Passing of the Saint: A Study of a Cultural Type*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941.

Melden, A. I. “Saints and Supererogation.” In *Philosophy and Life: Essays on John Wisdom*, edited by Ilham Dilman. The Hague; Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 1984.

Metaxas, Eric. *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010.

Miles, Margaret R. *Fullness of Life: Historical Foundations for a New Asceticism*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1981.

Mill, John Stuart. *Utilitarianism*. Edited by George Sher. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 1979.

Miller, Gordon L. *The Way of the English Mystics: An Anthology and Guide for Pilgrims*. Ridgefield, CT: Morehouse Publishing, 1996.

Moore, G. E. *Principia Ethica*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903.

Mother Teresa, *Come Be My Light: The Private Writings of the “Saint of Calcutta.”* Edited by Brian Koldiejchuk, M. C. New York: Doubleday, 2007.

———. *One Heart Full of Love*. Edited by José González-Balado. Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 1988.

Murray, Paul. *I Loved Jesus in the Night: Theresa of Calcutta – a Secret Revealed*. London: Paraclete Press, 2008.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1989.

———. *On the Genealogy of Morality: A Polemic*. Translated by Maudemarie Clark and Alan J. Swensen. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 1998.

Noffke, Suzanne, trans. *Catherine of Siena: The Dialogue*. New York: Paulist Press, 1980.

Oppenheim, Frank M. *Reverence for the Relations of Life: Reimagining Pragmatism via Josiah Royce’s Interactions with Peirce, James, and Dewey*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005.

———. S. J. *Royce’s Mature Philosophy of Religion*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987.

Palmer, R. R., Colton, Joel, and Lloyd Kramer. *A History of the Modern World to 1815*. 10th Edition New York: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2006.

Pettit, Philip and Robert Goodin. “The Possibility of Special Duties.” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 16, no. 4 (Dec 1986): 651-676.

Perry, Ralph Barton. *The Thought and Character of William James*. vol. II Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1935.

Pieper, Josef. *The Silence of St. Thomas: Three Essays*. Translated by John Murray, S. J., and Daniel O’Connor. South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 1999.

Putnam, Hilary. “How not to Solve Ethical Problems.” In *Realism With a Human Face*, edited by James Conant. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990.

———. “The Meaning of ‘Meaning.’” In *Mind, Language and Reality, Philosophical Papers* vol. 2, 215-271. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.

Rahner, Karl. “The Church of the Saints.” In *Theological Investigations* III. Baltimore, MD: Helicon Press, 1967.

Ramsey, Bennett. *Submitting to Freedom: The Religious Vision of William James*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice*, 2nd Edition Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999.

Riley-Smith, Jonathan. *The Crusades: A History*. 2nd Edition New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005.

———. “Crusading as an Act of Love.” In *The Crusades: The Essential Readings*, edited by Thomas F. Madden. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002.

———. “The Crusading Movement and Historians.” In *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Crusades*, edited by Jonathan Riley-Smith. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

———. *What Were the Crusades?*. 3rd Edition San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2002.

Roberts, Robert C. *Emotions: An Essay in Aid of Moral Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003

———. *Spiritual Emotions: A Psychology of Christian Virtues*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2007.

———. *Taking the Word to Heart: Self and Others in an Age of Therapies*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993.

Roth, John K. *Freedom and the Moral Life: The Ethics of William James*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969.

Royce, Josiah. *The Problem of Christianity*. Vol. I. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2001.

Russell, Norman, trans. *The Lives of the Desert Fathers: Historia Monarchorum in Aegypto*.. Collegeville, MN: Cisterician Publications, 2006.

Saint, Steve. *The End of the Spear*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishing, 2005.

Sandel, Michael. *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

Sarte, Jean Paul. *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr*. Translated by Bernard Frechtman. London: Heinemann, 1988.

Scheffler, Samuel. "Relationships and Responsibilities." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 26 (1997): 189-190.

Scanlon, T. M. *What We Owe to Each Other*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998.

Schopenhauer, Arthur. *The World as Will and Representation*. 2 vols. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1966. [Check edition]

Siegfried, Charlene Haddock. *William James's Radical Reconstruction of Philosophy* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990.

Sherry, Patrick. *Spirit, Saints and Immortality*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1984.

Sinnott-Armstrong, Walter. "Consequentialism." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2008 Edition). Edited by Edward N. Zalta. http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/consequentialism/> (accessed August 3, 2011).

Smart, J. C. C. and Bernard Williams. *Utilitarianism: For and Against*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1973.

Sommers, Christina Hoff. "Filial Morality." *The Journal of Philosophy* 83, no. 8 (Aug 1986): 439-456.

Sorokin, Pitirim. *Altruistic Love.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1950.

———. *The Ways and Power of Love*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1954.

Stark, Rodney. “Live Longer, Healthier, and Better.” *Christian History* 57, (1998): 28-30.

Stark, Werner. *The Sociology of Religion: A Study of Christendom*. Vol. 4. New York: Fordham University Press, 1966.

St. Teresa of Jesus. *The Book of Her Life*. 8, §. In *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, Translated by K. Kavanaugh, OCD, and O. Rodriguez, OCD. Washington, D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1976.

Stump, Eleonore. “Biblical Commentary and Philosophy.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, edited by Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Suckiel, Ellen Kappy. *The Pragmatic Philosophy of William James*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984.

———. *Heaven's Champion: William James's Philosophy of Religion.* Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999.

Talisse, Robert B. and Scott F. Aikin. “Still Searching for a Pragmatist Pluralism.” *Transactions of the Charles S. Pierce Society* 41, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 145-60.

Talisse, Robert and Micah Hester. *On James.* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2004.

Tambiah, Stanley J. “The Buddhist Arahant: Classical Paradigm and Modern Thai Manifestations.” In *Saints and Virtues*, edited by John Stratton Hawley. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987.

Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007.

———. *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992.

———. *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002.

Tertullian. “The Passion of the Holy Martyrs Perpetua and Felicitas.” Translated by R. E. Wallis. In *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 3, Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*. Edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004.

Torrell, Jean-Pierre. *Saint Thomas Aquinas: Volume I: The Person and his Work*. Revised Edition. Translated by Robert Royal. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University Press, 2005.

Torsellino, Orazio. *The Admirable Life of S. Francis Xavier* (1632).

Urmson, J. O. "Saints and Heroes." In *Essays in Moral Philosophy*, edited by A. I. Melden. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1958.

Van der Leeuw, G. *Religion in Essence and Manifestation: A Study in Phenomenology.* New York: Harper & Row, 1963.

Voltaire. *A Philosophical Dictionary*. 2nd Edition Vol. 6. London: C. H. Reynell, 1824.

Wach, Joachim. *Sociology of Religion.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944.

Wadell Paul J. *Becoming Friends: Worship, Justice, and the Practice of Christian Friendship.* Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2002.

———. *Friendship and the Moral Life*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989.

———. "An Interpretation of Aquinas' Treatise on the Passions, the Virtues, and the Gifts from the Perspective of Charity as Friendship with God." PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 1985.

Ward, Benedicta. "'Those by Whom the World is Kept in Being': The Social Aspects of the Text." Introduction to *The Lives of the Desert Fathers: Historia Monarchorum in Aegypto*. Translated by Norman Russell. Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2006.

Weber, Max. "The Nature of Charismatic Authority and its Routinization." In *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. Translated by A. R. Anderson and Talcot Parsons. New York: The Free Press, 1947.

Weinstein, Donald, and Rudolph M. Bell. *Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000-1700*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982.

Williams, Bernard. *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985.

———. *Moral Luck*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Wolf, Susan. "Moral Saints." *The Journal of Philosophy* 79, no. 8 (August 1982): 419-39.

Wright, N. T. *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision*. Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009.

Wyschogrod, Edith. *Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

Zagzebski, Linda. *Divine Motivation Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.