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Introduction

Since 2013, the phrase “Black lives matter” has come to represent one of the most recognizable and influential political movements in the United States. Resonating far beyond any particular organization, the phrase is a far-reaching cry against anti-Black racism. As a response to police brutality, economic and health disparities, and systemic racism more broadly, the phrase is both a clear assertion of the dignity of Black Americans in the face of its denial and a call for the provision of basic entitlements and fair treatment. For Black lives to *matter*, the implicit reasoning goes, Black Americans must be treated fairly and equally in being afforded the same basic rights, privileges, and goods as others. Whatever else it might convey, the phrase “Black lives matter” is certainly no less than a demand for justice in this more traditional sense of the term.

However, Alicia Garza, co-founder of the Black Lives Matter Global Movement and innovator of the phrase in its contemporary usage, suggests that the phrase refers to still something more. In a 2015 interview with *The Nation* magazine, Garza explained about the movement, “The fight is not just being able to keep breathing. The fight is actually to be able to walk down the street with your head held high—and feel like I belong here, or I deserve to be here, or I just have [a] right to have a level of dignity.”[1]

Garza’s comments helpfully elaborate on much of what is conveyed by the phrase “Black lives matter.” While no doubt referring to material conditions, legal protections, and the equal distribution of resources, it also refers to the lived, affective, *existential* dimension of political life. That is, the phrase also includes the demand to be recognized, to be valued, and to know

[1] Mychal Denzel Smith, “A Q&A with Alicia Garza, Co-Founder of #BlackLivesMatter,” *The Nation*, March 24, 2015, https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/qa-alicia-garza-co-founder-blacklivesmatter/.

oneself as such. Further, important to the context of "Black lives matter" and clearly evident in Garza's comment is that the recognition sought is not merely interpersonal or even institutional. Rather, it seems to refer to the political community as a whole, however imprecise or vague that might seem. Beyond the mere achievement of a certain status, the phrase points to a regard that is internal to the life of the political community, a standing that is expressed by, and experienced through a person's interactions with, fellow citizens, representative leaders, institutions, and a broader culture.[2] Following Garza, we might say that, along with demanding the justice of equal and fair treatment, "Black lives matter" appeals also to a sense of *belonging* to one's political community.

The example of "Black lives matter" is but one of many instances of the problem of belonging in political life, past and present. As the example further suggests, political belonging is at the heart of the experience of political inequality and exclusion, of which anti-Black racism in the United States is a paradigmatic example. Overlooking the experiential dimension of political life by not theoretically attending carefully to it, and this despite its frequent references by writers who experience systematic exclusion, effectively perpetuates harm toward others. Furthermore, I suggest that it is not possible to get our hands around the experience of political marginalization, and that therefore key aspects of anti-Black racism and other forms of exclusion will theoretically elude us, without a concept like belonging.[3] This point resonates with Terrence

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[2] This point was powerfully expressed in recent comments by Doc Rivers, then head coach of the Los Angeles Clippers NBA basketball team, who spoke to the experience of being a Black American shortly after the August 23, 2020, shooting of Jacob Blake by a police officer in Kenosha, Wisconsin: "It's amazing why we keep loving this country, and this country does not love us back." Andrew Grief, "Doc Rivers: 'It's amazing why we keep loving this country, and this country does not love us back,'" *Los Angeles Times*, August 25, 2020, https://www.latimes.com/sports/clippers/story/2020-08-25/doc-rivers-loving-this-country-and-does-not-love-us-back.

[3] To be clear, I am not suggesting that alienation and political belonging are sufficient to understand the phenomenon or experiences of anti-Black racism. Rather, I propose that they might contribute to better accounting for it.

Johnson's claim in his recent work on Black religion and radical politics regarding the need to "envision the role of subjectivity (and individual narrative) in political struggles," as well as "to imagine political subjects as more than rights-bearing persons—as persons seeking human dignity and a deep sense of belonging even as they remain bound by public laws and cultural beliefs."[4] All that said, I also maintain that political belonging is a universally human concern, and so theoretical disinterest and/or inattention to it also impoverishes theorizations of political life more generally.

In this dissertation, I take the experience of political belonging as my object of analysis. Only a deeply interdisciplinary project is suitable for the task, and I will engage discourses, concepts, and texts from across the disciplines of philosophy, political theory, Christian theology, and religious studies. Among the animating concerns for the project are two principal questions worth stating explicitly. The first is primarily descriptive: what does it mean for persons to experience a sense of belonging to their political community? The second is more plainly normative: why is political belonging good for persons? Both questions suggest or imply reference to a conception of the human self, which lies at the heart of this project.

Meta-theoretically, this dissertation is most broadly a work of philosophical anthropology. I am most fundamentally interested here in pursuing a conception of the person according to which belonging to their political community is good. In that phrasing, the Aristotelian kernel of the project becomes clear. In a sense, I am interested in investigating what it might mean for the human self—a hermeneutically, reflexively, recognitively constituted (that is, intractably social and perpetually self-interpreting) being—to be a "political animal."

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[4] Terrence L. Johnson, *We Testify with Our Lives: How Religion Transformed Radical Thought from Black Power to Black Lives Matter* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 162.

Outline of the Project and its Arguments

For this project, I am interested in examining the themes of alienation and political belonging as well as advancing constructive claims about their relation to one another, to human wellbeing, and to theorizations of political life. Although much of this dissertation is deliberately inductive, in it I will advance two major arguments. The first, which will unfold over the course of the next four chapters, is the contention that political belonging is good for persons because its realization involves overcoming alienation, which is corrosive of human wellbeing. I will make this case by engaging works pertaining to these themes by four figures who are especially concerned with the experiential or lived dimension of political life: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, G. W. F. Hegel, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Martin Luther King Jr. Crucial for this task is clarifying an account of human selfhood, which demands close and careful readings of their complex works. Despite some important differences between them, these four maintain compelling and analogous conceptions of the human self, alienation, and political belonging. There is evidence that these figures directly and indirectly influence one another, which I will make reference to in due course, but my interests are more theoretical and finally constructive than intellectual historical, even if such factors cannot (and ought not) be kept entirely apart.

Some conceptual clarifications are in order for the purposes of this first main argument. Following Rousseau, Hegel, Du Bois, and King, I will maintain that alienation is the experience of significant disjuncture or contradiction between subjective (internal, private) and objective (shared, public) aspects of self-knowledge. That is, alienation occurs when persons experience a deep tension or incongruity between who/how they regard themselves to be and who/how they are regarded by others. Owing to their nature as self-interpreting beings whose sense of self and self-knowledge depend upon *external* confirmation, such incongruity renders a person's sense of

self indeterminate. Stated paradoxically, such a scenario results in a self who cannot know itself to be the self it knows itself to be. When the content of self-knowledge pertains to the most basic or fundamental aspects of personhood, such as a sense of their full status as a human being and their basic capacity for rationality and/or self-determination, the indeterminacy that results can undermine human freedom and wellbeing. An essentially negative concept, on my rendering, *alienation names the experience of interruption to a person's integrated or coherent sense of self by social and/or other external forces, which impedes their ability to be a dignified and free person*. This is a narrower conception of alienation than many others have offered in that mine focuses intently on a person's sense of self; or, otherwise put, my definition pertains to the reflexive and self-interpretive dynamics involved in the development of a sense of self. As a result, some might say that my conception is more accurately understood as referring to the phenomenon of *self*-alienation. However, I insist that, no matter what form it takes or what context it occurs within, alienation is at root about one's relation to oneself, and it needs to be theorized as such if it is going to properly account for the internality and particularity that characterize our contemporary understanding of the self.

On that description, alienation may not seem obviously connected to political life, as it often emerges most immediately in interpersonal relations. However, Rousseau, Hegel, Du Bois, and King offer good reasons for thinking that alienation is only finally overcome by—or, more modestly, the only possibility for its overcoming involves—realizing a sense of belonging to a person's political community. In short, the political community is itself a powerful and meaningful context in reference to which persons make sense of themselves (otherwise put, it is a context that can be alienating with distinctive impact), and its encompassing scope and unique

influence and power render it an especially important context for belonging. Such a claim depends to some degree on what I mean by "political community," which I will address shortly.

Emerging most clearly from the writings of Hegel and implied or suggested by the other three authors under review in this project, I offer a conception of political belonging that serves as an ideal. I maintain that *political belonging refers to the experience of persons relating to their political community as constitutive parts of a larger whole and enjoying meaningful alignment with it such that persons are able to understand themselves as legitimate expressions or manifestations of that community. This relation is one of dynamic reciprocation: individuals self-consciously manifest, contribute to, and enhance the life of the community, and the community grounds and makes possible its members' continued existence and satisfactory self-knowledge.* As I will mention, theorizations of political community that attend to belonging by some of the main figures of this study (and certainly some others more broadly) risk endorsing a reductive and potentially violent homogeneity among their members. However, as my definition hopefully suggests, a sense of political belonging is conceivable within communities that are hospitable to and even celebrate pluralism and meaningful difference.

To reiterate, political belonging stands as an ideal, and it depends on subjective (self-conscious) and objective (interpersonal, institutional, cultural) conditions that are quite difficult to establish and maintain. Therefore, it is important to identify that *a necessary condition for realizing a sense of political belonging is having confirmed and protected by the institutions, norms (i.e., laws), fellow members, and broader culture of one's political community a person's equal standing among their fellow members (which I will often call dignity) and their capacity for self-determination*. Following King, I will often refer to this as a sense of "*somebodyness*," which is gestured to by the phrase "satisfactory self-knowledge" in the above definition of

political belonging. Securing a sense of somebodyness for all persons in a political community, which is certainly difficult enough to achieve on its own, stands as the proximate end—the immediate and more realistic aim—of a political community that ultimately aspires to realize a sense of political belonging for all of its members. A sense of somebodyness overcomes the harmful effects of alienation, but it falls short of a sense of realizing the full satisfaction and the most expansive self-determination entailed in a sense of political belonging, which we might call the maximally *un*alienated life. Notably, somebodyness also serves as the distinguishing factor between just and unjust experiences of belonging.

The second major constructive argument that I will advance in this project, primarily in the fourth and concluding chapters, is a proposal for theorizing political life in a democratic political community. Building on the work of King and incorporating insights from the other three figures, I will offer an outline of a constructive political theory attuned to the problems of alienation and political belonging that I call *dialogical democracy*. This proposal is "bottom up" by design and is patterned after a way of engaging the fellow members of one's political community that insists on one's own somebodyness while also affirming it in others.[5] Furthermore, this view strives to maintain the inclusion of oneself and one's fellow members as equals in the ongoing task of constructing and managing a common life to which all might belong. In the Conclusion, I will consider the implications and necessary features of such a theory and argue that, among other things, it requires attending to the political community itself as a site of normative concern.

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[5] For reasons that will become clear very soon, I reject any firm division between ethics and politics, and so I will very often present these terms in tandem. The primary reason for doing so is that I imagine political life as being a context for the direct realization of human wellbeing, and so "the political" and "the ethical" are not separated by independent or transactionally related ends.

Religion plays a significant role in this project and will receive attention in each of the following chapters. As I will show, each of the four main figures in this dissertation are profoundly influenced by religious traditions (mostly, although not only, different forms of Protestant Christianity), and each marshals resources from these traditions for their respective political theories. However, each of these four has a different relationship to religion, confessionally and historically. My argument about the role of religion in their works is not about uniform reference or influence, although there are important similarities to be found among them. Rather, I intend to show that these four figures cannot seem to put religion down or proceed without it when theorizing political life, despite their differences. By this point I am not invoking what is often referred to as "political theology," although there are important overlaps. I mean more generally that it is not possible to understand how these thinkers conceive of alienation and theorize the political community and political belonging without attending to the prominent role of religion in their thought.

The aspect or place of religion in their thinking that most interests me is its use (analogically, metaphorically, or theologically) in theorizing the political community as the context of a larger life and/or how to theorize a person's relation to it as such. I am of course referring to what has been called "civil religion," a term whose origin and meaning I will consider in some depth. Building on its use in the works of Rousseau and Hegel, I will argue that civil religion ought to be understood as referring specifically to the matter of political belonging. Refining this conceptualization, I will argue that Du Bois and King offer a form of civil religion that facilitates the relation between individuals and their political community in its ideal and principally just form rather than its current manifestation.

Principle of Selection for Main Interlocutors

Regarding the principles of selection for my main interlocutors, I have chosen Rousseau, Hegel, Du Bois, and King as the central figures in this dissertation for three main reasons. First, in light of their attention to the experiential dimension of political life, the concept of alienation plays a prominent if not always explicit role in their thinking. Second, despite their differences, these four thinkers share significant theoretical commonalities that allow for generative comparison. Third, all four of these thinkers utilize characteristically religious and most often specifically Christian theological categories and concepts. While this connection to religion is more apparent in some of them than others, I will show that each of these thinkers finds religious conceptual resources necessary in order to theorize collective life and membership thereto.

As noted previously, these four thinkers also have intellectual historical connections. Hegel's indebtedness to Rousseau is widely acknowledged and explicitly stated, and Du Bois and King are clearly influenced by Hegel. What is more, Du Bois and King are connected to Hegelian thinking in part through a shared conduit: the American idealist philosopher Josiah Royce, who influenced both Du Bois (while he was a student at Harvard University) and King (who apparently read his work). In the coming chapters, I will make reference to these and other connections between them.

Each of these four thinkers offers a significant contribution toward understanding and addressing the problem of alienation and toward theorizing the matter of political belonging. I begin with Rousseau for two major reasons. First, his intervention into the history of modern political theory involves a turn toward the experiential dimension of political life. Eschewing an approach organized primarily by abstract principles or institutions, Rousseau attends foremost to the development and proper organization of the political community with concern for how its

members affectively and interpretively relate to it. That is, I find him to be a signal modern thinker for theorizing political belonging. Second, I begin with Rousseau because he is the first (or among the very first) modern thinker to identify the problem of alienation. As a response to this problem, he offers a political theory of non-aggregate community, to which all members might experience a sense of belonging. I then move to engage Hegel, who extends Rousseau's concern for the inner lives of persons. Hegel's main contribution to the story I am telling is that he astutely theorizes the problem of alienation within a compelling account of human selfhood, framing it in reference to the subjective and objective dimensions of self-knowledge and relating it the concept of recognition. Analogously to Rousseau, Hegel ultimately offers an organic conception of the political community that adequately addresses the problem of alienation by attempting to secure the conditions for political belonging.

Du Bois and King offer a critical intervention into the development of these themes as presented. Whereas Rousseau and Hegel speak of alienation rather generally, Du Bois and King speak as Black Americans from and about the radically different and particular context of anti-Black racism in the nineteenth and twentieth century United States. On their accounts, the experience of such racism includes the interruption of an integrated sense of self resulting from the denial of mutual recognition by prominent persons, institutions, and broader culture. Although manifestly different than what is described by Rousseau and Hegel, Du Bois and King present the experience of anti-Black racism as deeply analogous to the ways in which Rousseau and Hegel theorize it. This commonality, along with their structurally similar accounts of the self, allows for illuminating and generative comparisons.

I want to stress that, although I am separated in time and context from all four of the main figures in this project, despite being geographically and temporally more proximate to Du Bois

and King, I am meaningfully distant from them in a way that demands mention. I have no personal comparison to their being Black in an anti-Black racist context, and I am mindful of that key fact. My attempt to theorize with their experiences as they write about them is certainly neither to claim them as my own, nor is it meant to suggest my full understanding of them. Rather, my engagement with their experiences involves marking them as crucial sources of insight that are necessary for understanding both the dynamics of oppression and exclusion *and* what it means to be human. It is especially important to note, then, that my references to their experiences are undertaken with great care and attention to their written words, historical contexts, and autobiographical writings, and I hope that the inevitable failure of my ability to grasp the full weight and measure of their experiences does not undermine my attempt to learn from them. I undertake this project in the firm conviction of a shared humanity between me, the figures in this project, and my readers that does not allow for universal access to our importantly different experiences, but it does encompass and draw lines of connection between them. I wager that the errors of omission and commission I risk committing are preferable to treating the experiences of Du Bois and King as entirely unknowable and beyond analogy or even partial comprehension. Especially given my own privileged status, a move like the latter conduces to their designation as something other than human, even if done out of respect for their alterity.

Returning to my outline, Du Bois offers the concept of "double consciousness" as a powerful and insightful account of the experience of *imposed* alienation, and his suggestions for overcoming it mark a significant theoretical advance. Among them, Du Bois argues for the importance of *self-assertion* for maintaining a sense of one's own dignity, especially in a dehumanizing milieu. This introduces something of a paradox, because such insistence on one's own dignity in a dehumanizing context results in furthering and even intensifying the experience

of alienation. However, the existential costs of not doing so, Du Bois asserts, involve the worse scenario of being resigned to or even becoming an active participant in one's own dehumanization. What is more, the mode of self-assertion he advises connects to another key contribution of Du Bois, which is his advocacy for a form of protest in response to a political community that alienates some of its members.

King offers an account of imposed alienation that reflects and extends Du Bois's. In doing so, he mobilizes three key interrelated elements: the concepts of "somebodyness" (and its opposite, "nobodiness") and "Beloved Community" and an account of nonviolence. I will show how these three elements are component parts of a rich account of moral and political life that, when seen for its full, constructive potential, offers a promising approach to theorizing political life that attends to alienation and belonging.

Two points complicate the project at hand. First, political belonging does not often enjoy direct attention and explicit consideration by these thinkers, although alienation (sometimes under a different name) certainly does. However, as the succeeding chapters will bear out, these themes lie at the heart of their writings. Second, these figures represent a range of approaches to theorizing political life, in terms of both genre and method. Nevertheless, the works I engage by each directly and/or indirectly address alienation and political belonging and theorize the latter as involving the overcoming of the former. Although the language of alienation and political belonging is somewhat artificial for some of these figures, the themes they refer to are certainly not, and utilizing the themes as I present them offers something of a hermeneutical key that unlocks powerful if sometimes implicit elements in their works.[6]

[6] To be clear, as for all hermeneutical lenses, the one I am proposing both reveals and conceals. In no way do I offer the readings in the succeeding chapters as exhaustive readings of these four thinkers.

Methodology and Structure

My methodology for engaging the primary figures in this dissertation is interpretive, comparative, and critical. I set out to identify and examine many of their main claims and core ideas pertaining to the topics at hand, note key similarities and differences between them on these matters, and discern limitations and weaknesses in their writings while indicating where amendments need to be made. True to the model of dialogue that I ultimately endorse, another way to put this is that I set out to convene a conversation with and between these figures on the themes of alienation and political belonging, in which I will play an active role.

In the following four chapters, I will attempt to "listen" carefully to their contributions. These chapters will be immersed in the pertinent writings and salient intellectual and historical background details necessary for this task. These chapters will be primarily inductive, which is critical both because each of these figures is a nuanced and complex thinker deserving to be engaged on his own terms and also because considerable work is needed to identify and clarify their often indirect or implicit treatment of the themes in their writings. That said, I will proceed in a mode of "active listening," in which I will intervene to make connections that remain suppressed or unfinished, suggest points of overlap, contrast, and critique, and offer what "translation" might be necessary for generative exchange. In the concluding chapter, I will contribute my own perspective to the discussion by turning in a decidedly constructive direction. Building on insights gleaned along the way, I will offer a constructive theorization of political life according to which all members of a political community might have the opportunity to overcome alienation and realize a sense of political belonging.

As indicated, the structure of this project is quite straight forward. I will spend the next four chapters closely examining Rousseau, Hegel, Du Bois, and King on the themes of alienation

and political belonging, dedicating one chapter to each figure in the order mentioned. In each chapter, I will consider how the writer being engaged describes and explains the experience of alienation, including its causes and contributing factors. I will then examine in each how the figure under consideration conceives of the political community, as well as how and why he maintains that alienation might be overcome in realizing a sense of belonging therein. I will also focus for each on the implicit and explicit role of religion in his respective account, noting especially the way it shapes his thinking about the nature of the political community and the relations of citizens to it, and I will draw on the language of "civil religion" to do so.

As mentioned, I will conclude this project by offering an outline of a constructive democratic theory that takes alienation and political belonging as matters of fundamental concern. This will be a theory that *begins* with the problems of alienation and political belonging. Along the way, I will also consider how such a theory oriented to the matter of belonging might transform relations with one's fellow members into instances of *belonging with* them to a shared political community.

In the concluding chapter, I will develop the constructive theorization of political life that I will call, in virtue of its indebtedness to King's thought, *dialogical democracy*. After clarifying some formal and meta-ethical features of it—a teleological structure, in which the good is prior to the right, ordered to the good of a political community to which all persons might belong—I locate the theory in reference to three contemporary thinkers in democratic theory, Ella Myers, Danielle Allen, and Chantal Mouffe. I will use these references to refine aspects of the theory, most notably regarding matters of citizenship and citizen formation. I will conclude by elaborating on the relational ontology against which dialogical democracy reposes and the necessary role of "civil religion" for it.

Scholarly Interventions

This dissertation aims to most directly contribute to existing scholarship in the disciplines of political theory/political philosophy and religious studies. Rather straightforwardly, this project contributes to theorizations of political life and political community in these fields a robust, distinct, and somewhat novel account of political belonging, as well as an argument for its significance. The survey of recent scholarship on these themes below will further clarify the details of my particular interventions to this body of work.

Political belonging has remained, to this point, often overlooked and mostly under-theorized. This is also true in reference to the scholarship on the four figures that I will consider in the coming chapters. Over the course of these chapters, I will attend to the significance of political belonging for these figures, and, along the way, I will stake out my own distinct position regarding the interpretation of some of their most notable works. Although scholarship on the theme of alienation has been plentiful, both generally and with respect to the writings of Rousseau and Hegel, I will contribute to this scholarship a distinct account of alienation tied to the attainment of satisfactory self-knowledge. I will also prominently bring Du Bois and King into this scholarly conversation more substantially than they have been.

Aside from these more obvious contributions, and this partially accounts for the inductive nature of the next four chapters, I also hope to push theorizations of political community to become more attentive to the experiential or *existential* dimension of political life than they often are. Political theories often rush toward abstraction, often for the good reasons of utilizing properly general or universal categories and remaining open to pluralism. Yet, ignoring or moving too quickly past the experiences of persons—and what these experiences mean to

them—not only misses vital data for analysis, but it can also (even unwittingly) perpetuate harm toward those who are or are part of communities that have been historically marginalized. Despite their intentions, theories of justice that do not carefully and patiently sit with *and theorize from* the lived reality of those experiencing political marginalization risk under-appreciating the significance of context and potentially reifying the harmful relations that they ostensibly intend to correct. In fact, I wager that this may be some part of the reason that political belonging has been so under-theorized, namely, that *not*-belonging to one's political community has not appeared as a felt problem to so many theorists who occupy social positions of power and historical privilege. Attempting to keep my own limitations and even culpability regarding these points in full view, I aspire to remain carefully attentive to the experiences of anti-Black racism in the writings of Du Bois and King, and I hope that my proposals regarding alienation and political belonging help to uncover and address aspects of that particular injustice that remain too often overlooked.

Lastly, I hope to contribute to ongoing work on the concept of civil religion. Like these above points, this matter addresses the disciplinary overlap between the fields of political theory/political philosophy and religious studies. As I will elaborate especially in the Conclusion chapter, I propose defining the term primarily in reference to the themes of this project. Drawing on its original use by Rousseau, I will construe civil religion as the matter of constructing and refining a political culture that helps to facilitate part/whole relations between individuals and their political community as such, and therefore for helping to realize a sense of political belonging. Such a definition means separating it from any necessary reference to recognizably religious artifacts, but I find this functional definition more theoretically helpful.

An Excursus on Political Theory

Given that this dissertation pertains to theorizations of political life and political community, a brief excursus on more formal political theoretical matters is in order. This will help to position my project in reference to some prominent historical developments in political theory, and it will sharpen the project's contrast to traditionally liberal political theories. Doing so will also further clarify my project's distinct contribution to and intervention in political theory.

Thinking about political belonging as profoundly important for persons requires thinking capaciously about political life as taking place within an expansive context of meaning and being. As I see it, the very notion of belonging implies a part/whole relation between an individual and some larger entity. Our everyday language suggests this: when we talk about being a member of some organization or group, we often speak about being "a part of" it, the connotation of which suggests that the entity includes but is larger than any individual member. Accordingly, belonging entails that individual members stand in an *asymmetrical* and *vertical* relation to the whole of which they are a part; that is, the whole has an elevated status with respect to its constituent parts, being "more than" its parts in both evaluative and spatially metaphorical terms.

In light of these factors, properly conceptualizing the context of political life is essential for my project. To accommodate the aforementioned elements, and appropriate to the thought of my main interlocutors, I utilize the language of "political community" rather than "the political" or "the political domain" when referring to that context within which political life occurs. On my usage, "political community" refers to an expansive context that encompasses different domains of life and is constituted by shared norms, institutions, and ways of living that bind persons

together under the power of common governance, broadly understood. The fact of common governance is what defines such an entity into being, hence the qualifier "political."

Although importantly not "nations" in the early modern, Romantic sense of a polity bound by shared ethnicity, race, and/or religion, political communities are nevertheless, to use Benedict Anderson's famous phrase, "imagined communities," whose culture and way(s) of life are at least as significant for the wellbeing of their members as are the structure of their institutions and laws, which are of course inseparable and flow from one another.[7] On the view I am offering, which at many points resembles a classically republican perspective, all domains of life are conditioned by and occur under the auspices of a political community, for better or worse. According to such a picture, all of life is always already political in virtue of this fact, even if aspects of it may also be more than that.

With this "shape" of the political community required to theorize political belonging in view, it is possible to see why and how political belonging is so often overlooked or under-theorized. As I see it, liberal political theories, which are the most prominent and influential family of approaches to theorizing political life in the North Atlantic intellectual context, tend to overlook or under-appreciate the matter of political belonging for two basic reasons. First, liberal political theories present political life as consisting of and/or constituted by horizontal and symmetrical relations (relations between equals). Not unrelated, such approaches tend to narrowly construe "the political" as one domain among others.

Second, to consider political belonging as so important for human wellbeing is to theorize political life as a context for the realization of human wellbeing.[8] Liberal political thinkers tend

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[7] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition (New York: Verso, 1983).

[8] By this I do not mean to suggest that political life is that context within which *all* aspects of human wellbeing are or are not realized; rather, it is *a* context for the realization of *some* aspects of human wellbeing.

to cast the political domain as existing for the sake of protecting *other* domains or aspects of life. On a liberal political picture, the political domain is valuable for essentially transactional or instrumental reasons: persons engage in political life for the sake of refining the proper institutions, policies, and/or laws that protect domains of life defined as non-political, which are seen to be the primary domains for realizing human wellbeing. However, a theory that takes belonging as serious as I suggest would need to theorize the political community as a context for the realization of human wellbeing, as one in which human wellbeing is directly (that is, not only indirectly) thwarted or realized. Allow me to explain these points by referencing some canonical liberal political thinkers and a few more recent representative figures.

The social contract tradition, which is genealogically significant for liberal political theories and even paradigmatic for some, imagines politics being constructed by mutually beneficial arrangements between equal parties. For many of those claiming the social contract tradition, the political community ideally emerges from and for transactional agreements between persons.[9] Whether the contract itself is taken to be historical or theoretical, liberal political theorists often use it as a framework for grounding or devising the necessary foundational principles to govern, which results in a political order characterized by transactional relations.

Surely many liberal political theorists would insist that this depiction misses the strong deontic dimension of their perspectives. Such liberals would be in principle opposed to consequentialist thinking and are therefore not transactional in any straightforward sense.[10] However, it is important to note that deontic liberals, given the nature of their position, do not

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[9] I use the phrase "transactional" in reference to a relation benefiting both parties that is entered into *because* of its (at least potentially) beneficial outcome.

[10] That is, deontic thinkers would not argue the rightness of an action (or relation) on the consequentialist grounds that the act (or relation) would produce beneficial results.

prioritize or think firstly in terms of the realization of goods. For these sorts of liberal, in whatever domain deontic thinking is to be employed—either in the political domain alone or in all realms of life—the realization of goods is not a normatively decisive or prioritized feature of that domain.[11]

Structurally, transactional and deontic liberals—which, I submit, on these broad descriptions, are representative of liberal political theorists—have at least this in common: they establish the political as a distinct domain consisting of exclusively horizontal relations. On such a view, the political domain is normatively flat: it is constructed of and by relations between equals.[12] For reasons pertaining to a strong principle of equality between persons, a guarantee of individual entitlements, and a commitment to accommodating pluralism, liberal political theories resist any reference to hierarchical or vertical registers in the political domain. In fact, a key feature of liberalism is its relegation of vertical or hierarchical appeals to the private domain.[13]

To draw out an aspect of this point more clearly, not only do liberal political theories tend to be built on transactional relations between persons, they also tend to instrumentalize the political domain *itself*.[14] More specifically, liberal theories tend to posit that the political domain itself exists primarily, if not exclusively, for securing goods (or access to goods) or principles expressly for life outside of it—that the political exists not for its own sake but for the sake of

[11] The point is captured by the distinction between deontic and teleological positions. It is not unrelated to the tendency of liberal theorists to embrace a "negative" conception of freedom.
[12] John Rawls presents a theory of liberalism ordered to the concept of reciprocity, which he claims stands between deontic and transactional approaches. However, his is *not* a transactional position, as he is clear to explain that reciprocity "is not the idea of mutual advantage." Instead, Rawls stresses the absolute centrality of equality. John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, exp. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 16-17.
[13] To the extent that certain "perfectionist" versions of liberalism reference substantive goods to be realized, as is found in William Galston's liberal theory (noted below), they appeal to a vertical or hierarchical value (a conception of human nature allowing for better and worse realizations). However, even in this case, the value refers exhaustively to the individual human being and not "beyond" it. This marks an important difference from the conception of belonging I offer.
[14] For an insightful genealogy of these horizontal and instrumental trajectories in the European intellectual context, see Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

life in the *non*-political domain.[15] I take this to be more or less baked into the distinction made by many liberal theorists between public and private domains of life.

The claim about liberalism's horizontalization of the political strikes me as rather uncontroversial, but the claim of instrumentalization may need more explanation, which I will provide by turning to some representative liberal political thinkers. John Locke, perhaps the most genealogically important modern liberal political theorist, claims that the ideal state of "perfect freedom" *precedes* the political community, whose "great and chief end...is the preservation of...[private] property."[16] John Stuart Mill, an enormously influential figure in the tradition's development, famously offers a conception of freedom as the pursuit of one's own good in one's own way, which clearly privileges the non-political.[17] Mill frames the purpose of the political instrumentally, as existing to provide protections for persons in their private lives for the sake of enjoyment and personal development, and because of which individuals owe certain obligations of mutual respect and shared sacrifice.[18]

Any claim about liberal political theory nowadays requires some engagement with the work of John Rawls, who is certainly the most influential liberal political theorist in recent times. In whole, Rawls's liberalism offers a robust theory of justice for the governance and promotion of social cooperation.[19] Among his foremost concerns is the moral and religious diversity that characterizes liberal societies, and he remains sensitive to a significant plurality of individual life

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[15] This might seem to sit in tension with the tendency of liberal theories to advocate strong principles that, if necessary, can override or restrict private principles or values. This is why it is wrong to say that, for liberals, the private has *absolute priority* over the public/political. However, these constraining principles or values are (at least implicitly) *for the sake of* preserving and allowing rich diversity and maximum freedom in the private domain.
[16] John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, ed. C.B. Macpherson (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1980), chapters 2 and 9.
[17] John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and Other Writings*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 16, and chapter 2.
[18] Mill, *On Liberty*, 75.
[19] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 1999), 4, and chapter 3.

plans.[20] For him, the principles of justice (and political institutions governed by them) protect and allow for a wide range of private life plans or conceptions of the good. Yet, Rawls says, justice also has important value of its own. In his first major work, *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls argues that "just institutions allow for and encourage the diverse internal life of associations in which individuals realize their more particular aims." Such a claim clearly references an instrumental valuation of justice and the institutions it governs, which is the overriding sense that emerges in the text. However, Rawls also argues that maintaining certain "public arrangements" allows individuals to "best express their nature and achieve the widest regulative excellences of which each is capable."[21] In this instance, the political institutions governed by justice are presented as a site for the refinement if not the direct realization of certain human goods or capacities tied to wellbeing, and this because of their being maximal in size, scale, and/or complexity.[22] Nevertheless, like Locke and Mill, Rawls's early theory of justice presents public and/or political institutions as being primarily valuable for protecting or promoting the realization of human wellbeing in non-political domains.

In his later book, *Political Liberalism*, Rawls turns more clearly toward a designation of the political as a distinct domain of life and decidedly away from any particular conception of human nature. In this later approach, Rawls offers a conception of justice that is "political and not metaphysical," meaning it is "freestanding" from any "specific metaphysical or epistemological doctrine beyond what is implied by the political conception itself."[23] This

[20] Rawls, *Theory of Justice,* 110.
[21] Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, 463.
[22] He calls this the "Aristotelian principle." Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, 374.
[23] Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 10.

normative distinction between domains serves the point that political liberalism exists for the sake of constructing "a fair system of cooperation over time, from one generation to the next."[24]

Attempting to parry the charge I am leveling, that his view instrumentalizes the political and its principles, Rawls explains that in a "well-ordered society" citizens share "one very basic political end…namely, the end of supporting just institutions and of giving one another justice accordingly."[25] He explains that the value of such an arrangement is threefold: it 1.) exercises the two natural "moral powers" of human beings, 2.) secures the "fundamental needs" of individuals, and 3.) makes possible ends only achievable via cooperative activity.[26] Despite his protest, these seem to position the political firstly as a servant of the non-political.[27] While on his view the political has its own end, for which its principles are intrinsically valuable, Rawls nevertheless seems to present *that* end as instrumental for non-political life. He writes, "In a reasonable society…all have their own rational ends they hope to advance, and all stand ready to propose fair terms that others may reasonably be expected to accept, so that all may benefit and improve on what every one can do on their own."[28] Something like this view seems inevitable for any theorist so intent on not committing to a particular philosophical anthropology, as in the case of *Political Liberalism*. The point is clearest when Rawls explicitly distances himself from the perspective of "civic humanism" (a perspective quite like the one I offer), which posits that political life is a "privileged" domain of human flourishing.[29]

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[24] Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 15.
[25] Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 202.
[26] Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 203-204.
[27] Regarding the first point, the exercise of two basic human moral powers, Rawls says that this good is "for persons individually," by which he seems to mean privately (or non-politically). Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 203.
[28] Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 54.
[29] "From the standpoint of political liberalism, the objection to this comprehensive doctrine [civic humanism] is the same as to all other such doctrines," which, as such, should not be favored or endorsed. That said, Rawls does acknowledge the benefits of such a view: "Indeed, in a well-framed polity it is generally to the good of society as a whole" that at least many of its members hold that "political life is central to their comprehensive good." Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 206.

William Galston, another recent liberal theorist, endorses a minimally perfectionist theory of political liberalism. He explains that “a liberal polity may be viewed as a cooperative endeavor to create and sustain circumstances within which individuals may pursue—and to the greatest possible extent achieve—their good.”[30] In contrast with Rawls’s position in *Political Liberalism*, Galston argues that members of a liberal polity are rightly understood to share a “partial” conception of the human good that “defines a range of normal, decent human functioning” and that includes values such as life, freedom, the development of basic capabilities, and society.[31] For him, however, the substantive and non-instrumental values of liberalism are not oriented toward political life; rather, he argues that different forms of liberal “conceptions of human excellence” cohere around “a common core – a vision of individuals who in some manner take responsibility for their own lives.”[32] Like Rawls, Galston explicitly distances himself from what he calls the “civic-republican” perspective that posits a conception of the human good whose flourishing is (at least partially) realized in the political domain.[33] This leads Galston to declare outright that a defining feature of liberalism is its “instrumental rather than intrinsic account of the worth of politics.”[34]

Eschewing any strong distinction between public and private domains of life, Stephen Macedo, a third recent liberal theorist, offers a substantive liberal political theory that acknowledges and advocates for the influence of public norms and values on private life.[35]

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[30] William A. Galston, *Liberal Purposes: Goods, Virtues, and Diversity in the Liberal State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 183.
[31] Galston, *Liberal Purposes*, 174-177.
[32] Galston, *Liberal Purposes*, 230.
[33] Galston, *Liberal Purposes*, 225.
[34] This, again, is what he explains distinguishes liberalism from “civic republicanism.” William Galston, *Liberal Pluralism: The Implications of Value Pluralism for Political Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 4.
[35] Stephen Macedo, *Liberal Virtues: Citizenship, Community, and Virtue in Liberal Constitutionalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 263-265.

Although his approach clearly avoids offering purely instrumental norms and principles, Macedo nevertheless does not promote the political as a domain for the realization of goods or human wellbeing; rather, as a strongly deontic liberal, he claims that the political is the domain of key principles and values. As such, his view of political community is entirely horizontal, and although he may technically escape the instrumentalization charge as I have extended it, he is certainly more interested in the characteristics of a liberal community than the goods realized or the significance involved in belonging to one.[36]

A final point to note regarding the limitations of liberal political theories has to do with their abstract approach. Given especially that many are shaped by Anglophone analytical language, liberal political theories are most often organized around abstract concepts such as rights, justice, and equality. Important though such concepts no doubt are, given that alienation and political belonging are inescapably experiential matters, a theorization of political life sufficient to account for the problem of belonging would have to be more attuned to the phenomenology or lived experience of persons than these approaches tend to be.[37]

These points aside, I do not intend to present this project as fundamentally illiberal or anti-liberal in any way. The alternative picture of political life that emerges does contrast at important points with liberal political theories, but it actually defends many of liberalism's trademark values. Through the succeeding chapters, I will trace a parallel but distinct way of theorizing political life. This project offers an intervention into theorizations of political life by advocating for a more experientially attuned approach and takes political belonging as its guide.

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[36] Macedo, *Liberal Virtues*, 278-284.

[37] A liberal political theorist like Rawls would surely respond that a purely abstract approach is the best or maximal way to accommodate a pluralism among conceptions of the good life. Fair enough, but I contend that it comes at a severe cost for standing too far back from human experience and follows from a mis-identification of the purpose of political community.

Alienation and Political Belonging in Recent Scholarship

The concepts of alienation and belonging have received widespread attention in recent scholarship from across different academic disciplines, and I will now offer a brief literature review of some of the important trends and thinkers on the themes. I will first attend to three major works on alienation by Rahel Jaeggi, Hartmut Rosa, and Akeel Bilgrami. I will then turn to some works on political belonging, which range from the disciplines of sociology and political science to philosophy and political theory. This brief, representative review of scholarship will provide an overview of recent works on the topic, help to locate my own project therein, and provide an opportunity to further refine and clarify my own accounts by pointing out points of similarity and difference.

Alienation in Recent Scholarship: Rahel Jaeggi, Hartmut Rosa, and Akeel Bilgrami

The concept of alienation has played an important role in social and political theory since the nineteenth century, appearing prominently in influential works by the early and mid-twentieth century critical theorists Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse, Theodor Adorno, and others. After falling somewhat out of favor, alienation has returned in the last two decades as a fertile concept for historical, critical, and constructive purposes. I will account for much of the early history of the concept in the chapters to come, so I will offer here three recent works on the topic that enjoy some prominence among the scholarship and that I find to be the most theoretically insightful and generative.

The most thorough and influential recent work of scholarship on alienation is Rahel Jaeggi's book *Alienation*, which analyzes the intellectual history and theoretical dimensions of

the concept and attempts to identify its core meaning. In the book, Jaeggi explains that alienation is "a concept of social philosophy par excellence" in that it refers to the many complex relations between "self and world."[38] According to Jaeggi, at its core, "Alienation is a *relation* of *relationlessness*," which is overcome in "a *relation of appropriation*."[39] Otherwise put, Jaeggi maintains that "An *alienated* relation is a *deficient* relation one has to oneself, to the world, and to others."[40] In contrast, Jaeggi claims that "appropriation" involves making "what one does, and the conditions under which one does it, *one's own*."[41]

Jaeggi helpfully explains that alienation has often been understood to have a broad range of meanings: "indifference and internal division, but also powerlessness and relationlessness with respect to oneself and to a world experienced as indifferent and alien. Alienation is the inability to establish a relation to other human beings, to things, to social institutions and thereby also—so the fundamental intuition of the theory of alienation—to oneself."[42] As part of the overview she provides, Jaeggi helpfully notes some crucial aspects of alienation that appear in my account, including its relational nature, its connection to a "*coherent self-conception*," its impact on human freedom, and its tie to self-realization as a matter of overcoming the firm division between "an inner life and an outer world."[43] However, although Jaeggi's work is admirably rigorous and thorough, my account of alienation is different from hers in four key ways.

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[38] Rahel Jaeggi, *Alienation*, trans. Frederick Neuhouser and Alan E. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), xxii.
[39] Jaeggi, *Alienation*, 1. Italics original.
[40] Jaeggi, *Alienation*, 5. Italics original.
[41] Jaeggi, *Alienation*, 2. Italics original.
[42] Jaeggi, *Alienation*, 3.
[43] Jaeggi, *Alienation*, 25, 123 (italics original), 199, 152. She also helpfully connects alienation to the matter of being able to tell "meaningful narrative" about oneself. Jaeggi, *Alienation*, 170.

First, my account is directly epistemological in a way that Jaeggi's is not. By that I mean that on my rendering alienation has something specifically to do with the attainment of *knowledge* about oneself. As I put it, alienation is the experience of not having satisfactory self-knowledge about one's status as a dignified and equal self among others and about one's basic capacity for self-determination. Aspects of this epistemological point are plainly evident in Jaeggi's work, but they are not so central features of her account. In short, I centralize the attainment of self-knowledge and Jaeggi centralizes the agentive activity of appropriation. A key pertinent distinction here is that her language of appropriation implies a heavier one-way directionality of influence than I imagine—traveling primarily from the agent and to the object/other—when conceiving of what is necessary for overcoming alienation. In contrast, I want to preserve more space than is implied in her account for a two-way directionality of change, both descriptively and normatively, where the self is both actor and acted upon with respect to its object (or, more specific to my account, community). Second, and following, my account of alienation is rooted in the specific matter of self-knowledge (that is, a relation one has to oneself), whereas her account can refer to "relationless" relations that include oneself *and* other objects. Third, the dynamics of my account and its reliance upon confirmation of self-knowledge from others means that recognition plays a prominent role. In contrast, recognition plays a very marginal role in Jaeggi's account.[44] Fourth, on my account, alienation is finally overcome by realizing a sense of belonging to one's political community. Although Jaeggi stresses the importance of social and political conditions for overcoming alienation, she does not have so straight-forward a communal and political perspective on the matter. What is more, she would likely resist my reference to belonging (and my insistence on the relation between persons

[44] Jaeggi, *Alienation*, 195-196.

and their political community as a part/whole relation) for not properly prioritizing the individual to the community.[45]

A second recent major treatment of the concept of alienation, also originating in the field of critical theory like Jaeggi's but anchored in different disciplinary perspective (sociology as opposed to philosophy and political theory), is found in Hartmut Rosa's work on accelerationism. In brief, Rosa's big project has been to unpack what he calls "The logic of social acceleration," which refers to the "time-regime" of modernity that has supplanted ethical norms, legal principles, and other sorts of governing principles as the primary forces of regulation in society.[46] Rosa invokes the concept of alienation to describe the effects of social acceleration on persons and connects it to "the negation of the good life."[47]

Rosa claims that "Alienation indicates a deep, structural distortion of the relationships between self and world, of the ways in which a subject is set or 'located' in the world."[48] More specifically, he argues that alienation "is a mode of relating to the world in which the subject encounters the subjective, objective, and/or social world as either *indifferent* or *repulsive*." Explicitly building on Jaeggi's definition of a relationship of relationlessness, Rosa argues that "resonance"—or, more accurately, a relationship of resonance—is the opposite of alienation.[49] Casting it as a relationship of mutual exchange and effect, Rosa explains that "The core idea here [about resonance] is that the two entities in relation…mutually affect each other in such a way

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[45] See Jaeggi, *Alienation*, 219.
[46] Hartmut Rosa, *Alienation and Acceleration: Towards a Critical Theory of Late-Modern Temporality* (Copenhagen: NSU Press, 2010), 8.
[47] Rosa, *Alienation and Acceleration*, 9.
[48] Rosa, *Alienation and Acceleration*, 84.
[49] Hartmut Rosa, *Resonance: A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World*, trans. James C. Wagner (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), 178. Italics original.

that they can be understood as *responding to each other*, at the same time each *speaking with its own voice*."[50]

Rosa's work on alienation and resonance is rich and generative, especially his rendering of the former as a relation of non-reciprocation and the latter as a relation of reciprocation. I find this development of Jaeggi's account of appropriation helpful, given that I, too, find her notion of appropriation overly unidirectional. That said, I think Rosa's account of alienation begins at the second step, as it were. Although I do contend that relations to objects and the larger world are important implications of alienation, as mentioned previously, my account is primarily about a self's relation to itself and on the way in which that self-relation is mediated by others and/or the world.[51] Furthermore, as noted with respect to Jaeggi's work, my account is more epistemological than Rosa's, as I focus on the matter of self-*knowledge*. A final major difference is in line with the final one I identified above, namely, that my account of overcoming alienation (and its reference to belonging) is finally both more communal and specifically political than Rosa's.

A third recent insightful account of alienation has been offered by Akeel Bilgrami in his book *Secularism, Identity, and Enchantment*. In that book, Bilgrami offers a comparative study of the political theories of Mohandas Gandhi and Karl Marx and suggests that the concept of alienation helps to identify what lies at the heart of both of their works.[52] In broad terms, he defines alienation as "the transformation of the human subject to an object or, to put it more

[50] Rosa, *Resonance*, 167. Italics original.
[51] An important influence on both Jaeggi and Rosa in the tradition of critical theory is Axel Honneth, who has contributed signal works on the concept of recognition. See, for example, Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, trans. Joel Anderson (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995). That said, Honneth does not mobilize the concept of alienation as a primary one for social or political analysis.
[52] Marx's account of alienation is very broadly outlined here, but I am regrettably unable to give it the attention it deserves. For the key text of his on the topic, see Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, second ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), esp. 70-81.

elaborately, an increasing *detachment* of the wrong kind in one's relation to the world, including one's relations to others and, therefore, an increasing loss of genuine subjectivity and subjective engagement with the world and with others."[53] Bilgrami argues that, for Gandhi, alienation names a decidedly modern condition that follows from widespread "desacralization and the consequent adoption an objectifying attitude of detachment toward *both* nature *and* its inhabitants."[54] Sharing key similarities to that view, Bilgrami explains that Marx's conception of alienation is distinct for connecting it to the conditions of modern capitalism, especially in reference to labor and commodification. Nevertheless, Bilgrami maintains that Marx's view shares with Gandhi's a sense that the intrinsic moral status of the natural world and human beings has been replaced by their instrumental valuation.[55]

In a brief constructive move, Bilgrami then imagines what might be necessary for overcoming the two forms of alienation—between person and nature and between persons—that he identifies in the writings of Gandhi and Marx. First, Bilgrami posits the need for understanding the natural world as intrinsically valuable, "that values suffuse the world and nature."[56] Arguing that practical agency is properly found in a person's *response* to intrinsic value, Bilgrami argues most fully that "To be unalienated from nature is *for our subjectivity to be in sync with the normative demands upon it coming from the value properties of nature*."[57] Second, Bilgrami argues that alienation from other persons emerges when the forces of mass,

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[53] Akeel Bilgrami, *Secularism, Identity, and Enchantment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 130. Italics original.

[54] Such detachment, Bilgrami claims, follows from "worldly alliances formed between scientific ideologues, commercial interests, and established or 'high' religious institutions" that lead to, among other things, "a form of political economy and of political governance… were destructively exploitative of nature and its inhabitants." Bilgrami, *Secularism, Identity, and Enchantment*, 150. Italics original.

[55] Bilgrami, *Secularism, Identity, and Enchantment*, 151.

[56] This way of putting it is, as he says, a non-religious way of conveying the religious notion of "a sacralized nature" that he finds in Gandhi. Bilgrami, *Secularism, Identity, and Enchantment*, 157.

[57] Bilgrami, *Secularism, Identity, and Enchantment*, 160. Italics original.

capitalist society render persons “individuals in a sense that is so atomistically realized and refined that the very idea of the social or of the collective becomes a mere abstraction.”[58] As a result, he claims that “What we aspire to, when we seek a socially unalienated life with one another, is the realization of the ideal that *nobody in society is well off if someone is badly off*.”[59] For Bilgrami, this does not refer to a cultivated sentiment of other-regard, but rather to a state of mind according to which the wellbeing of the other is intertwined with one’s own.[60]

Bilgrami’s analysis of alienation in Gandhi’s and Marx’s works brings out important points of connection to my own, and I find his constructive response quite generative. However, our accounts differ on a few key points. First, whereas Bilgrami’s account of alienation pertains to a person’s relation to others and the world, my account is more constrained in being firstly concerned with a person’s self-relation, although this may pertain more to a matter of emphasis than substantive difference. I agree that alienation profoundly affects a person’s relations to others and the natural world, and Bilgrami is especially compelling on these points, but I think he under-theorizes alienation’s connection to a person’s self-relation (or self-understanding). Second, Bilgrami connects alienation directly to matters of community and politics, and he even references how it was prevented “by the social frameworks of a period prior to modernity” that made possible a “sense of *belonging*.”[61] However, although I see it implicit in his constructive proposal, Bilgrami never theorizes belonging as a live option for overcoming alienation in the current context. Third, for reasons that are not obvious, Bilgrami resists any real reference to the matter of ontology, whether metaphysical or purely social/political, despite how necessary it

[58] Bilgrami, *Secularism, Identity, and Enchantment*, 164.
[59] Bilgrami, *Secularism, Identity, and Enchantment*, 165.
[60] Bilgrami, *Secularism, Identity, and Enchantment*, 165-166.
[61] Bilgrami, *Secularism, Identity, and Enchantment*, 171. Italics original. He references belonging one more time: “We have to ask…what can be retained of the general idea of social ‘belonging.’” Bilgrami, *Secularism, Identity, and Enchantment*, 172.

seems to be for his view.[62] In the chapters that follow, I will argue that a relational ontology is necessary for theorizing the overcoming of alienation in the experience of political belonging.

Political Belonging in Recent Scholarship

The concept of belonging has recently enjoyed considerable attention in academic, literary, and even broader popular arenas.[63] Evidently, an increasing number of scholarly and cultural critical writers are finding the concept a helpful one for thinking through our contemporary moment.[64] The literature on belonging in general is too voluminous to account for, and so to best serve my project I will focus on some representative works regarding its use in reference specifically to politics and political community.

In the social sciences, the matter of political belonging has been most engaged by the overlapping fields of sociology and empirical political science. Works on the topic in these disciplines often take public opinion and self-reporting surveys as primary data. An exemplary case is the book *The Politics of Belonging: Race, Public Opinion, and Immigration* by Natalie Masouka and Jane Junn.[65] While such works have critical academic importance, they tend to be rather less concerned with *theorizing* political belonging (what it is, how it works, etc.) than I am here. Of most interest, then, are works in the more theoretical fields of philosophy and political theory. I will briefly consider four.

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[62] He does write, when thinking about positively relating the wellbeing of oneself and others in one's community, about the importance of "a generalized unease of the mind or, as metaphysicians like to say, of *being*, which affects all social relations." Bilgrami, *Secularism, Identity, and Enchantment*, 166.
[63] For an example of its relevance outside of academic contexts, see Laila Lalami, *Conditional Citizens: On Belonging in America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2020).
[64] For examples in the social sciences, see Kelly-Ann Allen, *The Psychology of Belonging* (London: Routledge, 2021); and Martini Sandbu, *The Economics of Belonging: A Radical Plan to Win Back the Left Behind and Achieve Prosperity for All* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020).
[65] Natalie Masouka and Jane Junn, *The Politics of Belonging: Race, Public Opinion, and Immigration* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013).

First, Nira Yuval-Davis has been perhaps the most prominent voice in political theory on the matter of political belonging, specifically in her book *The Politics of Belonging: Intersectional Contestations*. Yuval-Davis's book is foremost about raising awareness of the many complex dimensions of the relation between politics and the experience of belonging and examining "contemporary political projects of belonging" that she suggests are important alternatives to "the hegemonic forms of citizenship and nationalism which have tended to dominate the twentieth century."[66] Using an intersectional analysis, Yuval-Davis identifies and analyzes political movements that strive to construct a new or different sense of belonging for some group of people in a given political community.[67]

Over the course of her book, which explores different aspects or contexts of the politics of belonging (citizenship, nationality, religion, cosmopolitanism), Yuval-Davis builds a case for "a feminist political project of belonging…based on transversal 'rooting', 'shifting', mutual respect and mutual trust."[68] Like Yuval-Davis, my constructive proposal in the concluding chapter will also draw on the feminist ethics of care and conceptions of mutuality. Aside from these similarities, though, my project is significantly more theoretical in nature, being more engaged than she is with a particular conception of the human self and alienation, and with making a case for why political belonging is *good* for persons. Another point of meaningful difference is that I maintain that belonging requires part/whole relations for its theorization, which is mostly absent from Yuval-Davis's account. That said, a key contribution of hers is the

[66] Nira Yuval-Davis, *The Politics of Belonging: Intersectional Contestations* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2011), 2.
[67] She identifies this as "The politics of belonging," differentiating it from the experience of belonging. Yuval-Davis, *The Politics of Belonging*, 10, 18-21.
[68] Yuval-Davis, *The Politics of Belonging*, 199.

assertion that power must not be overlooked when theorizing belonging, a point that will become evident in the third and fourth chapters of this project.[69]

Second, Akeel Bilgrami, Prabhat Patnaik, Faisal Devi, Michele Lamont, Ernesto Ottone, James Tully, Nira Wickramasinghe, and Sue Wright (hereafter, "the panel") contributed a collaborative article on belonging as part of the International Panel of Social Progress's report *Rethinking Society for the 21st Century*. In the article, the panel theorizes belonging as pertaining to three factors: identity, solidarity, and "the unalienated life."[70] The relations of identity and solidarity to belonging are insightful, but the third factor, the unalienated life, is most pertinent to the project at hand not only because it overtly connects alienation to belonging but also because, in doing so, it proposes a normative account of social and political community.[71] What is more, the panel claims that, among the three factors, "[belonging] is, at its core, a notion that is most deeply of a piece with and inseparable from the ideal of an unalienated life."[72]

The conception of alienation at work in this article is rather vague, although it bears strong resemblance to Bilgrami's noted previously (unsurprisingly, given that he is listed as one of its two lead authors).[73] In turning to belonging, the panel rightly warns against repurposing

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[69] As she puts it, "Politics of belonging are about the intersection of the sociology of power with the sociology of emotions." Yuval-Davis, *The Politics of Belonging*, 203.

[70] Akeel Bilgrami, Prabhat Patnaik, Faisal Devji, Michele Lamont, Ernesto Ottone, James Tully, Nira Wickramasinghe, and Sue Wright, "Belonging," in *Rethinking Society for the 21st Century: Report of the International Panel on Social Progress. Volume 3: Transformation in Values, Norms, Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 782. I am only attending here to the part of the article that deals with theoretical matters. The article also offers a number of case studies, which I will not address, where the panel examines how the matter of belonging has emerged in different regions and cultures around the world. Bilgrami, et al., "Belonging," 791-811.

[71] I have found one other account than the ones I identify here that directly posits that belonging involves the overcoming of alienation. See George Monbiot, *Out of the Wreckage: A New Politics for an Age of Crisis* (New York: Verso, 2017), esp. chapters 4 and 5. However, Monbiot's book is more of a journalistic work of cultural critique and political advocacy that, although deeply politically engaged, is not especially theoretically acute. This is especially the case for his definition of these concepts.

[72] Bilgrami, et al., "Belonging," 787.

[73] The panel generally refers to alienation as "a matter of experience and mentality" characterized by "detached or disengaged relations with one another." Bilgrami, et al., "Belonging," 790.

pre-modern conceptions because of their hierarchical, inegalitarian, and often oppressive renderings. As they write, "Belonging with a pervasive absence of liberty and equality is not an ideal worth recovering."[74] I affirm this important point and will directly address it in the coming chapters. At the heart of the panel's theorization of the matter is the claim that a sense of political belonging might help to mitigate or even transform a deep internal tension in liberal political theory between liberty and equality by imbuing persons with a profound sense of their mutuality and interrelatedness.[75] I find this an extremely insightful point that I will return to in my concluding chapter. Yet, suggestive as the panel is about what a sense of political belonging *does* or how it *effects* persons, the article is rather thin on theorizing what political belonging *is* or *how it works*. Moreover, despite its relevance to the topic, the panel never considers the matter in part/whole terms as I do.

Third, Montserrat Guibernau's recent book *Belonging: Solidarity and Division in Modern Societies*, is as thorough a treatment of political belonging as I have found. A fellow traveler in many respects, Guibernau's book offers an overview of pertinent scholarship on the topic, an analysis of belonging and its connection to identity, and an argument about the importance of choosing to belong to a community. Especially helpful about her analysis is the importance she gives to symbols and rituals in the formation of national or political communities, and she references analogies and historical relations to the role of religion in communal life.[76] This aligns with my argument about civil religion in the chapters ahead. More broadly, Guibernau rightly

[74] Bilgrami, et al., "Belonging," 787.
[75] Bilgrami, et al., "Belonging," 787-789. This maps directly onto an argument in Bilgrami's independent work on alienation referenced above. See Bilgrami, *Secularism, Identity, and Enchantment*, 171-173.
[76] Montserrat Guibernau, *Belonging: Solidarity and Division in Modern Societies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 35-44, and chapter 5. Important for Guibernau's analysis on this and other points is the work of Émile Durkheim who, although I do not engage him in any depth, theorizes communal life in similar ways that I do.

identifies the reciprocal transformation between individual and community that is involved in belonging, along with its affective dimension.[77]

Guibernau's major argument about political belonging pertains to its emotional power to bind individuals to a group, mobilize political action, and affect persons' interpretations of social and political actors and events.[78] There are clear points of connection between Guibernau's book and my arguments here. For one, she connects belonging to alienation, claiming that belonging is "the most powerful antidote against feelings of alienation and doubt," even if she presents an anemic account of alienation associated with a sense of "insignificance."[79] In this way, her argument for why belonging is good for people takes a similar form as mine. Another point of connection is that Guibernau relates belonging to recognition (albeit loosely) and to what I call a sense of somebodyness. She writes that a sense of belonging "'reassures us;' it confirms our value as sound, legitimate human beings since we seek in collective recognition a strengthening of our own self-esteem."[80] Finally, Guibernau imagines that belonging entails persons locating themselves in a community that "stands above" or "transcends them," even if she does not consider this with any theoretical complexity.[81]

Ultimately, Guibernau provides a strong case regarding the emotional significance of belonging for political life, but, as to the points of connection with my project mentioned above, Guibernau more reports, asserts, and describes rather than strives to *explain* them. This is especially the case regarding alienation, which she does not theorize in any real depth or

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[77] Guibernau, *Belonging*, 32-34.
[78] Guibernau, *Belonging*, 144ff.
[79] Guibernau, *Belonging*, 51, 64.
[80] Guibernau, *Belonging*, 34.
[81] Guibernau, *Belonging*, 43.

complexity. Most significantly, though, Guibernau's overall argument is focused on and builds toward an argument about human emotions rather than an account of human selfhood.

Fourth, I want to very briefly attend to the most rigorous recent (and one of the very few) work on belonging in analytic moral and political philosophy, Kimberley Brownlee's *Being Sure of Each Other: An Essay on Social Rights and Freedoms*. Brownlee's text is focused on social relations and belonging more broadly, and not ever specifically on political belonging, but she does raise a few important points that resonate with my own argument. Her argument is framed in the language of rights, both human and moral, and she argues forcefully for rights protecting and satisfying the human need for social connections. Brownlee specifically invokes the language of belonging, attending briefly to the different implications of "*belonging with*" and "*belonging to*," as I do in the Conclusion, and even suggests that the latter carries the implication of "asymmetrical" or "hierarchical" relations.[82] However, this point is not elaborated on or theorized in any way, and the asymmetry is almost entirely problematized.[83] Brownlee's attention to the relational nature of human beings is an important intervention in the broadly liberal scholarship on rights, but her inattention to *political* belonging and her rendering of belonging as basically referring to a network of stable and reliable social relations result in her work being substantially distant from my own.[84]

Conclusion

As the survey of recent scholarship shows, more theoretical work on the nature of political belonging is needed. Despite the recent popularity of the concept, there is a lacuna of

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[82] Kimberley Brownlee, *Being Sure of Each Other: An Essay on Social Rights and Freedoms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 17. Italics original.
[83] Brownlee, *Being Sure of Each Other*, 18-19.
[84] Brownlee, *Being Sure of Each Other*, 24-30.

theoretical proposals regarding what political belonging is, how it works, and why it is good for persons, at precisely the time we seem to need these insights most. What is more, existing accounts of political belonging tend to downplay aspects that I deem necessary, such as the part/whole relation that is implied in or intuitively connected to the notion, and many of these studies are not theoretically broad or interdisciplinary enough to theorize the phenomenon adequately. This dissertation hopes to help address these needs in the scholarship on political belonging by theorizing its relation to alienation and civil religion, while intending to contribute to scholarship on those latter two themes as well.

1. Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Alienation, Civil Religion, and the Body Politic

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's prominence in the history of political thought is in no small way due the complexity and creativity of his distinct contributions to the social contract tradition. However, what motivates and undergirds his influential constructive work is his astute analysis of the troublesome conditions burdening modern society. Rousseau's most important theoretical intervention is his tracing of the profound tensions that characterize modern social and political life, which interpreters have long parsed in different ways. For example, Judith Shklar famously argues that Rousseau draws out the irresolvable tension between "man" and "citizen," whereas Mark Cladis suggests that he charts the tension (and possible mediation) between "public" and "private" domains of life.[1] While these are each insightful renderings in their own right, I contend that the themes of alienation and political belonging, properly understood, more adequately capture the core features of Rousseau's political thought, with respect to what he identifies as both the central problem of political life and the solution to it.

This chapter examines the themes of alienation and belonging in Rousseau's social and political writings. I will argue that his analysis and critique of modern life is oriented to the phenomenon of alienation, and that he offers a constructive proposal to overcome it by securing for individuals a certain standing in and regard for their political community as a whole and among their fellow members, what I deem a sense of belonging. To make this case, I will provide readings of Rousseau's key social and political works, his three *Discourses* and *Social*

[1] Judith Shklar, *Men and Citizens: A Study of Rousseau's Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969). Mark S. Cladis, *Public Vision, Private Lives: Rousseau, Religion, and 21st Century Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

Contract, that locate alienation at their very core. Although the matter of political belonging is less developed and direct in Rousseau's thinking, I will show that it plays an important role in how he imagines overcoming alienation. As I will elaborate below, Rousseau's social and political thought is best understood as attending to the formal, institutional, and material conditions necessary to establish an equal, just, and stable order that overcomes the problem of alienation. Finally, I will argue that, implicit in his conception of belonging and evident in the structure of his constructive political vision, Rousseau's theorizations of alienation and belonging reintroduce a *vertical* dimension to modern theorizations of political life. In doing so, Rousseau presents the political community as the context of a larger life. Important for this analysis, I will identify Rousseau's dependence on and use of religious concepts and ways of thinking. I will explain how Rousseau introduces the concept of "civil religion" to imagine an individual's relationship to the political community as the context of a larger life, and that his political thought is structurally dependent on a distinctly Christian (specifically, Calvinist) way of thinking about an individual's "incorporation" into the political community.

Alienation names something central to Rousseau's awareness and concern, a thread that runs all the way through the development of his political thought, yet it is one that he never neatly summarizes, fully extends, or uses to draw together many of his insights like he might have. Despite his wide-ranging interests and writings, Rousseau is far from a systematic thinker, and he only occasionally alludes to and rarely tightly connects strands of his own thought. My goal is to provide neither a thoroughly synthetic reading of his varied works nor a wholesale reconstruction of his social and political thought. Rather, I aim to think with Rousseau, to sharpen some of the conceptual resources he offers, to clarify some of the connections he draws, and to make some of the connections that remain latent in his work. I do so, however, while

remaining close to his texts and faithful to the spirit of his thought, which marks this as a work of constructive interpretation.

Rudmer Bijlsma explains that, for Rousseau, alienation "is a condition of lost wholeness, mental disintegration."[2] Such a definition is true as far as it goes, and it is a rather common one among Rousseau interpreters, but it lacks content and conceptual precision.[3] In this chapter, I propose that Rousseau conceives of alienation as the conflict or division a person might experience between subjective (internal, self-conscious) and objective (external, social) dimensions of life regarding matters of identity and normativity. Alienation refers in Rousseau's writings to the experience of inner tension between a person's natural and inwardly felt sense of their own identity, on the one hand, and the identity or identities that they become affiliated with in their public life, on the other. In short, for him, alienation refers to the experience of living at odds with who one knows or believes oneself to be, which can be corrosive of human wellbeing.[4] Some sense of this definition is often conveyed by broad claims that Rousseau's conception of alienation contrasts with the notion of authenticity, but I am after the inner workings of these ideas.[5]

Alienation takes two identifiable forms in Rousseau's thought. One form, which is most evident in his first two *Discourses*, refers to the conflict between a person's natural, inwardly

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[2] Rudmer Bijlsma, "Alienation in Commercial Society: The Republican Critique of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Adam Ferguson," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 57, no. 3 (September 2019): 355. Bijlsma's study is insightful and well-reasoned, and it is representative of the best analyses of Rousseau on alienation, but my approach is somewhat broader, and my definition of alienation is framed differently. There is nothing radically novel about the definition I propose, though I have not found it phrased quite this way in the secondary literature, yet I suggest it is distinctly well able to clearly account for the two forms identified here. That said, Bijlsma (and others) certainly identify these two forms in one way or another, as I indicate in the next few footnotes.
[3] It is not uncommon for interpreters to import definitions of alienation from other thinkers into Rousseau's thought, but I intend to carefully draw out Rousseau's *own* conception of the problem. For an example of such importation, in this case from Theodor Adorno, see Julia Simon-Ingram, "Alienation, Individuation, and Enlightenment in Rousseau's Social Theory," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 24, no. 3 (Spring 1991).
[4] As something of a Romantic naturalist, Rousseau maintains that all persons have an inborn or innate identity given to them by nature.
[5] See, for example, Jaeggi, *Alienation*, 7.

held identity and their outward, social identity. As I explain, Rousseau claims that this form of alienation occurs because certain features of collective life tend to encourage in persons the construction of increasingly artificial, inauthentic, and even manipulative social identities. This first, social form of alienation names the disquieting experience of such disjuncture and its deleterious effects.[6] The second form, more evident in his *Third Discourse* and *Social Contract*, pertains to an individual's relationship to and status within their political community. As I show, Rousseau in these latter works becomes increasingly concerned with the potential misalignment between an individual's own identity and values and those of their political community.[7] I argue that his increasing attention to this second, distinctly political form of alienation does not elide the first form but rather includes it, leading to his vision for overcoming both forms of alienation by securing for all of a polity's members the opportunity to experience a sense of belonging to their political community.[8]

In order for him to accomplish this theoretically and practically, I will show how Rousseau invokes a distinct organic conception of the body politic and explicitly and implicitly utilizes religious concepts, themes, and structures of thinking. Upon careful examination, we will see that Rousseau's references to religion are neither shallow nor purely instrumental. His later and more constructive thinking is profoundly dependent upon religious conceptual and theoretical resources, so much so that his *Social Contract* is not adequately comprehensible without grasping their import.

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[6] "[For Rousseau] it is a central characteristic of harmful alienation that one [derives one's sense of self] from other people's judgment." Bijlsma, "Alienation in Commercial Society," 356.
[7] "Essential for human wholeness…[for Rousseau] is a close involvement with the public cause of humans *qua* citizens." Bijlsma, "Alienation in Commercial Society," 370.
[8] These two forms correspond to what Jaeggi identifies as the two major "ideas" in Rousseau's account of alienation, "*authenticity*" and "*social freedom*." Jaeggi, *Alienation*, 7.

Before engaging Rousseau's works, a general note of interpretation is in order. Rousseau's writings have strong metaphorical and figurative dimensions. As a writer, he is often biting, prone to overstatement, and sometimes polemical; in short, he regularly writes with a heavy rhetorical pen. Because of this, an overly literal and non-nuanced reading can lead to reductive and simplistic interpretations of his work that miss out on key subtlety.[9] At the same time, some interpreters seem intent on demythologizing Rousseau by attempting to marginalize or explain away his references to and dependence on non-(strictly) rational ways of thinking, such as his use of Romantic and religious language and concepts.[10] My readings of Rousseau's texts attempt to strike something of a mean between these misreadings of literalism and demythologization.

Alienation in Rousseau's Discourses and Social Contract

Rousseau is a notoriously harsh critic of modern society. Especially in his first two *Discourses*, he argues forcefully that modern institutions and social arrangements have had a noxious effect on individuals and society.[11] For this reason, Céline Spector aptly suggests Rousseau be understood as a "*modern critic of modernity*," one who is "fully part of the Enlightenment" and simultaneously "a deep critic of modernity" itself.[12] In brief, Rousseau

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[9] At times, I find Sally Howard Campbell's *Rousseau and the Paradox of Alienation* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012) guilty of this, as I indicate below. That said, Campbell's book offers an illuminating intellectual historical account of how Rousseau expanded the existing conception of alienation to include a "psychosocial" dimension. Like Bijlsma, Campbell offers a conception of alienation as the loss of wholeness, but I contend she reads Rousseau as too strongly and straightforwardly committed to the state of nature as such.

[10] Joshua Cohen's tightly argued, analytical reading of Rousseau as something of a proto-Rawlsian (ordered to the abstract principle of reciprocity) is guilty of this, even as he helpfully reveals Rawls's dependence on a certain reading of Rousseau and provides an insightful interpretation overall. Joshua Cohen, *Rousseau: A Free Community of Equals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[11] Shklar refers to Rousseau signal contribution as a diagnosis of "the emotional diseases of modern civilization." Shklar, *Men and Citizens*, 1.

[12] Céline Spector, *Rousseau* (Medford: Polity Press, 2019), 6-7. Italics original.

argues that, despite its many ostensible advancements and signs of progress, modern society produces diminished and unfree persons because it compels them to live alienated lives. On his account, alienation often emerges from the very formation of social and political communities and is worsened by the conditions of modern social, cultural, and political life. To address this, in his final *Discourse*, Rousseau begins plotting a constructive theory to overcome the problem of alienation, which he fills out in his *Social Contract*. I will attend to each of these four texts in turn.

Rousseau's First Discourse

The first glimpse of Rousseau's conception of alienation is found in his 1750 *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts* (hereafter, *First Discourse*). This text, a submission to an essay contest held by the Academy of Dijon, is among Rousseau's earliest published works and contributed significantly to his notoriety. Responding to the contest's prompt regarding the impact of the sciences and the arts on the moral life, Rousseau argues that their effect has been generally corrosive.

In his *First Discourse*, Rousseau offers three general points that come to characterize his critical and constructive social and political thinking. First, he suggests that human communities emerge to address the basic survival needs of humans, which serve as the "foundations of society," and that the inability to satisfy such needs drives people to form communities in the first place. Second, he argues that, despite being organized for the freedom and safety of their members, such communities tend to actually undermine individual liberty. Modern social and cultural institutions like the arts and sciences, he argues, often worsen this reality by perpetuating and obscuring it. Third, he claims that humans enjoyed primitive yet peaceful and free lives prior

to entering into political communities. This is an early indication of Rousseau's mostly favorable depiction of human beings in their "natural," pre-political state. As Rousseau incisively puts these three claims in the *First Discourse*, modern society and its cultural institutions "spread garlands of flowers over the iron chains with which [modern individuals] are burdened, stifle in them the sense of that original liberty for which they seem to have been born, make them love their slavery, and turn them into what is called civilized peoples."[13]

With respect to the essay contest's prompt, Rousseau criticizes the sciences and the arts for having made humans "more sociable by inspiring in them the desire to please one another with works worthy of their mutual approval."[14] Rousseau argues that, by depending on the approval of others, these social institutions inflame the powerful human desire for the recognition of others.[15] Such drive for recognition is corrosive to society, Rousseau claims, because it encourages people to misrepresent themselves in public for the sake of social esteem. Here we see his first description and explanation of the first form of alienation noted previously. Rousseau argues that this drive for esteem often leads individuals to project identities and values in their "outer appearances" that are increasingly at odds with their "heart's dispositions." Over time, he argues, such inauthenticity has the wide-spread effects of undermining "sincere friendships," "real esteem," and "well-founded confidence," with manipulative social

[13] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*, in *The Basic Political Writings: Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, *Discourse on Political Economy*, *On the Social Contract*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 3.
[14] Rousseau, *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*, 3. Rousseau also argues that the sciences are often born from less than virtuous motivations and serve to crowd out genuine moral development. Similarly, he says, for the arts. See Rousseau, *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*, 11-19.
[15] Shklar also argues that Rousseau found them troubling for contributing to worsening inequalities and, specifically with regards to science, for undermining important social customs. Shklar, *Men and Citizens*, 110. True enough, and Rousseau is always conscious of material conditions, but I stress the centrality of his concern being about alienation.

conventions he refers to collectively and disparagingly as comprising "that uniform and deceitful veil of politeness."[16]

In brief, in his *First Discourse*, Rousseau identifies a problem intrinsic to modern life that is harmful for leading individuals to live divided lives, which he suggests ultimately undermine social, civic, and personal relationships on which both society and individuals depend. For Rousseau, such ways of living are problematically bent on manipulation and prevent persons from living well. Although he does not explicitly name this as the problem of "alienation," it is precisely this phenomenon that I refer to with the term. In the *First Discourse*, Rousseau claims that alienation emerges from the individual longing for recognition and acknowledgement, which is exacerbated by prominent modern cultural institutions. At the very heart of Rousseau's criticism of modern life is the problem of alienation, to which he attends more thoroughly in his next *Discourse*.

Rousseau's Second Discourse

Rousseau's 1755 *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (hereafter, *Second Discourse*) extends the analysis from his previous *Discourse* regarding the conditions of alienation. The *Second Discourse* is another submission to an essay contest hosted by the Academy of Dijon, the prompt for which asked after the origins and legitimacy of contemporary inequalities. In the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau argues that the significant inequalities characterizing modern life are conventional rather than natural, having resulted from the organization of community life rather than emerging directly from natural differences.[17] Rousseau claims that such inequalities

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[16] Rousseau, *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*, 4.
[17] As Spector explains the force of Rousseau's argument in the *Second Discourse*, "Even if nature created physical or intellectual inequality, this inequality might not have any social effects: it might not provide any right to rule…

have in part grown from and only further contributed to the problem of alienation, which plays a prominent role in this text.

Rousseau begins the *Second Discourse* by referring to human beings in their natural state, "as nature formed" them.[18] Only from such a perspective, he argues, can an analysis of inequality be properly undertaken.[19] Here, however, an important interpretive question emerges regarding the role and status of Rousseau's state of nature. Only by clarifying this point can Rousseau's critique of inequality—and, further, his view of alienation—be properly understood.

It may seem as if Rousseau presents the natural state of human beings as an ideal for human life, in reference to which social and political institutions ought to be judged. According to such a view, the development of social and political organization is a straight-forwardly lapsarian story that entails the loss of original innocence, tranquility, simplicity, and goodness. What is more, according to this view the development of civilization is doubly tragic because, in view of its troubling effects, it appears to be nearly unavoidable given the evolving nature of human needs. However, this sort of view risks mis-reading Rousseau as a primitivist and confuses the role of the state of nature in his argument.

Although Rousseau's rhetorical style might suggest a reading like the one mentioned, I find such a reading unsatisfactory for three reasons. First, Rousseau is certainly not a simple primitivist who uncritically idealizes and/or appeals to as clearly preferable the pre-political condition of human beings. Sally Howard Campbell seems to read Rousseau in this way, arguing

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This is what Rousseau attempted to demonstrate [in the *Second Discourse*]: nothing in nature can justify conventional inequality." Spector, *Rousseau*, 29.

[18] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men*, in *The Basic Political Writings: Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, *Discourse on Political Economy*, *On the Social Contract*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 33.

[19] "But as long as we are ignorant of natural man, it is futile for us to attempt to determine the law he has received or which is best suited to his constitution." Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 35.

that Rousseau considers leaving the state of nature and forming political communities to be for all persons essentially a "great *mis*fortune."[20] As Spector rightly explains, however, "Rousseau was not a straightforward primitivist… His goal was by no means to return to an earlier state of nature before the evils of civilization occurred but to measure the price we have to pay for it."[21]

To be sure, Rousseau does clearly present desirable aspects of the state of nature, and he does not shy away from their obvious appeal. Avoiding the excesses, rivalries, and concerns for the future that characterize life in modern society, and being able to satisfy their unrefined needs and desires without significant obstacle or conflict, Rousseau presents the state of nature as a relatively pleasant and comfortable place for humans to live.[22] However, he also clearly argues that without social and political development human beings remain in a state of "crudeness," according to which each individual person "remain[s] ever a child."[23] After all, Rousseau claims that, in the state of nature, "*perfectibility*, social virtues, and the other faculties that natural man had received in a state of potentiality could never develop by themselves, that to achieve this development they required the chance coming together" into communities, "without which [the human] would have remained eternally in his primitive constitution."[24]

Second, the sort of reading indicated above risks misrepresenting Rousseau's presentation of the state of nature as historical, despite his explicit warning against doing so. At

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[20] Campbell, *Rousseau and the Paradox of Alienation*, 29. Italics original.
[21] Spector, *Rousseau*, 12; see esp. Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 70-71.
[22] Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 39-44. Spector, *Rousseau*, 20. The obvious contrast here is with Hobbes, and Rousseau seems to owe some debt (here and surely elsewhere) to Montesquieu. See Charles de Secondat Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, trans. and eds. Anne M. Cooler, Basia C. Miller, and Harold S. Stone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), Part I, chapter 2, p. 6-7.
[23] Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 57. As Judith Shklar right explains, for him "the state of nature is man's original condition, but not one in which he could remain or in which he is truly a man." Further, she writes, "Nature is a state that in Rousseau's account is explicitly a starting-point that men, as their own creators, must leave in order to become men at all. It is not their home." Shklar, *Men and Citizens*, 10. In something of a Shklar-like key, Cladis argues rightly that, "We are not asked by Rousseau to return to the [state of nature]. We are invited, instead, to see our lives in light of [it], and are thereby encouraged to envision a future different from the arduous, often brutal present… [The state of nature] itself is not a moral alternative." Cladis, *Public Vision, Private Lives*, 86-87.
[24] Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 59.

the beginning of the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau explains that his comments about the state of nature, like those of other thinkers, "should not be taken for historical truths, but only for hypothetical and conditional reasonings, better suited for shedding light on the nature of things than on pointing out their true origin."[25] While this comment does not immediately explain the theoretical or normative import of the state of nature, it clarifies that Rousseau's comments about the state of nature are *not* to be taken as historical claims.

Third, Rousseau does not grant normative significance to the state of nature, or humans in their natural condition, *as such.* Rather, he offers the state of nature as a thought experiment for the purpose of indicating some important features of human beings. Undoubtedly, for Rousseau, the natural state of human beings, however abstract or "hypothetical" his construal, provides important insight into human nature.[26]

In short, Rousseau uses the state of nature to present what he understands to be the basic human drives toward self-preservation (*amour de soi*) and pity, and to indicate the fundamental human capacities for freedom and "perfectibility."[27] He also uses the thought experiment to explain why, despite their differences, humans enjoy natural independence and equality.[28] The state of nature in this text is therefore an instructive "fiction," not for revealing how people actually lived and acted prior to the formation of political communities, but rather for indicating the natural status of humans *vis à vis* one another, as well as their natural capacities and basic

[25] Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 38-39. See also Shklar, *Men and Citizens*, 33-34.

[26] Spector rightly argues that "The general project of the second *Discourse* seems to be forged as an extension of the first one: Rousseau seeks to show that the alleged development of our faculties triggers a political and moral decay. But here…a new character appears: that of the *savage man*, who embodies human nature itself." Spector, *Rousseau*, 15.

[27] Here Rousseau is arguing (like Hume) against many of his natural law/rights predecessors in claiming that operative below/prior to human reason are some basic human sentiments. Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 35, 45.

[28] Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 58-59.

natural drives.[29] Therefore, for the purposes of the *Second Discourse*, the normative significance of the state of nature lies both in what it reveals to be some fixed or essential features of human beings and for its conclusion about the conventionality of social and material inequalities.[30]

In the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau presents a distinctive conception of human freedom. For him, humans are unique in their ability to rise above their animal inclinations. However, Rousseau subtly argues that the full scope of human freedom is not to be found merely in the capacity to reject or accept the pull of instinct, but also in the self-conscious "awareness" of and participation in one's actions as a free person. He refers to this reflective, non-mechanistic, non-reductive sense of human agency as human "spirituality."[31]

Rousseau's definition of freedom is therefore not entirely "negative," to use more recent parlance, meaning it is about more than non-interference or non-domination alone. Rather, it clearly includes the "positive" aspect of a person being able to "contribut[e], as a free agent, to his own operations."[32] For Rousseau, this capacity for the awareness of oneself as a free agent, which he maintains is fundamental to genuine freedom, along with the "almost unlimited" capacity for improvement (for "perfectibility" or "self-perfection"), can conspire with the imagination for the vast development of human potentiality, for good or ill.[33]

In the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau argues that the confluence of events leading to the development of human communities—most notably for him, the institution of private property—

[29] Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 70; See also Spector, *Rousseau*, 17.
[30] There is no necessary tension between claiming these essential capacities of human nature and affirming historicism, although some have pressed on this point. See Cladis, *Public Vision, Private Lives*, 85.
[31] "Nature commands every animal, and beasts obey. Man feels the same impetus, but he knows he is free to go along or to resist; and it is above all in the awareness of this freedom that the spirituality of his soul is made manifest." Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 45.
[32] Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 44.
[33] Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 45.

brought individual persons into increasing proximity and mutual dependence.[34] He claims that, over time, these features gave birth to the phenomenon of "public esteem," which he ominously describes as being "the first step toward inequality and, at the same time, toward vice."[35] Here we have arrived at an important aspect of Rousseau's moral psychology, which is anchored in the aforementioned capacities for reflective freedom and self-development. Rousseau refers to the socially emergent drive for esteem as *amour-propre* (often translated as "pride" or "egocentrism"), which he distinguishes from the natural drive of *amour de soi* (best understood as the concern for self-preservation). He explains that *amour-propre* "is relative, artificial and born in society, which moves each individual to value himself more than anyone else, which inspires in men all the evils they cause one another."[36]

It is perhaps best to understand *amour-propre* as the self-conscious internalization of and response to distinctions, natural and otherwise, as they begin to make social and material differences in people's lives on account of the formation of social, economic, and political institutions.[37] According to Rousseau, the generation of inequalities (some of which involved the conversion of natural variations into socially and materially meaningful ones) and the drawing of individuals into ever increasing proximity and dependence involved in the development of political communities, gave rise to conditions wherein it became "necessary, for [an individual's]

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[34] "The first person who, having enclosed a plot of land, took it into his head to say *this is mine* and found people simple enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society." Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 60.
[35] Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 64. For Rousseau, the division of labor plays an important role in this process. Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 65ff. On this, see Shklar, *Men and Citizens*, 29-30; Cladis, *Public Vision, Private Lives*, 72-73.
[36] Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 106.
[37] This is a gloss of *amour-propre* as presented in the *Second Discourse*. Rousseau complicates the concept in his *Émile*, where he argues that *amour-propre* refers more generally one's standing among their peers and is therefore not necessarily a negative phenomenon (albeit ripe for corruption). Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile, or On Education*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 235. On this, see Nicholas Dent, *Rousseau* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 104-106. Nevertheless, this helpful clarification does not alter what I am after here, which is the relation of *amour-propre* to alienation.

advantage, to show himself to be something other than what he in fact was. Being something and appearing to be something became two completely different things; and from this distinction there arose grand ostentation, deceptive cunning, and all the vices that follow in their wake."[38] Further, Rousseau claims that these circumstances imbue persons with "consuming ambition…less out of real need than in order to put [themselves] above others."[39] In short, Rousseau argues that the formation of human communities generated artificial inequalities, artificial desires, and artificial tendencies, all of which have proven destructive to individuals and their political communities.[40]

As in the *First Discourse*, but here with considerably more of a backstory, Rousseau identifies a growing distinction in modern life between "being" and "appearing," as he puts it. Arising from the forces that accompany the development of human societies, from *amour-propre* and the drive for recognition and esteem, Rousseau points to the troubling experience of persons living as "two-faced," divided creatures.[41] This helpful description is perhaps his clearest reference to the first form of alienation I referenced in the introduction, between a person's natural, inner self and their social, outer identity. With this form of alienation in view, Rousseau celebrates and looks longingly at the pre-political individual's ability to enjoy a wholeness and internal harmony that mostly escapes the experience of modern humans.[42]

At the very end of his *Second Discourse*, Rousseau explains that "the savage lives in himself; the man accustomed to the ways of society is always outside himself and knows how to

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[38] Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 67.
[39] Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 68. Here again he places the blame on the institution of private property: "All these ills are the first effect of property and the inseparable offshoot of incipient inequality."
[40] Referencing his *Letter to d'Alembert*, Shklar explains that, for Rousseau, although laws and the pursuit of pleasure are strong forces in social life, "it is public opinion that rules." Shklar, *Men and Citizens*, 75.
[41] Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 68.
[42] Campbell draws out this wholeness and its significance in Campbell, *Rousseau and the Paradox of Alienation*, 38-40.

live only in the opinion of others. And it is, as it were, from their judgment alone that he draws the sentiment of his own existence."[43] With this summary statement about the differences between persons in their natural state versus the sort of lives they tend to lead in human communities, Rousseau mobilizes a critical distinction between persons living "in" and "outside" of themselves. We can thus see a third way in which Rousseau's state of nature has normative significance, which pertains to the ideal *un*alienated lives of pre-social, pre-political human beings.

Rousseau's reference to the "ways of society" in the aforementioned passage indicates that, for Rousseau, as a problem of divided identity, alienation often also involves a dividedness between a person's own values and those of their context or community. Rousseau concludes the *Second Discourse* by summarizing the noxious effect of alienation on individuals and their communities: "with everything reduced to appearances, everything becomes factitious and bogus; honor, friendship, virtue, and often even our vices, about which we eventually find the secret of boasting… we have merely a deceitful and frivolous exterior: honor without virtue, reason without wisdom, and pleasure without happiness." After offering this incisive depiction of alienated life, Rousseau remarks on having thus "proved that this is not the original state of man."[44]

Rousseau's Third Discourse

In his 1758 *Discourse on Political Economy* (*Third Discourse*), first published in 1755 as the article "*Œconomy*" in the famous *Encyclopédie* edited by Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert, Rousseau offers a bridge between his more analytical and critical work of the first

[43] Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 81.
[44] Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 81.

two *Discourses* and his constructive project that attains its fullest form in his *Social Contract*.[45] In the *Third Discourse*, he makes a theoretical appeal that will prove central to his *Social Contract* and have a lasting impact on modern moral and political theory: he attempts to overcome alienation by constructing a theory of collective life that might allow a person "to act in accordance with the maxims of his own judgment and not to be at odds with himself." Doing so entails crafting a *political* theory, in his view, because of the important role that the political domain plays in shaping a person's commitments and reasoning, in both implicit and explicit (he mentions, for example, "civil rights" and "law") ways.[46]

Importantly, for Rousseau, alienation presumably cannot be legitimately overcome by forcing the political community to adopt a particular individual's standards and interests, which would amount to either violent despotism or a clamorous anarchy. Marking a more constructive move, Rousseau aims to think through this problem by utilizing the metaphor of "the body politic."[47] Drawing analogies between different parts of a human body and the different parts of a well-structured polity, Rousseau uses the metaphor to address what is basically the political version of the classic problem of the one and the many. With the body politic metaphor, he posits that the proper relationship between an individual and their political community involves the development of "reciprocal sensibility and the internal coordination of all the parts."[48]

Like his predecessor John Locke, Rousseau extends the metaphor of the body politic by positing that it is directed by a "will," which determines a polity's formal standards. In his

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[45] Importantly, it is in the *Third Discourse* that Rousseau offers his distinct conception of the "general will," a concept he "borrows and transforms" from Diderot. Spector, *Rousseau*, 43.

[46] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on Political Economy,* in *The Basic Political Writings: Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, *Discourse on Political Economy*, *On the Social Contract*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 117.

[47] This metaphor is ancient, of course, and can be found in the writings of Aesop ("The Belly and the Members," Perry Index #130), St. Paul (1 Corinthians 12:14-23), and others. Rousseau also mentions the metaphor in *Discourse on Inequality*, 75.

[48] Rousseau, *Discourse on Political Economy*, 114.

Second Treatise of Government, Locke writes about the formation of political communities, "when any number of men have, by the consent of every individual, made a *community*, they have thereby made that *community* one body, with a power to act as one body, which is only by the will and determination of the *majority*." Further, Locke explains that, "every man, by consenting with others to make one body politic under one government, puts himself under an obligation…to submit to the determination of the *majority*."[49] On this description, it is clear that Locke's portrayal of the body politic is one-dimensional. For him, the body politic is a figurative reference to the political community as a whole, which is constituted by individuals contracting with one another and the obligations that follow from doing so. For Locke, the body politic is the aggregate of its members, whose unity refers to the capacity of the majority to decide for—and with the power of—the whole of the community.[50]

Echoing Locke to some degree, Rousseau explains that the body politic "possesses a will…which is the source of the laws." For Rousseau, however, the body politic is an *organic unity*, "a moral being" whose will is a "general will, which always tends toward the conservation and well-being of the whole and of each part."[51] This is Rousseau's first use of the concept of the "general will," which he seems to have borrowed from Diderot's 1755 article "Droit naturel" in the *Encyclopédie*.[52] However, Diderot presents the general will as a public (non-private),

[49] Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, chapter 8, p. 52. Italics original.
[50] Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, chapter 8, p. 52-53.
[51] Rousseau, *Discourse on Political Economy*, 114. For more on the French and French theological context of this metaphor, see Cladis, *Public Vision, Private Lives*, 199. Unfortunately, it seems the notion of the general will is often abstracted from Rousseau's conception of the body politic, a move that I am resisting here.
[52] See Diderot's entry "Droit Naturel" in the *Encyclopédie.* Denis Diderot, *Political Writings*, eds. John Hope Mason and Robert Wokler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 17-21. See also Spector, *Rousseau*, 43. An inchoate form of the idea is found in his *Second Discourse*: "Since, with respect to social relations, the populace has united all its wills into a single one, all the articles on which the will is explicated become so many fundamental laws obligating the choice and power of the magistrates charged with watching over the execution of the others." Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 75.

dispassionate, general point of view lacking the organic unity of Rousseau's construal.[53] On Rousseau's account, the general will follows not from an abstract, seemingly static and universal perspective, nor is it the simple will of the numerical majority; rather, it is what emerges from the dynamic life of the body politic as an organic whole. Such an organic whole, he suggests, has its own distinct cultural patterns and ways of life that emerge "through the habit of [members] seeing each other and through the common interest that unites them."[54]

With his conceptions of the body politic and the general will in hand, Rousseau argues that a properly organized polity ought to be bound by certain structural commitments. In the *Third Discourse*, he offers three: the government must commit to pursuing the general will; virtue, understood as the alignment of private wills to the general will, ought to "reign" among members; and the government ought to see to the material "public needs" of the people.[55]

Rousseau suggests that these commitments are necessary for establishing a just political order, but it is important to see how they are also related to the phenomenon of alienation. As noted, Rousseau clearly aims in the *Third Discourse* to address alienation as the potential problem of being normatively divided and "at odds" with oneself for being held to standards that profoundly contrast with one's own personal commitments. To do so, he shifts his focus to the domain of the political in a way that is markedly different from the first two *Discourses*. Rousseau attempts to overcome alienation here by theorizing the convergence of individuals, the government, and the polity as a whole around the general will.

[53] Diderot, "Droit Naturel," 19-21.
[54] Rousseau resists a cosmopolitan understanding of the general will, which Diderot seems to embrace, because he imagines it only being possible for a particular community with its own history and identity. Rousseau argues that "the sentiment of humanity evaporates and weakens in being extended over the entire world… Interest and commiseration must somehow be limited and restrained to be active." Rousseau, *Discourse on Political Economy*, 121. In other words, Rousseau seems to think that a general will is a manifestation of a particular organic community with meaningful cohesion, which a global community by definition lacks.
[55] Rousseau, *Discourse on Political Economy*, 116, 119, 127.

As insinuated, the *Third Discourse* introduces what I refer to as Rousseau's second form of alienation, which concerns an individual's relationship with their political community. Whereas the first form pertains to what is perhaps best understood as the *social* domain, that is, to matters of social and economic life, this second form pertains more specifically to the *political* domain, to the community defined by common political institutions, governance, and legal standards, as well as less formal "habits" and mores that shape and bind them as a people. Both forms of alienation address the experience of dividedness between internal, personal and external, shared dimensions of life, but they primarily refer to different domains. This distinction between forms is perhaps clear enough, given the difference I have drawn, but it raises questions about the first form of alienation that occupied his earlier attention and how the two forms relate. In fact, Rousseau offers the outline of a solution in the *Third Discourse* that does not eschew the first form of alienation but rather includes it, and we can see here a more satisfying solution to the problem of alienation.

In his first two *Discourses*, Rousseau's first form of alienation involves but is not reducible to interpersonal relations. There, Rousseau presents alienation as connected to the material, cultural, and institutional contexts of human life, not least among them private property and the distribution of wealth. This form of alienation, emerging as it does from the toxic inflammation of *amour-propre*, pertains to the material and social inequalities among people. Guaranteeing some considerable measure of equality is the obvious solution to this problem, and here we can infer the necessary but unnamed political aspect of this first form of alienation.[56]

[56] Insightfully clarifying the important connections between material and social inequality, Frederick Neuhouser carefully explains the multi-dimensional significance of equality in Rousseau's thought and why it must extend beyond the formal equality of equal citizens before the law. Frederick Neuhouser, "Rousseau's Critique of Economic Inequality," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 41, no. 3 (2013): 207-215.

Securing (at least) the material equality necessary to prevent or overcome the first form of alienation, it seems, would require political intervention of some kind.

Further, the relation of the two forms of alienation becomes more evident when we press on the relation in Rousseau's thinking between the social and political domains. In turning his attention more fully to the domain of the political in his *Third Discourse*, Rousseau presents the *political* identity of a community—its own way of narrating its history, practices, values, and organization—as shaping and drawing together its social, cultural, and institutional life. As his own thinking develops over time, it becomes increasingly evident that for Rousseau all aspects of human life are finally shaped by and "depend *radically* on" the identity (including the culture and stories that the community tells about itself) and standards of a political community.[57] Given these two claims, the implicit reliance on political power to secure equality and an increasing sense that a community's social, cultural, and institutional life are drawn together under the aegis of the community as a *political* one, we can see the supremacy of the political domain in Rousseau's thought. It follows, then, that overcoming both forms of alienation requires changes in both the social and political domains, but that the latter deserves a certain priority.

In the *Third Discourse*, Rousseau intimates that overcoming alienation involves individuals coming to have a certain regard for, to identify with, and to enjoy meaningful participation in their political community. This is quite evident when he writes about the formation of individuals as citizens: "It is not enough to say to citizens: be good. They must be taught to be so… Love of country is the most effective [way to properly develop a polity's members]." Developing love of country in individuals, he suggests, helps to bring individuals into alignment with the norms and culture of their political community, which can help to

[57] Spector, *Rousseau*, 90.

overcome of alienation by fostering "conformity" between a person's "private will" and the community's "general will."[58] In other words, actively caring for the political community itself has the effect of bringing into increasing alignment a person's identity and values with those of their political community.

Rousseau seems to suggest, therefore, that a stable and just political community able to overcome the alienation of its members involves these members coming to understand themselves as being parts of, as *belonging to*, their political community as a whole.[59] This line of reasoning emerges climactically in the *Third Discourse*: "Let the homeland, therefore, show itself as the common mother of all citizens. Let the advantages they enjoy in their homeland endear it to them. Let the government leave them a large enough part of the public administration that they can feel they are at home."[60]

Rousseau's Social Contract

Rousseau refines and develops the main themes from the *Third Discourse* in his robust and visionary *Social Contract* (1762). Rousseau aims to provide in his *Social Contract* a genuinely egalitarian political theory that secures and enhances human freedom, which he claims is the natural birthright of all persons.[61] Similar to the *Third Discourse*, such a theory also importantly offers a way to overcome both forms of alienation mentioned previously.

[58] Rousseau, *Discourse on Political Economy*, 121. In his fragment "Of Public Happiness," Rousseau mentions the disquieting experience of division between a person as an individual and as a citizen. "Make man one," he writes, "and you will make him happy as he can be." Quoted in Cladis, *Public Vision, Private Lives*, 131.
[59] The culminating vision of the *Third Discourse* is that "everyone may feel a part of the common self (*moi commun*) and be raised…with a patriotic ethos." Spector, *Rousseau*, 44.
[60] Rousseau, *Discourse on Political Economy*, 123.
[61] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On the Social Contract, or Principles of Political Right*, in *The Basic Political Writings: Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, *Discourse on Political Economy*, *On the Social Contract*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), I.I, p. 141. Because my interest here is on the structure of Rousseau's constructive project in *Social Contract*, I will focus mostly on its first and second books.

For Rousseau, devising an egalitarian political theory that preserves human freedom involves more than simply establishing the proper principles and political institutions; rather, he claims, it must address the "prior convention[s]" that ground a community and shape its way of life. As he puts it, this involves attending to the acts and practices "whereby a people is a people," in character and in time.[62] Rousseau describes a major part of his task as theorizing about the sort of convention(s) necessary to establish a legitimate, equal, helpful, and stable community.[63] It is for this reason that his chapters on the Legislator and civil religion are so critical, two ideas to which I will return below.

Tersely rehearsing parts of his *Second Discourse*, Rousseau claims that at a certain point in the evolution of human needs individuals became unable to surmount the manifold challenges to self-preservation, which compelled them to cooperate with one another.[64] Further, he posits that such cooperation is also at least potentially beneficial beyond mere survival, given that humans have innate capacities for moral and cultural development that can only mature in the context of communal life.[65] However, Rousseau notes that endemic to the formation of political communities has been the corrupt "right of the strongest," which perpetually poses the threat of tyranny, among other inequalities.[66] As in the *Second Discourse*, but with more of a political focus, he determines that the formation of political communities has too often tragically resulted in significant unfreedom and diminished quality of life.[67] Because humans form communities for the protection of liberty and the development of their capacities, he presents the difficult

[62] Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, I.V, p. 147.
[63] Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, II.IV, p. 158.
[64] Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, I.VI, p. 147.
[65] Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, I.VIII, p. 150-151.
[66] Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, I.III, p. 143. Here he explains that the principle of might-makes-right is one of the central problems he aims to eradicate.
[67] "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains." Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, I.I, p. 141.

theoretical task as needing to conceptualize a form of collective association that protects its members and is conducive to their development without costing their liberty.[68]

Rousseau's constructive project stands in significant contrast to its social contract predecessors, as does his related conception of human nature. On one hand, Thomas Hobbes had defended a rather far-reaching conception of the state, the formation of which entailed the one-way transfer of individual rights for the protection of life.[69] As noted, Rousseau rejects any such theories that involve an outright exchange of liberty for security. What is more, Rousseau believes that humans are more complicated and dynamic than Hobbes's mechanistic and comparatively simplistic anthropology purports.[70] On the other hand, Locke had argued for a more complex theory of individuals conferring their natural rights to the political community for their management and protection. Importantly different from Hobbes, Locke maintained that these rights are inalienable and even offered grounds for legitimate rebellion against tyrannical regimes.[71] For Locke, the social contract exists to preserve individual liberty and property through the establishment of common standards (law), impartial arbitrators (judges), and the legitimate power to support and execute them.[72]

Sharing many of his aims and values, Rousseau nevertheless seems to argue that Locke operates from an inaccurate understanding of the role and impact of a political community on the development of the individual. For Rousseau, and further proving the point that he does not hold the natural state of humans as a simple ideal, the human person prior to becoming a member of

[68] Rousseau calls this "the fundamental problem for which the social contract provides the solution." *Social Contract*, I.VI, p. 148.
[69] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan, or the Matter, Forme, and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil*, ed. Michael Oakeshott (Oxford: Blackwell, 1957), chapters 14 and 17.
[70] Hobbes's philosophical anthropology is evident throughout Part I of *Leviathan*.
[71] Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, chapters 18 and 19.
[72] Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, chapter 9.

or abstracted from such a community is a morally and epistemologically simple being.[73] Rousseau would therefore claim that a theory such as Locke's that presumes an individual having rights, duties, and developed interests *prior* to entering into their political community, or that supposes those rights, duties, and interests remain largely unchanged by entering into it, has not grasped how profoundly the human person's moral development depends on and is shaped by such a community.[74] Further, Locke maintained the supremacy of the natural law—that is, the use of reason to order and protect a person's "health, liberty, or possessions"[75]—to the laws of any commonwealth.[76] This opens the possibility for conflict between an individual's interests and the public interest, and Rousseau raises concern for such theories that either leave this conflict (at least theoretically) unresolved or that grant priority to the individual.[77]

Rousseau might have also pointed out the related point that, despite their important differences, both the Hobbesian and Lockean forms of contract rest on instrumental or transactional relations between the individual and the state, on *external* relations between sovereign and subject—Hobbes for the protection of life and Locke for the protection of liberty and property—whereas Rousseau's contract involves *internal* relations.[78] What is more, they

[73] He refers to the person in the state nature as a "stupid, limited animal" who is transformed "into an intelligent being and a man" by entering the social contract. Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, I.VIII, p. 151. As mentioned above, this troubles the view that Rousseau offers a simple embrace of the state of nature as an ideal. For him, the picture is far more complex: society both worsens human rivalry and competition, *and* it is necessary for full human development and flourishing.

[74] "The great end of men's entering into society being the enjoyment of their properties in peace and safety." Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, chapter 11, p. 66.

[75] Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, chapter 2, p. 9.

[76] "Thus the law of nature stands as an eternal rule to all men, legislators as well as others. The rules that they [legislators] make for other men's actions, must, as well as their own and other men's actions, be conformable to the law of nature." Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, chapter 11, p. 71. This is of course a common position for natural law thinkers.

[77] Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, I.VI, p. 148. To be fair, as a natural law thinker Locke would likely respond that this misses his (implicit) commitment to the unity of reason, guaranteed by God, which would prevent this conflict on principle. However, Rousseau's understanding of reason is too developmental and contextual for such a claim.

[78] Charles Taylor offers a compelling intellectual genealogy and explanation of such external relations, insightfully tracing them through what he calls René Descartes's "disengaged subject" and Locke's conception of the "punctual self." Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, Part II, esp. chapters 8 and 9.

seem to argue that civic membership is at least mostly morally inert. For neither Hobbes nor Locke is the transformation of an individual's identity and interests a necessary or inevitable part of joining a political community as it is for Rousseau, for whom the relations between individual and community are internal.[79] Importantly, this is not to suggest that Rousseau is attempting to accommodate all of a person's pre-existing values, etc., but rather that an alignment between individual and community is crucial, which depends upon a dynamic and mutually transformative relation between the two.

Despite his differences with Hobbes and Locke on these and other matters, Rousseau nevertheless remains within the social contract tradition as they do. This of course means that he frames issues concerning the origin, legitimacy, and justice of a political order in terms of whether and why an individual would voluntarily assent to its constraints and opt for membership. Therefore, despite insisting on a much more social anthropology than his fellow contractarians, Rousseau's political theory remains far more attuned to the individual than do pre-modern thinkers. Yet, I see Rousseau's employment of the social contract model to be more than mere convention; it is an expression of his abiding commitment to the dignity and equality of individuals. Rousseau can be seen in this way as a true child of the Enlightenment, but one attempting to navigate between the collectivism of pre-Enlightenment thinking and the atomistic or transactional individualism that came to characterize much of the developing liberal tradition.

All that said, Rousseau proceeds as if his predecessors have not sufficiently grasped the true nature of and/or the necessary conditions for true equality and liberty. Rather provocatively, Rousseau argues that a genuinely egalitarian social contract requires the total divestiture "of each

[79] Related to this point, Taylor claims that "Rousseau brought back into the world of eighteenth-century Deism the fundamentally Augustinian notion" that humans are in need of a "transformation of the will." Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 356. I would emphasize that for both the Christian and Rousseauian traditions, transformation of the person's will is concomitant with or an aspect of the transformation of their identity.

associate, together with all of his rights, to the entire community." He insists that only such self-abnegation can deliver equality and freedom from the threat of domination. Although this may appear at first blush to be nothing more than a reworked Hobbesianism, drawing on his *Third Discourse* he further explains that contracting in the way he recommends "produces a…body, composed of as many members as there are voices in the assembly, which receives from the same act its unity, its common *self*, its life and its will." This "body politic," he continues, is formed by the "union" of its members.[80]

Similar to how he does in the *Third Discourse*, Rousseau presents the body politic here as an organic unity formed by congruence with the general will, and he refers to the individual and their political community in terms of a part-whole relationship: "*Each of us places his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will; and as one we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole*."[81] Here, he gestures to the transformation that citizens undergo to become members of the body politic, which he presents as a matter of submission to the general will. Rousseau therefore builds a political theory around the affirmation of self-interest rather than its denial, but only after an individual's sense of themself has been brought into alignment with the emerging common, civic self.[82]

Developing the notion from the *Third Discourse*, in *Social Contract* Rousseau argues that the general will is the sole legitimate guide for a polity, "according to the purpose for which it was instituted, which is the common good." Further, he claims that the exercise of the general will, as the expression of the people as "a collective being," *constitutes* an act of sovereignty in

[80] Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, I.VI, p. 148.
[81] Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, I.VI, p. 148. Italics original.
[82] Cladis explains this as the attempt "to transform *amour-proper* into a collective passion that would *directly* contribute to the public good." Cladis, *Public Vision, Private Lives*, 138.

the social contract.[83] Thus, he concludes, the general will is the true expression of the public interest. As the expression of an organic body politic, Rousseau distinguishes the general will from the mere "sum of private wills." The general will is the will of the people *as* the body politic, as an organic whole, in which each participant is a constitutive member, and not the aggregate interests of the individuals who comprise it.[84]

Rousseau's explanation of the individual's constitutive membership in the sovereign and their necessary contribution to the formation of the general will reveal how he avoids the Hobbesian conclusion of a strong sovereign wielding (nearly) absolute power over its subjects. To put it briefly, for Rousseau the offices of sovereign and subject overlap.[85] Critical though this difference is, it likely does not put to rest all concerns about the loss of individual liberty. As much as the complete self-donation of each member to the community is indeed an egalitarian move, preserving at best a very minimal and negative sort of liberty (from domination), it also might seem that Rousseau's theory entails the loss of the individual.

Rousseau explains his unusual position this way: "For first of all, since each person gives himself whole and entire [upon entering the contract], the condition is equal for everyone… Moreover, since the alienation is made without reservation, the union is as perfect as possible, and no associate has anything further to demand… Finally, in giving himself to all, each person gives himself to no one."[86] In other words, Rousseau argues that genuine equality follows from

[83] Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, II.I, p. 153.
[84] Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, II.III, p. 155. Rousseau is therefore unsatisfied by a simple majoritarian vision (such as Locke's, noted above). However, this does not mean that the general will is necessarily held unanimously by the people. See *Social Contract*, IV.III, p. 207-208. Shklar largely misses the significant import of this organic, holist metaphor; Shklar, *Men and Citizens*, 197ff.
[85] For purposes of clarification, I have emphasized the contrast between Rousseau's and Hobbes' view on these matters. However, I hope it is clear in my presentation that Rousseau can be read as extending and further developing Hobbes' constructive approach in a way that attempt to overcome its concerning implications and conclusions. Rousseau is closer to Hobbes than Locke on matters of sovereignty and the body politic, even if he shares Locke's strong commitment to popular sovereignty.
[86] Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, I.VI, p. 148.

(1) equality of condition, such that no person's interest can be improved by burdening others;[87] (2) equality of submission to the sovereign, necessary to maintain the superiority of the public interest over private interests (or, negatively, to avoid the triumph of individual interest over the public interest); and (3) equality of status among people, which prevents any individual person from claiming authority over another. The second (2) argument above is a rather forceful counter to the Lockean position.[88] For Rousseau, these are three necessary conditions for individuals to become constitutive members of their community, whose interests cannot be properly understood as standing apart from or in competition with the good of the community. Therefore, we can say that Rousseau prioritizes the public interest over that of any individual, *qua* individual. And yet, he aims to do so without subsuming or dissolving the individual into the community by offering a theory of organic incorporation that involves the transformation of an individual's identity and interests.[89] According to Rousseau, such transformation ideally results in the alignment of duty and interest.[90]

At this point it is important to clarify how Rousseau imagines this incorporation into the body politic through transformation in such a way that does not result in the complete dissolution

[87] I take Rousseau here to be referring to both material and social (esteem or status) interests.

[88] Rousseau's full explanation of this second argument clarifies his concern, and it does so in reference to the Lockean notion of common judgment: "Moreover, since the alienation is made without reservation, the union is as perfect as possible, and no associate has anything further to demand. *For if some rights remained with private individuals, in the absence of any common superior who could decide between them and the public, each person would eventually claim to be his own judge in all things, since he is on some point his own judge.* The state of nature would subsist and the association would necessarily become tyrannical or hollow." Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, I.VI, p. 148. Emphasis mine. It is important to note that this can amount to a form of tyranny in his view. For Rousseau, it seems that the problem with individual rights existing above the power and interests of the community is that it manifests a pervasive dualism between the individual and the public. It follows that such a dualism necessarily tilts the priority of power to the individual, given that no properly mediating power can exist between the two parties.

[89] This, evident in the *Third Discourse* but even more so here, is to see Rousseau rightly as a Romantic, who offers an understanding of the individual "in terms of organic metaphors and a concept of self-expression." Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 12.

[90] "As soon as this multitude is thus united in a body… duty and interest equally obligate the two parties." Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, I.VII, p. 150.

of the individual. Rousseau maintains that this is possible insofar as the decision to undergo the transformation is *a free act undertaken for the preservation of freedom*. In this way, the person's free act to become a member of the body politic can be seen as a non-self-contradictory act of genuine gain.

The notion of incorporation or union with the civic community is particularly important for Rousseau, as it marks dynamic inclusion into a larger body. Uniting with the body politic in this way amounts to more than a transactional relationship that leaves the individual's interests and self-understanding largely untouched. It involves neither the simple transfer of rights for the protection of a sovereign (Hobbes) nor the strategic arrangement of reciprocal relations for protecting individual liberty and property (Locke).[91] Rather, it entails the *transformation* of the individual and their interests and identity in becoming a member of the body politic—and, given its organic nature, simultaneously the transformation of the body politic.[92]

This makes quite evident how Rousseau's proposal in *Social Contract* addresses the second form of alienation I identified at the start. The transformation involved in becoming a member of the body politic makes for the growing congruence between an individual's identity and interests and those of their political community. In this text, he also provides a way to address the first form of alienation. Insofar as equality is the solution to preventing or overcoming the problematic inflammation of *amour-propre* and the internal division it causes,

[91] Cladis helpfully contrasts contrasts Hobbes and Locke, "for whom enlightened self-interest or reason…inspire voluntary consent," with Rousseau, who claims that "if humans in society are to become cooperative and moral creatures, that is, good citizens, they need to be fashioned and trained." He even suggests, rightly I think, that this means Rousseau's social contract is different in kind from that of Hobbes and Locke. Cladis, *Public Vision, Private Lives*, 136.

[92] Note, however, that for Rousseau this transformation is not exhaustive. On his account, entering into a contract does not result in the loss or subsumption of individuality. For example, he argues that the sovereign "cannot impose on the subjects any fetters that are of no use to the community," which implies there are obligations and aspects to the individual that remain particular and protected from imposition. Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, II.IV, p. 157. See also, Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, III.I.

Rousseau outlines three commitments mentioned previously—equality of condition, submission, and status—as conditions for a thoroughly egalitarian political community. Further, the individual adoption of the general will (by way of the transformation involved in becoming a part of the body politic) is also to serve as a counter to the personal interests of one's private will. Therefore, as Shklar explains, by adopting the general will "each citizen can guard himself and his fellow citizens against the dangers of *amour-propre*, the empire of opinion and institutionalized inequality."[93]

In whole, as Campbell rightly asserts, Rousseau's *Social Contract* "is designed to heal the individual whose soul has been devastated by the circumstances of modernity."[94] More specifically, as I have shown, Rousseau's *Social Contract* is designed to address both forms of alienation that appear in his three *Discourses*. Having sketched the outline of Rousseau's constructive project and what it hopes to accomplish, an adequate picture of his proposal requires attending to the work's profound dependence on religion and religious concepts, themes, and forms of thinking, a subject to which I now turn.

Religion in Rousseau's Social Contract

Aside from infrequent references to concepts like "the sacred," Rousseau's *Discourses* scarcely reference religion in any obvious way. However, on this point, his *Social Contract* marks a significant departure. In what follows, I will attend to the ways in which Rousseau explicitly and implicitly utilizes religious themes and categories to advance his constructive political vision and to support his proscription for overcoming alienation. As I indicate below,

[93] Shklar, *Men and Citizens*, 166.
[94] Campbell, *Rousseau and the Paradox of Alienation*, 65.

Rousseau's reliance on religious conceptual resources is not incidental or superficial, but rather fundamental to the framing and coherence of his project.

The Explicit Role of Religion: The Legislator and Civil Religion

At two notable places in *Social Contract* Rousseau explicitly references religious concepts or themes, the understanding of which are important for his project as a whole. The first emerges from his speculation into how the founding conditions for the social contract might be established, which leads him to introduce a preternatural figure he calls "the legislator." The second comes near the very end of the work, where Rousseau argues the need for what he famously calls "civil religion" to secure the legitimacy, stability, and cohesion of a political community.

Given that Rousseau argues the importance of certain virtues and collective practices for a people to accept and maintain the social contract, what he calls a people's "prior conventions," he is tasked with offering an explanation of how those initial conditions might be met.[95] As Spector puts the matter, Rousseau must account for how "to shape a people culturally and to imbue them with the mores needed for a true political community."[96] For this, Rousseau presents the somewhat mythical character of the Legislator (or "lawgiver"), whose foundational task includes epistemological, moral, and motivational aspects for the shaping of a polity's members.[97]

Whether the Legislator is to be understood as an actual person(s) or the personification of an important formative process, Rousseau associates the role and authority of the Legislator to a

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[95] Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, I.V, p. 147.
[96] Spector, *Rousseau*, 75.
[97] Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, II.VII, p. 164-165. Spector helpfully identifies these different aspects in Spector, *Rousseau*, 78-79.

capacity that has historically often resided in religious figures and/or traditions, not least because of their transcendent appeals.[98] To perform its task, he recognizes that the Legislator must possess a "great soul" and draw on the "an authority of a different order" in order to transform a people and their culture according to the lasting "wisdom" that secures the necessary conditions for a just and stable social contract.[99] For perhaps obvious reasons, given its mythical role and description, the figure of the Legislator has proven a difficult one for Rousseau's interpreters.[100]

Nevertheless, one thing is clear from his description of the Legislator. Rousseau, like countless others before him, acknowledges the important role that religions and religious references have played in grounding and legitimizing political regimes, as well as in the formation of a people's character. Part of this important role, he suggests, which is part of the Legislator's role, is to shape a sense of collective concern and identity among members of the polity; or, in other words, to redirect its citizens' *"amour-propre* towards the glory of [their] homeland."[101]

Such an attachment to and regard for one's political community, which is mentioned several times in passing in the *Discourses*, gets sustained attention near the very end of *Social Contract*, at the site of Rousseau's second explicit reference to religion. Rousseau begins the eighth chapter of Book IV with a brief recounting of how religion and political regimes have long been interrelated, noting especially how often political legitimacy, identity, and law have

[98] See Shklar, *Men and Citizens*, 127-133; 155-156.
[99] Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, II.VII, p. 164. For Rousseau, most importantly this involves turning citizens away from their private interests and toward the public good.
[100] Although the figure does emerge and exit rather abruptly, its role in Rousseau's thinking seems hardly to be "one of the most perplexing points in his whole enterprise." Dent, *Rousseau*, 140. That said, appreciating the role of the Legislator means seeing the different aspects of his task noted above; Dent's uncertainty noted here may have something to do with the fact that he only really attends to the Legislator's epistemic task. Dent, *Rousseau*, 140-141.
[101] Spector, *Rousseau*, 80. Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, II.VII, p. 164. Shklar describes this necessary phenomenon, albeit less concretely, as "the socialization of *amour-propre*." Shklar, *Men and Citizens*, 21.

been anchored in transcendent claims and traditions of individual and collective practice.[102] Most importantly, he claims, this relationship has facilitated binding unity among a polity's members and strong attachment to their collective existence.

Rousseau argues that Jesus of Nazareth and the original Christian movement intervened in this history by aiming to establish "a spiritual kingdom on earth," which severed the religious from the political.[103] Acknowledging that this clear separation did not last, he adds that the Christian tradition introduced a lasting tension between the two, which works against and can ultimately undermine social cohesion. Rousseau also refers to the impact of this tension on individuals, framing the matter in terms of alienation: "all institutions that place man in contradiction with himself are of no value."[104]

Nevertheless, Rousseau insists on the importance of religion (or something quite like it) for a well-functioning and stable polity. Reflecting on what he sees to have been Christianity's problematic intervention, the sort of religion Rousseau has in mind must be properly political, and, given the legitimate restraint placed on public matters, it must be limited to allow for individual or private autonomy.[105] He suggests, then, that "there is…a purely civil profession of

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[102] Despite the considerable differences he has with Locke on these matters (whose view of the relation between religion and politics Rousseau would likely criticize for inviting alienation if not also social instability), Rousseau like Locke remarks on the importance of grounding the "force" of law in a belief in God; Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, IV.VIII, p. 224. For similar reasons Locke is concerned about the political consequences of atheism; John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, in *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration,* ed. Ian Shapiro (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 246.

[103] Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, IV.VIII, p. 221. As he then puts the matter rather directly, the problem with Christianity's purported purely transcendent gaze is that it "has no particular relation to the body politic." Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, IV.VIII, p. 224.

[104] Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, IV.VIII, p. 223. It could be said that Rousseau is here using alienation as an ethic of belief, and, to a degree, as a *political* ethic of belief—as a principle for normatively assessing the content and/or effects of religious commitments and practices.

[105] He writes, "The right which the social compact gives the sovereign over the subjects does not, as I have said, go beyond the limits of public utility. The subjects, therefore, do not have to account to the sovereign for their opinions, except to the extent that these opinions are of importance to the community." Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, IV.VIII, p. 226. Cladis offers a reading of Rousseau's conception of civil religion as attempting to strike a balance between public and private beliefs and values; Cladis, *Public Vision, Private Lives*, 189. We therefore see Rousseau intending to protect or preserve at least some of the differences inevitably found between to persons (aside from simply their agency), likely pertaining to their distinct perspectives and/or personalities. However, much like the

faith, the articles of which it belongs to the sovereign to establish, not exactly as dogmas of religion, but as sentiments of sociability, without which it is impossible to be a good citizen or a faithful subject." Without much explanation, he claims that this "civil religion" ought to consist of the following doctrines: "the existence of a powerful, intelligent, beneficent divinity that foresees and provides; the life to come; the happiness of the just; the punishment of the wicked; the sanctity of the social contract and of the laws."[106]

All of this raises the question of why Rousseau explicitly brings religion into his project at all, especially given that the two references noted here seem to arrive and depart rather abruptly. Upon careful reading, we can surmise that Rousseau employs religious references and language in order to capture at least three interrelated elements that he appears to take as being bound up with religion itself.[107] One has to do with the *object* of certain beliefs or commitments, regarding, as his first dogma of civil religion clearly reveals, reference to a domain of transcendence (in this case, a deity). Simon Critchley presses on what could be called the political theological nature of this point and, referring to both the other worldly authority of the Legislator and this feature of civil religion, rightly claims that "Rousseau's purportedly purely immanentist conception of the being of politics requires a dimension of transcendence" for its grounding and legitimacy.[108] Second, on Rousseau's presentation there seems to be something

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point above regarding the transformation involved in persons becoming part of the body politic, it is not clear for him exactly what those aspects are.

[106] Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, IV.VIII, p. 226. Such a list finds *some* parallel in the discussion of religion by Rousseau's Savoyard Vicar in his *Émile*, 266-294. See also Dent, *Rousseau*, 107-116. For an attempt to read these two writings of Rousseau as compatible in regard to their view of religion, see Cladis, *Public Vision, Private Lives*, 195-196.

[107] Joshua Karant rightly resists interpretations of Rousseau's invocation of civil religion as "a wholly secular plea in spiritual clothing," arguing that such readings miss something about the character or quality of the attachments Rousseau attempts to capture with the reference, pertaining to what Karant calls Rousseau's "sincere religiosity." Joshua Karant, "Revisiting Rousseau's Civil Religion," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 42, no. 10 (2015): 1038.

[108] Critchley argues that this indicates not merely something unique to Rousseau, but something true about politics more generally. Simon Critchley, "The Catechism of the Citizen: Politics, Law and Religion in, after, with and against Rousseau," *Continental Philosophy Review* 42, no. 5 (2009): 7. He later argues that, according to Rousseau, "There can be no legitimate polity, and legitimacy implies immanence, without an appeal to transcendence,

existentially distinct about the *nature* of religious attachments, namely, that they reside somewhere deep within a person such that they determine whether one has either "profound indifference" or "love" toward their obligations and relationships.[109] In other words, Rousseau appears interested in capturing the distinct way that commitments of a religious nature tend to lodge themselves deeply within an individual and profoundly shape their self-understanding. Third, Rousseau seems to think that there is something distinct about the socially cohesive *effects* of (especially shared) religious commitments and practices.[110] Religion seems quite clearly to be the best, immediate reference Rousseau has for thinking about the affective development of what he calls "the social spirit" among a polity's membership.[111]

Returning to the first element, Rousseau's appeal to transcendence is clearly an important feature of his thinking, as evidenced by the noted reference to God among the dogmas of civil religion, and it also appears to name something significant about the Legislator's superior authority and wisdom. However, transcendence is important here for more than reasons of legitimacy and motivation alone; it plays a critical role in the *structure* of his political theory as well. Recall that in his *Third Discourse* Rousseau refers to the need for individuals to realize an internal and binding relation to their political community: "Let the homeland, therefore, show itself as the common mother of all citizens."[112] And recall that, in his *Social Contract*, Rousseau argues the need for individuals to reside "under the supreme direction of the general will" and to

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ultimately transcendence in the form of the sacred. It is this problem that leads Rousseau toward the issue of civil religion with which *The Social Contract* concludes. But these extraordinary pages are not, as might appear on a cursory reading, an addendum to the main argument about politics, but its transcendental condition of possibility." Critchley, "The Catechism of the Citizen," 25. Critchley is in conversation here with the tradition of political theology that follows in the wake of Carl Schmitt's work on the topic.

[109] Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, IV.VIII, p. 224, 226.

[110] As noted above, Rousseau refers to the dogma of civil religion as "sentiments of sociality" for establishing the "great bonds of a particular society." Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, IV.VIII, p. 226, 224.

[111] Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, IV.VIII, p. 224. This point is helpfully elaborated on Dent, *Rousseau*, 173.

[112] Rousseau, *Discourse on Political Economy*, 123.

become "indivisible part[s] of the whole."[113] As these examples indicate, Rousseau suggests that the political community as a whole is to occupy a clearly transcendent position with respect to its individual members.[114] Further, and here the analogy or parallel to religion extends, he presents individual members living and coming to relate to one another under the aegis of the political community.

This structure of transcendence is even more evident in Rousseau's later *Considerations on the Government of Poland* (1772). There, after raising concerns about the excessive abstractions of cosmopolitanism, he writes: "Every true Republican drank love of fatherland, that is to say love of the laws and of freedom, with his mother's milk. This love makes up his whole existence; he sees only his fatherland, he lives only for it; when he is alone, he is nothing: when he no longer has a fatherland, he no longer is, and if he is not dead, he is worse than dead."[115] This portrayal is concerning insofar as it commits to an exhaustive and totalizing relationship to one's political community, which the *Social Contract* clearly warns against, but Rousseau's clear message here is the need to intensely bind a polity's members to one another and to the wellbeing of their community, *under* the umbrella or auspices of the community as a whole.[116] Rousseau's lofty portrayal in his *Considerations on the Government of Poland* clarifies an important point that is evident in his other writings, even as it clearly risks falling into the

[113] Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, I.VI, p. 148.
[114] Despite recognizing that "the general will is the desire of every citizen as he seeks the general interest, namely the preservation and prosperity of the whole to which he now belongs," clearly implying some measure of transcendence of the whole to the parts, Spector confoundingly says "there is nothing…transcendent in the general will." Indeed, the general will does not refer to a supernatural entity or force, but the body politic from which it emerges occupies a transcendent position with respect to its individual members. Spector, *Rousseau*, 57.
[115] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Considerations of the Government of Poland*, in *Rousseau: The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 189.
[116] See Dent, *Rousseau*, 176-177. Dent rightly explains that Rousseau's "central concern" is "with the development and direction of a national or civic culture which makes each citizen's duty to acknowledge the rights and needs of others not a burdensome requirement but more nearly what they would design and wish for as their own way of realizing their union with and care for their fellows." Dent, *Rousseau*, 179.

totalizing threat of such a perspective: the political community is to stand in a vertical and asymmetrical relation to its members. Only such an arrangement can accommodate his metaphorical (body politic, part-whole) references, his dependence on religion, and his republican sentiments, the combination of which are necessary for overcoming alienation.[117]

There is nothing unique about a portrayal of the political community occupying a transcendent position with regard to its members, of course, as this was a regular feature in the political theories of countless pre-modern thinkers, Christian and classically republican alike. Notably, however, this feature sets Rousseau's project apart from other modern and especially liberal thinkers (namely, Locke), who present a political order that is constituted and maintained primarily by horizontal relations between individual members *as* equals. In fact, ordering his political theory around such a vertical relation to the political community as a whole is a key feature of Rousseau's thought. It is important to recognize, though, that, unlike pre-modern thinkers, Rousseau attempts to do so while remaining committed to individual equality and liberty. He attempts to manage this difficult theoretical mediation, as I have explained, by invoking an organic and participatory conception of the body politic, in which individuals are constitutive of the sovereign and by imagining the transformation of individuals as they become members of it.

[117] This is not to suggest the overly simplistic conclusion that Rousseau is analogizing the political community and God, although they do share in occupying a certain transcendent position with respect to the individual. Of course, for Rousseau any analogy to God breaks down quickly because individuals are constitutive members of the political community, a claim that would strike as heresy all but the pantheist. Relatedly, Cladis helpfully clarifies that Rousseau's design is not totalitarian, given that he opposes a centralized government and a hereditary monarchy. He then explains, "The telling difference between ourselves and Rousseau does not turn on totalitarianism, but on the value of social solidarity… Rousseau's plan for the Poles is frightening not because it raise the specter of totalitarianism or belittles the value of human life but because there is no allowance for the private life." Cladis, *Public Vision, Private Lives*, 129.

The Implicit Role of Religion: The Model and Logic of John Calvin's Soteriology

I have shown that Rousseau's constructive political project aims to establish a free and equal political community that overcomes the problem of alienation. Moreover, I have shown that Rousseau does so by presenting a theory of individual incorporation into a distinct conception of the body politic, wherein a person's identification with the political community is understood as an organic, part-whole relation in which the status of its members with respect to the sovereign is altered. As noted as well, Rousseau relies on explicitly religious concepts in proposing that the identity and standards of a community's members must undergo a transformation (initiated, at least, by the Legislator), and that the individual's appreciation of and life within the community should take on a religious quality (civil religion).

Yet, Rousseau's reliance on religious themes runs still deeper.[118] I contend that the model Rousseau employs—of individual union with a metaphorical body that entails individual transformation of one's identity, standards, and relation to the sovereign, which follows from and further encourages a life of piety—is patterned after a prominent aspect of John Calvin's theology, his doctrine of salvation. While Rousseau's familiarity with Calvin is well established, not least because of his direct reference to Calvin in *Social Contract* (footnote seven in Book II, Chapter VII), this particular connection seems to have gone unnoticed.

Attending to the apparent influence of Calvin's theology on Rousseau's political thought, Pamela Mason, who speaks directly to such matters, notes strong similarities in the two thinkers' respective theories of the state. Mason points to Rousseau's reference in *Social Contract* to the

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[118] Notable studies of Rousseau's implicit dependence on religion and/or religious traditions, themes, and concepts include Cladis, *Public Vision, Private Lives*, which locates Rousseau at the intersection of Enlightenment optimism and Augustinian pessimism, Patrick Riley, *The General Will Before Rousseau: The Transformation of the Divine Into the Civic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), which offers a theological genealogy of Rousseau's concept of the general will, and John T. Scott, "Politics as the Imitation of the Divine in Rousseau's *Social Contract*," *Polity* 26, no. 3 (Spring 1994), which offers (as the title suggests) a political theological reading of the role of politics in Rousseau's work.

idea of the fellow membership of the clergy who take communion together.[119] While such notions of the body of Christ and the communion of saints were common across Christianity in Rousseau's time, Mason explains that Protestant conceptualizations, given their belief in the priesthood of all believers, were distinct in being principally egalitarian. Further, Mason argues for a specific indebtedness to Calvin on this point, given that Calvin's ecclesiology maintained the church's legitimate authority over the consciences *and* material conditions of its members, in contrast to Luther's position that the church was an "*entirely* spiritual entity."[120]

Mason then argues that "the centerpiece of Rousseau's construction of the state…[which] is the self-divided identity as subject and sovereign which constitutes the citizen," is also indebted to a Genevan Calvinist ecclesiology.[121] Mason draws analogies between church membership in Calvin's view and state membership in Rousseau's, noting the requirement for individuals to give up their fallen natures for the redemption found in membership to a communal whole.[122] Most insightfully, albeit without much development, Mason reveals that Rousseau, like Calvin, "clearly holds that the communion consists not in the relationships of members with one another directly, as individuals, but instead in their relationships with one another indirectly, through participation in the sovereign."[123] For Rousseau as for Calvin, Mason argues, this leads to important conclusions about the role of civic (Rousseau) or catechistic (Calvin) education among a community's members.[124]

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[119] Pamela A. Mason, "The Communion of Citizens: Calvinist Themes in Rousseau's Theory of the State," *Polity* 26, no. 1 (Fall 1993): 36. Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, IV.VIII, p. 127.
[120] Mason, "The Communion of Citizens," 37. This brief gloss rushes over nuances in the evolution of Calvin's thinking on these matters, but it nevertheless accurately portrays the non-dualistic nature of his mature thought with regards to the spiritual and material dimensions of life and the church's (and state's) authority therein. For more, see John Witte, Jr., *The Reformation of Rights: Law, Religion, and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 56ff.
[121] Mason, "The Communion of Citizens," 38.
[122] Mason, "The Communion of Citizens," 39-41.
[123] Mason, "The Communion of Citizens," 42.
[124] Mason, "The Communion of Citizens," 44-45.

Lastly, Mason draws close connections to Calvin's thinking in one of the more difficult theoretical aspects of Rousseau's theory, which is the tension between dependence and freedom: a "double condition" of self-abnegation to unify with the sovereign and the seemingly paradoxical freedom that ensues.[125] On Mason's view, Rousseau, like Calvin, argues that the more a person, as a "self-interested individual," is subjugated, the more free the person is as a member of the community (Calvin) or the sovereign (Rousseau).[126]

Mason's work to draw out Rousseau's analogous connections and conceptual indebtedness to Calvin's thought is helpful, to be sure, both for understanding aspects of Rousseau's intellectual genealogy as well as their theoretical implications. As revealing as these connections are, however, Mason only gestures toward the matter of individual transformation in her comments about dual identity and mediated relations and does not develop it at any length. This limits the explanatory power of the theoretical connection between these two figures and minimizes a central aspect of their thinking. To make sense of this connection, a brief excursus of Calvin's soteriology is in order.

Calvin's theology is characterized first and foremost by an emphasis on God's sovereignty. Yet, as is the case for Luther and other Reformers, at the center of Calvin's theology is a decidedly Protestant account of salvation comprised of the doctrines of justification and sanctification. An important feature of Calvin's soteriology is his claim that salvation is the work of an "essential union" with Christ.[127] In this "mystical union," wherein the believer "is ingrafted

[125] Mason, "The Communion of Citizens," 46.
[126] Mason, "The Communion of Citizens," 47.
[127] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1957), Book III, xi, 6. J. Todd Billings suggests that while none of these three features of his soteriology (justification, sanctification, union with Christ) is unique to Calvin, the presence of all three and the way he holds them together are distinctive of his thought—especially in comparison to Luther and other Reformers. Billings, "John Calvin's Soteriology: On the Multifaceted 'Sum' of the Gospel," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 11, no. 4 (October 2009): 431.

into [Christ's] body," "[Christ] deigns to make us one with himself" to "glory in having a fellowship of righteousness with him."[128] Frequently using metaphors like adoption to explain this matter, Calvin's theology of union with Christ continued to develop over the course of his life and occupied an increasingly central place in his thought.[129] Calvin explains that union with Christ is both democratizing, marking the leveling "union of the head and members," and non-totalizing, in that the union entails not the loss of the self but a radically intimate "fellowship of righteousness with [Christ]."[130]

Calvin's soteriology can only be understood in reference to his doctrine of sin. On account of original sin, drawing on a strongly Augustinian tradition handed down through the first generation of Reformers, Calvin explains that humans are incapable of achieving the status of righteousness.[131] In other words, according to Calvin, humans are the inheritors and perpetuators of a legacy of transgression and guilt that prevents them from relating rightly to God.[132] Overcoming this divine estrangement, he argues, involves being "deemed righteous" and "accepted on account of [one's] righteousness" by God. For Calvin, *justification* refers to the process whereby an individual is received "into [God's] favor as if [the believer] were righteous."[133] The "as if" here is critical, given that he contends such favor is impossible to merit. Ultimately, Calvin presents a doctrine of justification by faith according to which the sins of a person are forgiven, and the person is imputed the righteousness of Christ.[134] This

[128] Calvin, *Institutes*, Book III, xi, 10.
[129] J. Todd Billings, "John Calvin's Soteriology," 430-441.
[130] Calvin, *Institutes*, Book III, xi, 10.
[131] Calvin, *Institutes*, Book III, xiv, 10-13.
[132] Calvin, *Institutes*, Book II, I, 8.
[133] Calvin, *Institutes*, Book III, xi, 2. Calvin explains that the term "justify" very basically means "to acquit form the charge of guilt." Calvin, *Institutes*, Book III, xi, 3. "…justification may be termed in one word the remission of sins." *Institutes*, Book III, xi, 22.
[134] Calvin, *Institutes,* Book III, xi, 2. The "imputation" of the righteousness of Christ is central for Calvin's doctrine of justification. Later he more clearly explains: "Hence, when God justifies us through the intercession of Christ, he

reestablishes one's relation to God, the sovereign, such that "God becomes, instead of a judge, an indulgent father."[135]

For Calvin and other early Protestants, justification through faith in Christ not only reestablishes a person's relation to God, but it also relieves them of the impossible burden of being vulnerable to the consequences of their imperfections. Calvin and other Reformers, most notably Luther, frame this as the freedom of being released from anxiety and necessity.[136] Freed from compulsion, the believer can "rise above the law" to reflectively consider God's commands to do good works. Only here can the law properly "teach, exhort, and urge [people] to be good" and "excite…to the study of purity and holiness."[137] For Calvin, this marks the emergence of the conscience, which involves the distance from necessity to "voluntarily obey the will of God."[138] The conscience is also important for discerning the things toward which God is "indifferent" and how to direct one's life on such matters.[139]

According to Calvin, reestablishing one's relationship to God thus leads to reestablishing one's relationship to morality. Calvin therefore argues that salvation also includes the gift of *sanctification*, or moral and spiritual "regeneration."[140] According to Calvin, sanctification entails aspiring "to integrity and purity of life."[141] While justification can be understood as being logically prior to sanctification, Calvin repeatedly stresses their inseparability: they are

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does not acquit us on a proof of our own innocence, but by an imputation of righteousness, so that though not righteous in ourselves, we are deemed righteous in Christ." Calvin, *Institutes*, Book III, xi, 3.
[135] Calvin, *Institutes*, Book III, xi, 1; Book III, xi, 4. Calvin calls faith "the instrument for receiving justification." *Institutes*, Book III, xi, 7. Also, *Institutes*, Book III, xi, 9.
[136] Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian" in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 607. Calvin, *Institutes,* Book III, xix.
[137] Calvin, *Institutes*, Book III, xix, 2.
[138] Calvin, *Institutes*, Book III, xix, 4.
[139] Calvin, *Institutes*, Book III, xix, 7.
[140] Calvin, *Institutes*, Book III, xi, 11.
[141] Calvin, *Institutes*, Book III, xi, 1.

inseparable gifts because they are inseparable in Christ.[142] As J. Todd Billings concisely summarizes, "while faith alone justifies, faith necessarily leads to an active life of pursuing holiness by the Spirit's power."[143] For Calvin, then, the gift of sanctification further contributes to the development of morality and the conscience by cultivating the appropriate knowledge of and desire for good works and by empowering the believer to accomplish them through spiritual renewal. Comprised of the doctrines of justification, sanctification, and union with Christ, Calvin's soteriology thus entails the transformation of a person's identity and interests and provides the necessary conditions for realizing true freedom.

To restate, Calvin claims that justification is a constitutive element of salvation, which attends to the belief that, as inheritors of original sin, humans are unable to enjoy unmediated relation with God. Accordingly, in order to reestablish this relation, humans are in need of being judged innocent and receiving approval by God. For Calvin, then, justification is the "first" step in the salvific process whereby humans are rescued from a precarious existence by reestablishing their most consequential relation (to God, who is sovereign) in an ideal context of acceptance and benevolence. Notably, Calvin's thoroughly Protestant thinking is committed to an egalitarianism both before God and in Christ.

Also for Calvin, this relation is reestablished and set aright through the mediation of and union with a third party, Jesus Christ. *Qua* individual, the human person is unable to relate rightly to God. In union with Christ, the person is imputed Christ's righteousness and thereby justified, setting their relations with God aright. In this scheme, the person is justified by and relates to God through Christ, *as* Christ, and hence the importance for Calvin of this Christological union. What is more, by reestablishing a person's relation to God, Calvin claims

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[142] Calvin, *Institutes*, Book III, xvi, 1.
[143] Billings, "John Calvin's Soteriology," 439.

that justification by faith in Christ relieves a person of the need to become righteous under one's own power. On this view, Christian freedom begins with this release from necessity and compulsion and the emergence of the conscience that follows.

Returning to Rousseau, for him, in initially forming and joining society humans are exposed to natural inequalities of power and to institutionalized inequalities of wealth and status. As well, native human moral and intellectual capacities will likely be squandered or remain underdeveloped so long as they reside in the state of nature or in contexts of severe inequality. These problems are endemic to relations of individual dependence and are perpetuated by problematic social arrangements. Rousseau argues that his theory of the social contract effectively rescues persons from this precarious existence by reestablishing their consequential relations—their relations to others and to the sovereign—in a context of genuine egalitarianism.

Rousseau argues that humans are rescued by union with and the mediation of a third party, in this case the body politic. Only as a member of the body politic, he argues, can one relate equally and safely to others. According to Rousseau, this entails relating to individuals not merely *through* the body politic but also *as* the body politic. He explains that by way of this union, persons relate to one another not *qua* individual, but "*as* a member of the sovereign."[144] Rousseau concludes that by entering into a contract, individuals "have…made an advantageous exchange of an uncertain and precarious mode of existence for another that is better and surer." This, he argues, is the initial step to true freedom, or, as he puts it, "natural independence is exchanged for liberty."[145]

Recall that, for Calvin, the "second" gift of salvation is moral and spiritual regeneration. Prior to salvation, the person is unable to relate rightly both to God *and* to good works. Having

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[144] Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, I.VII, p. 149. Emphasis mine.
[145] Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, II.IV, p. 158.

one's relation to God reestablished through unity with Christ frees the believer from necessity and, by being sanctified, empowers them for proper moral understanding and action. Only after developing the conscience and a voluntary relation to principles or reasons for action can a person become truly moral. In this way, Calvin argues that both justification and sanctification through union with Christ are necessary for the full realization of genuine freedom.

Rousseau argues in several places that a person's political context profoundly influences their moral development, for better or worse. In *Social Contract*, Rousseau argues that his version of the social contract provides the framework and conditions for the formation of true morality. He explains that entering into the social contract is practically empowering and morally formative: "[it] produces quite a remarkable change in man…and gives his actions a moral quality they previously lacked."[146] Distinctive to his conception of the social contract is an individual's transformation involving a person's identity and interests that results in the realization of "*moral* liberty."[147] In such a state, he explain that a person's "faculties are exercised and developed, his ideas are broadened, his feelings are ennobled, and his entire soul is elevated."[148]

Seeing the distinctively Calvinist logic at work in Rousseau's social contract theory is genealogically insightful, and it raises awareness of three important aspects of his work that otherwise remain under-appreciated. First, it indicates the profound extent to which Rousseau's thinking has been influenced by and depends on religious theoretical and conceptual resources. Second, it highlights and fills out the critical point that individuals are to undergo a

[146] Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, I.VIII, p. 150. For Rousseau, the status of "morality" comes from having one's actions (or intentions) align with an objective standard, even if it is socially constructed.
[147] Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, I.VIII, p. 151. Emphasis mine.
[148] Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, I.VIII, p. 151. This lofty and expansive description of individual transformation certainly invites the analogy to salvation.

transformation upon being incorporated into their political community that serves their own wellbeing as well as the wellbeing of the polity. To read Rousseau as a totalitarian or simple collectivist is to overlook the nuance of this point. Third, locating the analogies between Calvin and Rousseau helpfully draws out the constitutive parts of Rousseau's account of individual transformation, community life, and how they relate to one another. Most importantly, preserved among the analogies with Calvin is a sense that individual transformation and wellbeing are features of membership in the context of a transcendent community.

Conclusion

At the very heart of Rousseau's analytical and constructive social and political works is concern for the problem of alienation. Although it is not always immediately identifiable in his writings, Rousseau ought to be thought of, perhaps even firstly, as a theorist of alienation. Not only does he contribute an identification and analysis of the phenomenon, but it is also a prominent thread that runs through his varied social and political writings.

In this chapter, I have argued that Rousseau's three *Discourses* and *Social Contract* introduce two distinct forms of alienation. The first form, most prominent in his first two *Discourses*, refers primarily to the domain of social life and pertains to the tension between a person's natural and inwardly known identity and their outward, socially constructed or associated identity. Rousseau argues that the conditions of modern life, especially those created and worsened by modern cultural and economic institutions, toxically inflame *amour-propre*, or regard for esteem and social standing, and compel humans to live outside of themselves, at odds with who they are and know themselves to be. He claims that this form of alienation not only results in the loss of personal wholeness and undermines the possibility of meaningful human

relationships, but that it also poisons social life with overly competitive, manipulative, and disingenuous actors.

More prominent in his *Third Discourse* and *Social Contract*, the second form of alienation in Rousseau's writings refers primarily to the political domain of life and names the experience of significant disjuncture between an individual's identity and values and those of their political community. When crafting his own political theory, Rousseau pays considerable attention to the importance of aligning the commitments and concerns of a polity's members with those of the polity as a whole, which ideally involves mutual transformation. This is of course unsurprising for a republican theorist like Rousseau, but his stated interests are not only the stability of the political community. He also claims that such an alignment can overcome the problematic experience of individuals living at odds with themselves for living amidst and being held to values and standards that are profoundly divergent from their own.

I have posited that these are two forms of the problem of alienation, which I have identified generally as the conflict or division a person experiences between subjective (personal) and objective (shared) dimensions of life regarding matters of identity and normativity. I have argued that, as his thought develops across the four texts considered here, he ultimately turns to the domain of the political for a solution that overcomes both forms. For Rousseau, I have shown that this solution involves thinking about the individual's relationship to their political community as an organic, part-whole relation, and that membership therein entails a certain transformation of a person's identity and interests. That is to say, Rousseau's solution entails the development of internal and intrinsically valuable relations established by an individual with their political community as a whole and their fellow members as equal, constitutive parts. Finally, I have indicated how, in the most robust version of his constructive project (*Social*

Contract), Rousseau employs and depends rather profoundly on religious concepts, themes, and patterns of thought. This occurs explicitly, in his invocation of the figure of the Legislator and civil religion, and implicitly in his utilization of a distinctly Calvinist logic, all of which play a crucial role in how he imagines overcoming alienation.

With all of this in view, I contend that we can best understand Rousseau's solution to the problem of alienation as an attempt to secure for individuals a sense of equal belonging to their political community. I have gestured toward the concept of political belonging already, but it seems to be the concept best able to capture his solution. In this usage, political belonging refers to the experience of being and knowing oneself as an equally constitutive part of one's political community, such that a meaningful congruence can be drawn between one's identity and values and those of their political community. As mentioned, interpreters have often contrasted Rousseau's conception of alienation with a sense of wholeness. I certainly agree that wholeness is an accurate description of an unalienated life, but, at least on the surface, the concept of wholeness fails to reckon with the decidedly *communal* and more specifically *political* dimension of alienation. Attending to the problem of wholeness also suppresses what Rousseau presents as the vertical relation to one's political community, which occupies a position of transcendence with respect to its members, and the other details of his argument necessary for its overcoming. Suggested by the very notion of belonging and evident throughout his writings, one of Rousseau's signal yet under-appreciated contributions is his reintroduction of a dimension of transcendence to theorizations of modern political life.

Such a sense of belonging is not absent from the secondary literature, although it is typically mentioned only in a vague, offhand, or summative manner.[149] For example, Dent

[149] For example, Cladis writes, "In Rousseau's model, society is a sui generis collective being—a political body—and the members of that body enjoy the freedom of belonging and the peace that flows from a unity of duty and

rightly notes that Rousseau's "general thought" is "that without a fairly widespread sense of belonging shared by many citizens we have a fragile society little concerned for the benefit of all." Dent then summarizes that, for Rousseau, "How that sense is sustained and consolidated must, therefore, be an urgent concern for anyone interested in a just society." It is for this reason, he concludes, that Rousseau is so interested in attending to the collective practices and habits of a people.[150] However, Dent's attention in these passages is only on the significance of belonging for the political community itself.

Allan Bloom better captures the personal or subjective dimension of this when he writes that Rousseau's *Social Contract* offers the possibility for humans to no longer experience "an opposition between…inside and outside."[151] While he does not use the term "belonging", Bloom has something quite like it in mind when he writes, "For such a man [who does not experience the opposition between inside and outside] really to exist, there must be a community into which he is woven so tightly that he cannot think of himself separately from it, his very existence formed as part of this whole… Only in this way is he autonomous and does he maintain his natural inalienable freedom."[152] While the Romantic republican picture Bloom presents is not without its problems, he clearly articulates Rousseau's concern and fills in the subjective aspect of belonging in a way that complements Dent's portrayal.

Stepping back to get the project at hand in view, I submit that Rousseau makes an important and still yet to be fully appreciated intervention in modern theorizations of social and

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desire." Cladis, *Public Vision, Private Lives*, 132. According to Cladis's reading of Rousseau, "Peace is satisfaction with one's private life but also the experience of social belonging." Cladis, *Public Vision, Private Lives*, 188.

[150] Dent, *Rousseau*, 179.

[151] Allan Bloom, "Rousseau's Critique of Liberal Constitutionalism," in *The Legacy of Rousseau*, ed. Clifford Owen and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 157.

[152] Bloom, "Rousseau's Critique of Liberal Constitutionalism," 158. Contrast belonging and what Bloom is referring to here with a concept like "solidarity", which captures something important about the point but remains somewhat abstract. Cladis names solidarity as a concern for Rousseau in Cladis, *Public Vision, Private Lives*, 129. It seems to me that a sense of "belonging with" better captures the experiential dimension than does a concept like solidarity.

political life by framing and identifying the problem of alienation and reintroducing a dimension of transcendence or verticality to modern theorizations of political life. Concerns about his proposed solution to the problem likely persist, but I contend that the way he structures alienation as a diremption of subjective and objective dimensions of life that can occur in different domains but is finally overcome in the realization of a certain relation to one's *political* community rightly captures the nature of the problem and the structure of the solution. I have argued that contemporary life is still burdened by the problem of alienation, in part because we have failed to recognize it as such, and I now trace its theoretical development from Rousseau across different thinkers and contexts. Importantly, Rosseau's conception of civil religion as functioning to facilitate the relations between persons and their political community as the context of a larger life is a critical contribution to theorizing political belonging, which will remain a topic of interest throughout the duration of this project.

Before moving on, however, I want to point out two features of Rousseau's solution to alienation, to how he theoretically imagines establishing political belonging, that are especially important as this dissertation unfolds. First, Rousseau's proposed solution is structurally one of self-donation, meaning that it requires the willingness of a person to undergo a voluntary transformation of their identity and interests on the promise of receiving a larger, more expansive sense of freedom and flourishing.[153] As I have explained, Rousseau claims that this solidly grounds an egalitarianism and argues why it is beneficial to persons. Nonetheless, I want to flag the importance of this aspect of self-giving in the structure of his thinking, aware of the troubling implications it might have.

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[153] Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, I.VI, p. 148. The concept of self-donation has rich theological resonance (for example, in the notion of *kenosis*).

It is prudent to ask Rousseau what distinguishes between good and bad forms of belonging, knowing that his account of self-donation might invite toxic forms of belonging. To be sure, his model is premised on a steep ask that presumably requires considerable trust in one's fellow citizens and political community as a whole. Rousseau has offered some values that might help us to think about the difference between better and worse political communities—values such as equality, freedom, and belonging—but he clearly has not thought enough about how they might inform a theory of (or the conditions for) *just* belonging. This point will become especially clear in the coming chapters, where I will examine the writings of W. E. B. Du Bois and Martin Luther King Jr., who have ample reasons *not* to trust their fellow citizens and political community, and who offer some suggestions for how to address these concerns.

Second, on Rousseau's description of the mores, habits, and practices that shape individuals into becoming a people—being those things that are crucial for the formation of a just, stable, and unalienated political community—one cannot shake the fact that his theory could easily be used to support the development of an oppressively homogenous state. This concern is only worsened by Rousseau's talk of an organic community that requires the total self-donation of its members. Although I have indicated elements of Rousseau's thought that help to resist totalitarian and fascist readings of his proposal, insofar as these might be convincing, they speak at best to his intent and not to the likelihood that such arrangements might favor, encourage, or result in an ethnically, racially, and/or culturally homogenous political community.[154] To put the point sharply, to what extent can the accounts of belonging offered by Rousseau allow for and be hospitable to meaningful pluralism and difference? Readers of Rousseau have long struggled with just this question. Not to be settled here, these two features will travel with us over the next

[154] This point is forcefully made by H.D. Forbes, "Rousseau, Ethnicity, and Difference," in *The Legacy of Rousseau*, ed. Clifford Owen and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997).

several chapters, and it will remain an important question as to how a theory of political belonging might not succumb to and, more fully, how such a theory might convincingly prevent the troubling outcomes that accompany these points.

2. G. W. F. Hegel: Self-Knowledge, Recognition, and Political Belonging

G.W.F. Hegel has long been recognized as a prominent theorist of alienation, not least because the actual term (*Entfremdung*) plays an important role in his work. However, my interest lies not in tracing Hegel's use of the term or providing an analysis of its appearance throughout his numerous writings.[1] Instead, I will attend to the significance and role of the *theme* of alienation in Hegel's writings, which is broader than Hegel's strict terminological usage but nevertheless congruent with it, and I will do so by considering it as a lived phenomenon.

References to alienation often appear in Hegel's writings to speak to a separation, estrangement, or opposition between two objects that ought to stand in harmonious relation. I am interested, however, in examining the nature and meaning of alienation as it is experienced by and among persons, which will guide my consideration of the theme (and that of political belonging) as it arises in his works. My task is therefore to draw out and clarify the experiential significance of alienation in this thinking and its connection to political belonging, which are features of his thought not always explicit in his writings and often under-appreciated.

I will argue in this chapter that Hegel offers a rich account of alienation as the problem of unsatisfactory knowledge of oneself as a free, self-determining being, which he contends is ultimately overcome by attaining a sense of belonging to one's political community.[2] As I will explain, Hegel's theorizations of alienation and political belonging bear broad structural similarities to Rousseau's; however, Hegel's are more expansive and deeply woven into his

[1] For a helpful summary of just this, including the related term "estrangement" [*Entäusserung*], see Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 35-38.
[2] For a similar but very brief reading of Hegel on alienation, see Jaeggi, *Alienation*, 8-9.

distinct philosophical system, salient aspects of which I will outline below. Furthermore, I will show that, like Rousseau, religion plays a key role in Hegel's account of political belonging in a way that locates him in the tradition of civil religious thinking.

This chapter will proceed as follows. I will begin by contextualizing and outlining Hegel's philosophical project before locating the theme of alienation in it. After doing so, I will carefully examine alienation and its role in Hegel's account of the development of self-consciousness and Spirit in his *Phenomenology*. Next, I will briefly turn to Hegel's political theory and consider his argument regarding the importance of the *political* community for overcoming alienation. I will then explore the importance of religion for his theorization of political community and for overcoming alienation by locating him in the tradition of civil religious thinking. In conclusion, I will reflect on the distinctive aspects of Hegel's philosophy with respect to the themes of alienation and political belonging, as well as the importance of religion for them.

Hegel's corpus is both sizable and notoriously complex, but a shrewd selection of a few key texts is sufficient for my purposes. To best present alienation and political belonging in Hegel's thought, I will attend primarily to his early *Phenomenology of Spirit* because it offers his richest account of alienation and remains thoroughly committed to the frame of human experience.[3] To consider the extension of his thinking on the matters at hand, I will also engage, though in a more limited manner, three works representing his mature thought: *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History,* and *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*.

[3] With Josiah Royce, I also find the *Phenomenology* to possess "greater freedom of imagination and…constructive power" than his later works (although I do not agree with him that Hegel's later works are so straight-forwardly hampered by a troubling conservatism). Josiah Royce, *Lectures on Modern Idealism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1919), 136.

Hegel's Understanding of the Problem Besetting Philosophy and His Constructive Solution

The sophistication, distinct use of language, and unique approach of Hegel's philosophy can prove quite disorienting, making it difficult to approach and ripe for misinterpretation. These features also raise steep problems for any brief treatment of his works. Because of this, I will provide here at the outset an outline of his understanding of the central philosophical problem he takes himself to inherit and the structure of his constructive solution in the most general terms, tailored to the interests of my project and focused on the individual self and its experience.

On Hegel's view, modern philosophy had developed up to and through the work of his predecessor Immanuel Kant by way of a profound deepening of—and increasing importance given to—the *internality* of a self-conscious self, construed in sharp distinction from what is understood to fall "outside" of it, theoretically, metaphysically, and/or empirically. Accordingly, Hegel thinks, the modern self is constitutively confronted with the problem of obtaining *satisfactory knowledge* of itself as a rational and free (that is, self-determining) being. On his account, the self-conscious self is both a subject and an object among others in the world, and he takes philosophy to have been unable to provide an adequately synthetic account that holds these two dimensions of selfhood together. Significantly, this reportedly leaves the self unable to *know* itself adequately as the rational and free being it essentially is.

Given his view of the self-conscious self, the lack of satisfactory self-knowledge is not merely a theoretical concern, although it is surely that; on Hegel's thinking, it is also an ethical and an existential crisis that I refer to as alienation. On Hegel's picture, alienation is a profound problem for a fundamentally self-conscious and self-determining being whose very existence and freedom are *expressions* of its self-understanding. Being free and knowing oneself as free are

therefore inseparable for Hegel's radically reflexive conception of the self. Because my focus is on human experience, I will attend more on the latter, although I will attempt not to lose sight of its relation to the former. To put this in different terms, freedom, for Hegel (not dissimilar from Rousseau), is less about possessing the capacity for causal efficacy than it is being able to locate oneself in or to affirmatively identify oneself with one's actions and one's own development.

I contend that, for Hegel, self-knowledge can only be satisfactory if it meets three conditions: 1.) it is determinate and particular (not overly abstract and general), 2.) it affirms or includes the essential capacity of self-conscious selves for self-determination, and 3.) it is confirmed or verified by some source outside of the self that grants it the status of objectivity. As these conditions make clear, the self is dependent upon some confirmation *from without* for stable and satisfactory knowledge of itself as a self-determining being. In more Hegelian terms, self-knowledge—and therefore freedom—is *mediated by otherness*.[4] As I interpret Hegel, when a self experiences the failure of that mediation to be satisfactory for failing to meet one or more of the criteria noted above, the self experiences alienation.

[4] The primary and secondary sources on which I depend for this rendering of Hegel's project will soon become clear, but I must note here the similarity of my reading to Robert Williams', who locates the theme of recognition at the very center of Hegel's thought. Indeed, determinate self-knowledge (as I am referring to it) results from recognition. What I describe as alienation in Hegel's thought is in fact the *experience* of mis-recognition or the absence of recognition. That said, I am focused more on the experience and perspective of the individual self and so focus rather intently on self-consciousness and self-understanding, whereas Williams offers a more general account of Hegel's ethics, his theory of freedom, and the importance of actualization for them. What is more, I prefer the language of belonging to refer to the final overcoming of alienation rather than that of recognition both because of its experiential referent and the fact that recognition does not quite so intuitively capture the important communal aspect involved in its overcoming. As a representative summary of Williams' take on the matter, he writes, "For Hegel, recognition mediates the affirmative consciousness of freedom and plays a crucial role in the formation of the ethical sphere… Recognition decenters the modern concept of the subject found in Descartes and Kant, not but displacing it as in structuralism, but by transforming and expanding it into intersubjectivity." Further, he writes "Recognition is the process wherein and whereby freedom becomes both actual and ethical… for Hegel autonomous freedom is intersubjectively mediated. Hegel believes that genuine autonomy is achieved only in relation and community with others." Robert R. Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 2, 6.

Here it is important to note that Hegel's philosophical project maintains a significant ontological position. For Hegel, consciousness is an emergent property of being and thus not ontologically distinct from it. In his sights, then, is also the troubling dualism (genetically related to that between subjectivity and objectivity) between thought and being or mind and world, which for the self is experienced also as the distinction between mind and body. Hegel therefore argues that the satisfactory self-knowledge sought by an embodied self whose mindedness is not essentially distinct from its embodiment *must also be embodied*, being not merely theoretical and formal (as he took the Kantian solution to be) but *actual* and *concrete*. As I will explain, Hegel concludes that selves can only attain satisfactory knowledge of themselves as rational and free by identifying themselves as members of—by *belonging to*—a community united in a common life.

In Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, alienation takes two basic forms that are roughly analogous to those I located in Rousseau's writings. Similar to Rousseau, for Hegel these two forms follow from human dependencies on 1.) other persons and 2.) a socio-political context or community. Relations of dependence stand as immediate obstacles to freedom, and so overcoming alienation is a matter of coming to know oneself as free in these dependencies.

First, alienation is primarily experienced as a matter of uncertainty regarding a self's status and agency as a particular being in embodied and social space. This form follows from the self's attempt to make sense of itself as both a subject *and* an object in the world with others. Hegel argues that this first form of alienation is overcome by entering into relations of mutual recognition with other selves, in which an other becomes bound up with the self's self-knowledge and rational agency.

Second, alienation is experienced as a matter of uncertainty regarding the self's status and agency in the context of a socio-political community. Such contexts profoundly shape the

conditions for individual freedom, and, according to Hegel, are the only entities capable of true self-determination. He therefore claims that selves must come to identify with and know themselves as members of certain sorts of human communities in order to enjoy genuine freedom.[5] Again similar to Rousseau, Hegel argues that this second form of alienation, and by extension the first as well, is finally overcome by attaining of a sense of *belonging* to one's political community.

Here it is important to see *political belonging* as referring to the self-conscious experience of having the self's status and capacity as a rational and free being protected, promoted, and reflected back by the fellow members, institutions, culture, and governance of its political community. Such external or "objective" confirmation secures satisfactory self-understanding and attaining a sense of belonging to a "body" uniquely capable of true self-determination (the properly ordered political community) overcomes both forms of alienation. Further, Hegel's thinking on these matters clearly indicates that the political community stands as a transcendent context *within which* selves locate themselves as parts relating to a whole. Accordingly, belonging to a political community involves coming to understand oneself as a legitimate *expression* of that community's ongoing life. An important feature of such a part-whole relation is that the individual and the community relate in dynamic (albeit asymmetrical) reciprocation: the life of the individual manifests, contributes to, and enhances the life of the community, and the life of the community grounds and makes possible the individual's continued existence and satisfactory self-knowledge. As I will explain, Hegel suggests that

[5] These two forms map onto the two prominent perspectives in the *Phenomenology*: the individual (the perspective in the chapters on consciousness, self-consciousness, and reason) and the communal (the perspective in the chapters on Spirit). With a slightly different focus, Williams notes three "levels" of recognition (which, again, on my description refers that which results in non-alienation) in Hegel's thought that map onto the three domains of Ethical Life as presented in the *Philosophy of Right*: one referring to the context of interpersonal and familial relations, a second referring to the relation between individuals and institutions, and a third pertaining to matters of the state. Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*, 3.

political belonging requires persons to relate vertically to their political community (as an encompassing, larger context of meaning) and that something like religious commitments might help to facilitate this sort of relationship.

Although alienation on my rendering refers primarily to a subjective state or internal disposition, in light of the (especially ontological) claims Hegel makes about the nature of consciousness and selfhood certain subjective *and* objective conditions must obtain for it to be overcome. This point introduces a critical principle for normatively distinguishing between better and worse policies and communal arrangements. That is to say, because of his philosophical anthropology, overcoming alienation for Hegel cannot simply involve bringing a self's self-knowledge into alignment with whatever one's social "world" says about it. Such a view would be helplessly conservative and potentially endorse a range of individually harmful conditions. Instead, Hegel holds that there are norms deriving from the nature of self-conscious selfhood that govern both the subjective and objective domains. For Hegel, alienation will persist until objective conditions emerge that promote the self's satisfactory self-knowledge and self-expression as a rational and free being. Importantly, then, Hegel is neither a relativist nor a subjectivist. He holds that any individual or social value that undermines a self's free self-determination is illegitimate. That said, Hegel is a pluralist in the sense that these conditions can conceivably be provided by any number of varying forms and ways of life.

In the previous chapter, I identified Rousseau as the first modern thinker to clearly address the problem of alienation. Despite his differences with Rousseau on several important points, Hegel extends several key trajectories of Rousseau's thinking.[6] Hegel clearly indicates his indebtedness to Rousseau on numerous occasions, but, to my knowledge, never explicitly on the

[6] Their theoretical similarities surely include (and stem from) common influences. Perhaps obvious in his prominent use of the concept of "spirit," Hegel, like Rousseau, is heavily indebted to Montesquieu.

topic of alienation. That said, Hegel is deeply influenced by Rousseau on at least four points of interest for this project.

First, although painfully reductive, it is possible to see the through-line of Hegel's constructive work on ethics and politics as a dense theoretical elaboration of Rousseau's portrayal of human freedom as the capacity to "contribut[e], as a free agent, to [one's] own operations."[7] More modestly, Hegel is clearly indebted to Rousseau's attention to a dimension of self-conscious reflexivity and self-understanding as fundamental to ethics and human freedom (aspects of which, like quite a few theoretical matters, are also developed by Kant). Like Rousseau, Hegel frames the matter of the human good in terms of freedom or self-determination. Second, as suggested above, in acknowledging the inevitability and necessity of human dependency, both thinkers attempt to theorize how human dependencies might be rendered conducive to genuine freedom rather than remaining merely an impediment to be overcome or a threat to be neutralized. What is more, both Rousseau and Hegel aim to theorize human dependence, and by extension the political community, as positively contributing to the wellbeing and freedom of selves in ways other than organizing the coordinated non-interference of individuals. Third, Rousseau and Hegel theorize the political community with organic language and metaphors.[8] Fourth, both thinkers claim that a person's wellbeing and freedom are profoundly conditioned by the recognition received from others. For both Rousseau and Hegel, the "other" occasions a self's awareness of the difference between its own internal sense of itself and how it is known to be in social and embodied space. In other words, the gaze of an other at

[7] Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 44.

[8] Like Rousseau, Hegel's philosophy is also structurally informed by Christian concepts and patterns of thought. However, unlike for Rousseau, this is a much more commonly recognized fact. See, for example, Nicholas Adams, *Eclipse of Grace: Divine and Human Action in Hegel* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

least initially tends to unsettle a self's self-knowledge, which occasions an experience of alienation. Here, however, the two thinkers diverge in important ways.

Whereas Rousseau presents the difference occasioned by the other as an essentially negative experience, which is by extension his take on alienation as well, Hegel's dialectical philosophy understands alienation as a troubling yet potentially *generative* phenomenon. On one hand, Hegel claims that necessary for the development of the self is a process of individuation, of defining oneself against one's others, that is quite often alienating. On the other, a key characteristic of Hegel's conception of Spirit is that its realization involves overcoming the alienation of its members, for whatever reason it may have occurred.

According to Hegel, the development of the self involves the emergence of a sense of one's own particularity in contrast to or distinction from others and the (social, political, and natural) world, only after which it is possible to come to see oneself in mutually constitutive relations with others. Because he thinks that the individuality and particularity of persons is critical for and must be preserved in the realization of Spirit, alienation as the experience of that difference is a necessary and generative step in the self's development. From another angle, he also thinks that alienation is an important though not always inevitable occurrence in relationships and communities as they strive to more fully realize themselves by incorporating the full freedom and individuality of their members.

These salient differences between Rousseau and Hegel can be accounted for by two fundamental reasons. First, as something of a Romantic naturalist, Rousseau seems to hold that individuals possess by nature something like a more or less fixed identity. Hegel's view, on the other hand, is that the self is radically self-determining (constrained of course by certain biological, social, and material factors) and is essentially a self-interpreting and self-forming

being. To be sure, Hegel's conception of the self maintains its own integrity, internality, and particularity, but its identity and sense of self are radically dynamic and never fixed by nature. Second, Hegel's metaphysical "monism" (for lack of a better term)—that, despite manifold, genuine existing differences, all that exists is fundamentally *of the same substance*—is committed to the view that no differences among, between, or within beings are metaphysically ultimate.[9] Therefore, Hegel thinks that self-conscious rational freedom, itself an emergence of or a potentiality internal to being itself, can and *should*, in and through the self-conscious rationality of self-conscious and self-determining beings, come to terms with the unity that pervades all differences, conceptual, logical, or metaphysical.

Hegel's interpreters have tended to characterize alienation in his writings in one of two ways. One way has been to identify alienation as a defective, broken, or estranged relation that stands in need of "reconciliation."[10] Presenting Hegel's thinking on the matter in this way is not inaccurate, but it is incomplete. Such an account understates Hegel's view and risks being somewhat *un*-Hegelian for abstractly theorizing the matter from mostly outside of human experience, leaving inadequately addressed what the experience of alienation *means* for persons. Further, this alienation-and-reconciliation picture can unfortunately *flatten* Hegel's constructive thinking, as it tends to downplay or under appreciate the transcendent dimension and vertical

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[9] Whether Hegel is able to convincingly maintain the position of internally or self-differentiating being, for which differences are authentic but not metaphysically final (that is, differences are neither superficial nor do they indicate the existence of ontologically different kinds of being), is another matter. But my reading of his philosophy requires grasping his dependence on this position. As well, it is important to note that this does *not* mean Hegel's philosophy is one of "closure" or "totality," precisely because the self-interpreting and self-determining nature of selves (as "spiritual" beings) invites infinite variations and developments.

[10] For example, Peter C. Hodgson, "Alienation and Reconciliation in Hegelian and Post-Hegelian Perspective," *Modern Theology* 2, no. 1 (1985); Michael O. Hardimon, "The Project of Reconciliation: Hegel's Social Philosophy." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 21, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 165-195; and Mark Lilla, "Hegel and the Political Theology of Reconciliation," *The Review of Metaphysics* 54 (June 2001). Hardimon's argument strongly implies a vertical relation to one's socio-political "world," as do his references to feeling "at home" in it, but he never addresses it as such.

relation that is fundamental to it. The second prominent way has been to identify alienation as the experience of persons not having reasonable recourse to standing norms for rational agency. This way suggests that alienation refers to a person's experience of not having access to or being able to provide what counts for satisfactory explanation for their actions.[11] This way better attends to the experience of alienation and its relationship to self-conscious freedom and the Ethical Life of a community, but it is limited by a restricted focus on reason-giving for human action.

Despite the enormous secondary literature on Hegel's thought, the concern and perspective I am offering have not yet been adequately considered. Michael Hardimon's *Hegel's Social Philosophy*, Lydia Moland's *Hegel on Political Identity*, and Charles Taylor's *Hegel* are the full-length works on Hegel most attuned to alienation, belonging, and the related matters that occupy my attention here, but each is limited in important ways.[12] Hardimon's text rightly asserts that Hegel conceives of persons as both individual and social beings, but he does not provide a robust and adequate argument for *why* Hegel holds this view or for how these two different aspects relate to one another.[13] Nor does his analysis attend in any real way to the verticality involved in Hegel's thinking about the individual's relation to the state.[14] Moland's work is in

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[11] Dean Moyar, "Self-Completing Alienation," in *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit: A Critical Guide*, eds. Dean Moyar and Michael Quante (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Although it does not exhaust his portrayal of alienation in Hegel's thought, aspects of such a view is evident in Taylor, *Hegel*, 384.
[12] Michael O. Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy: The Project of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Lydia L. Moland, *Hegel on Political Identity: Patriotism, Nationality, Cosmopolitanism* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2011); and Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1975). As noted, Williams's *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition* is also an important text to include in this group.
[13] Hardimon simply states that, for Hegel, individuals are social beings for depending on society for "biological, social and cultural needs" and also "for the realization of their distinctly human capacities, such as thought, language, and reason." Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy*, 153, and, further, 154-173. As I have suggested, I take Hegel to be arguing more specifically that individuals are dependent upon others and their community for the determinate self-knowledge necessary to live a full life. Not unrelated, it is surprising how little a role recognition plays in Hardimon's text. Further, He nicely describes the self-interpreting and expressive nature of human persons, but he does not really extend this line of thinking. Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy*, 43-52.
[14] As an aside, I also differ with Hardimon's portrayal of what he takes to be the purely "subjective" purpose and contextual nature of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: "Hegel maintains that in the modern social world, reflective

some ways closer aligned to my own, but her focus is narrowly limited to the formation of human desires for their reflective self-identification as a necessary condition for agency.[15] What is more, both Hardimon's and Moland's works are primarily studies of Hegel's political thought, whereas my analysis will focus on the more expansive *Phenomenology*. Taylor's text is almost uniquely attuned to the lived, experiential dimension of Hegel's thought and especially to the verticality involved in what I refer to as belonging, but his reading of Hegel is hampered by a problematic "cosmic spirit" interpretation.[16]

A Note on Hegel Interpretation

Given the rich development in the field of Hegel interpretation over the last fifty years, especially in the context of Anglophone philosophy, it is common practice to locate oneself within recent debates on the topic. Among other reasons, doing so helps to clarify, up front, where a writer stands with respect to several key aspects of Hegel's thought and why the writer draws on the secondary literature that they do. Although some of the implications of this debate are not salient to the limited scope my project, I will offer some brief remarks to clarify my own position.

The notable "post-Kantian" intervention in Hegelian scholarship made by Klaus Hartmann, Robert Pippin, Terry Pinkard, and others has helped to unearth a dimension of

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individuals experience 'pure subjective alienation.' They are *subjectively* alienated because they feel estranged from its arrangements, which they regard as alien and hostile. But their subjective alienation is *pure* (unaccompanied by objective alienation) because, contrary to appearances, the world they inhabit is in fact a home." Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy*, 133. Hardimon terms his understanding alienation and reconciliation as a matter of whether one's world is a "home," a concept with an implied but unexplored vertical dimension.

[15] Her conception of "*concrete freedom*" refers to "the individual's ability, developed through her interactions with others and within rational institutions, to mold her desires in such a way that she can reflectively endorse them." This is undoubtedly a significant *part* of Hegel's picture of freedom and the self, but it is unduly limited for my analysis. Moland, *Hegel on Political Identity*, 17.

[16] Taylor, *Hegel*, 87-94. More on this below.

complexity in Hegel's works and offers a plausible, well-reasoned, and coherent reading of Hegel's *oeuvre*. Focusing on the Kantian theme of "apperceptive unity," such readings eschew the strongly metaphysical approaches that had previously dominated the field and offer rigorous interpretations of Hegel as something of a social-contextual epistemologist.[17] More palatable with trends and commitments in contemporary philosophy (especially some forms of pragmatism), post-Kantian readings have gained considerable traction in especially the North American context. As interpretations of Hegel, however, I do not find them entirely convincing.[18]

On my view, Hegel's thought is at once more embodied and ambitious than the post-Kantian readings readily allow. I therefore find them too narrow with respect to both the texts themselves and the "spirit" of Hegel's thought more generally. I take Hegel to be quite clearly aiming at the development of a truly global, synthetic philosophical project—integrating the physical sciences, philosophy, religion, and politics—that strives to account for mind *and* world, their positive relation, and the matter of embodiment.

That said, the ontological dimension of Hegel's position is not a discrete artifact of his thought. Rather, it grounds and ties together many different elements of his systematic philosophy. My view does not commit to reading Hegel as an uncritical or naïve ("pre-Kantian") metaphysician, but I do take him to be saying something positive about ontology. I therefore find

[17] Charles Taylor's *Hegel* is typically referred to as representative of the strong metaphysical readings, and a similar reading has been prominently defended more recently in Frederick Beiser, *Hegel* (New York: Routledge, 2005). The standard texts of the post-Kantian readings mentioned are Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfaction of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); and Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). For a lucid explanation and forceful defense of this position, see Thomas A. Lewis, *Religion, Modernity, and Politics in Hegel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 60-96.

[18] That said, the sort of reading I offer resonates with many key aspects of this line, although it is different in some important ways, as indicated below. In fact, their focus on apperception connects to my own on self-knowledge. Most significantly, however, I do not approach Hegel from the same angle, and with the same specific Kantian problem in mind, as proponents of the post-Kantian line do.

readings like those offered by Stephen Houlgate and Ludwig Siep, and even important aspects of Charles Taylor's—whose "cosmic spirit" reading is indeed too metaphysically heavy-handed or "top down" for the organic nature of Hegel's thought—to speak more accurately to the encompassing (dare I say, "metaphysical") scope of Hegel's vision.[19]

To say something more about my own approach, I read Hegel, specifically though not only regarding matters of ethics and politics, as a post-Kantian Aristotelian. Hegel's indebtedness to Aristotle is obvious and well-documented, and he often approvingly references what appears to be a broadly Aristotelian framing of Ethical Life in Ancient Greece. For the purposes of this project, I mean by these two terms several specific things.[20]

I identify Hegel as an Aristotelian for four main reasons. First, like Aristotle, Hegel is a *eudaimonist*. The respective conceptions of the moral life that Aristotle and Hegel offer are teleological and anchored in the proper functioning of the human person according to its nature as a reasoning being.[21] Second, both thinkers have a relational conception of human wellbeing.

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[19] Briefly, with Stephen Houlgate, I take the general trajectory of Hegel's thought to be tracing the emergence of "being itself becom[ing] conscious of its own intrinsic rationality in and as" human self-consciousness, reason, and action. Stephen Houlgate *An Introduction to Hegel: Freedom, Truth and History*, second edition (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 243. Thus, for Hegel, the development of consciousness, self-consciousness, and Spirit are emergent features of being rather than, as Taylor argues, pre-existent qualities/aspects that gain new or different expression in the world. The view I affirm aligns with the self-professed organic nature of Hegel's thought, which is structurally distinguished by the bottom-up emergence of implicit capacities and qualities rather than by top-down investment.

[20] It is commonly acknowledged that Hegel's ethics "may be viewed as an attempt to reconcile traditional Aristotelian ethical theory with the Kantian… emphasis on free selfhood." Allen W. Wood, "Hegel's Ethics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. Frederick C. Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 216. The most robust account I am aware of regarding the relation between these two thinkers is Alfredo Ferrarin, *Hegel and Aristotle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[21] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin, second edition (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999), book I, chapter 7, esp. 1098a3-20, p. 9. Reading Hegel as a teleological thinker (at least with respect to the human good) is something of a controversial position, but for unclear reasons. For example, Paul Franco argues that Hegel ought not be understood (presumably with Aristotle and others) as aiming for "conformity to some sort of end or purpose given by nature." True enough, if the end or purpose being referenced is a final state of affairs; however, for Aristotle at least, the human *telos* involves the exercise of reason as the *essential function* of the human species. And so a tension emerges in Franco's own writing when he later explains that, for Hegel, "To have the capacity for self-determination is not simply a contingent or historical acquisition; it is what it is to be a human being… And the desire to cultivate or realize this essential human capacity for self-determination, to transform his implicit, in-itself character of human beings into an explicit, for-itself actuality, is not merely a contingent or historic disposition; it is

For Aristotle, this is most evident in his conception of friendship, and the theme emerges for Hegel in his theory of recognition.[22] Third, both thinkers affirm the profound dependence of moral development on the social context of persons, maintaining that persons are thoroughly shaped by the values, norms, and practices of their social environments.[23] Fourth, both Aristotle and Hegel are *political holists* in that they refer to the political community (at least ideally) as a self-sustaining and self-satisfying whole, which Aristotle classifies as "self-sufficient" and Hegel terms "organic," and they both frame an individual's relation to their political community in terms of a part-whole relation.[24] Both of these thinkers refer to the political community as the critical domain of human existence that both possesses the requisite power and encompasses the appropriate scope of human life to direct and unite the disparate elements of collective life necessary for individual wellbeing. In other words, a key feature of their holism is that human flourishing is profoundly dependent upon a person's location, status, and activity within a political community, a point famously captured by Aristotle's claim that human beings are by nature political animals.[25] Hegel can be seen as advancing just this point, on which I will elaborate, in his conception of "Spirit" as a community of persons.

Hegel is also importantly influenced by and follows in the wake of Kant, especially pertaining to Kant's deepening of the significance of the self's internality. Like Kant, Hegel affirms a form of idealism, according to which concepts determine knowledge and experience of

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the rational destiny of human beings." While Hegel's position does contrast with *some* teleological views, it seems nevertheless to be very much a teleological one. Given his view of humans as possessing the essential capacity for self-determination, Hegel seems to be very much a teleological thinker *à la* Aristotle. Paul Franco, *Hegel's Philosophy of Freedom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 184-186. That said, different from Aristotle, Hegel maintains a philosophy of history that can be read as (more or less) teleological.

[22] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, books 8 and 9.

[23] This is an obvious and fundamental feature of Aristotle's thought, evident throughout his *Nicomachean Ethics*, i.e., book I, chapter 4.

[24] Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), 1274b38-41, p. 65.

[25] Aristotle, *Politics*, 1252b26-1253a5, p. 3-4.

the world and the things in it, even if Hegel's idealism is ultimately metaphysical in a way that Kant's is not. What is more, Hegel follows Kant in his commitment to submit all aspects of human knowledge and experience to critical, rational inquiry. I mean two specific things by claiming that Hegel is *post*-Kantian, which I use here to mean something different than the "post-Kantian" line of interpretation noted above. First, already mentioned and perhaps the most obvious thing about the relation between the two figures, Hegel dispatches with what he takes to be unwarranted and problematic dualisms in Kant's philosophy (ontological, epistemological, and ethical). Second, Hegel's conception of the self is fundamentally dialogical or intersubjective rather than transcendental, meaning that for him the selfhood of the self-conscious subject emerges from and through the self's interaction with others. With these points in view, let us turn directly to Hegel's *Phenomenology*.

Alienation and Belonging in the Phenomenology of Spirit

The *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) is Hegel's first constructive work in, and it serves as an introduction to, a distinct philosophical system that aims to extend Kant's pioneering critical philosophy by resisting appeals to authority, convention, and presumption in the pursuit of "what is true."[26] This description may sound as if the work is essentially an epistemological one, but, as will become clear, its scope is certainly broader than that. In fact, Nicholas Adams persuasively argues that the *Phenomenology* is best understood as offering an alternative, non-oppositional logic.[27] Nonetheless, my focus will be limited to two of its sections, "Self-Consciousness" and "Spirit," through which I will introduce Hegel's framing of alienation and political belonging.

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[26] G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), §78, p. 50.
[27] That said, Adams does not mean to restrict the focus of the text to purely theoretical matters. As he readily acknowledges, logic and ontology are not, for Hegel, independent. Adams, *Eclipse of Grace*, 22-26.

Given the *Phenomenology*'s complexity, frequent opaqueness, and deeply ruminative and synthetic structure, it is impossible to pluck one or two themes from the work and provide anything like a sufficient account of them. My focus on the themes of alienation and belonging is also too narrow to be well served by a lengthy exegetical approach to the text. That said, a summative account will also not do, because my intention is not simply to report a number of assertions that Hegel makes at given points along the way, which can prove quite inadequate given the idiosyncratic nature of the *Phenomenology*. Instead, assuming little or no prior exposure to the work, I will attempt to walk readers through Hegel's reasoning by remaining as close to the text and its perspective as space allows before offering some remarks on the themes of alienation and belonging. Although this will require some patience on behalf of my reader, such an approach is most true to the method of Hegel's text and seems the best way to present not only *what* Hegel claims but also *how* and *why* he thinks and concludes as he does.

Much of the difficulty involved with interpreting the *Phenomenology* has to do with understanding its context, method, and aim. In his German idealist intellectual context, Hegel inherits a set of problems pertaining most immediately to the role and activity of the human mind in the construal of its knowledge and experience of objects. Quite central to these matters is the relation between what a person can know about a given object and what the object is in itself. Hegel intervened in these discussions by attempting to overcome what he saw to be a troublingly subjectivist, dualist, and overly formal conclusion to the matter in Kant's philosophy. In response, Hegel offers an approach that connects human knowledge, self-knowledge, and freedom, which opens up to matters of ontology, ethics, religion, and politics.[28] Setting aside

[28] As mentioned, he does this in part by making positive ontological claims. As I read him, Hegel argues that self-conscious, rational self-determination is the implicit nature and *telos* of being itself. This follows from Hegel's view that self-conscious selfhood emerges from—and is thus not something fundamentally different than—being itself.

some of the finer details pertaining to Hegel's epistemology as such, my focus is on his understanding of the nature of self-knowledge and its relation to freedom.

As the work's title indicates, Hegel presents this text as a work of *phenomenology*, meaning it is an inquiry that proceeds entirely from within the frame of conscious experience (or simply, "consciousness"). He explains that the *Phenomenology* is an attempt to trace "[t]he series of configurations which consciousness goes through" in order to attain what he contends is a properly philosophical perspective. As he puts it, his task is to explicate "the detailed history of the *education* of consciousness itself" necessary for attaining this philosophical perspective.[29]

As I previously noted, one of Hegel's major philosophical concerns is the dualism, emerging primitively in ordinary experience, between a person's knowledge, on the one hand, and the world and particular objects as they are, on the other. For Hegel, however, this dualism, which he takes Kant to perpetuate, is an unjustified and uncritically held presumption.[30] Importantly for Hegel, a "truly self-critical" philosophy is one without "presuppositions" that aims to think *through* rather than adopt any such dualism, paradox, or contradiction.[31] For Hegel in the *Phenomenology*, what we have is our conscious experience, and his agenda is to carefully unpack what is embedded and implied in it without reference to anything outside.[32]

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[29] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §78, p. 50. Unless otherwise noted, all emphases in the following quotations from the *Phenomenology* are Hegel's.

[30] Taylor, *Hegel*, 128. Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel*, 49-50. Terry Pinkard, who like Pippin offers a "post-Kantian" reading of the *Phenomenology* (and Hegel's works more generally) that attends to the (exclusively) epistemological matter of "the norms governing judgments about objects of which we are aware," frames Hegel's anti-dualism in an analogous way—as a rejection of "the unfortunate and untenable Kantian dualism between concepts and intuitions or to the Kantian mechanism of the 'imposition' of concepts on sensibility to which Kant had been driven by virtue of accepting that dualism." Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy, 1760-1860: The Legacy of Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 224-225.

[31] Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel*, 65. For the technical aspects of this point, see Stephen Houlgate, "Hegel's Critique of Kant," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 74 (2015), esp. 38-39.

[32] This sharply contrasts with Hegel's approach in the *Science of Logic* and *Encyclopedia Logic*, although the different projects are importantly connected. For varying understandings of this connection, see Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel*, 50; Taylor, *Hegel*, 216-221; Pinkard, *German Philosophy, 1760-1860*, 246-250.

At the start, Hegel explains that consciousness by its very nature is always in relation to some object, that it is always consciousness *of* something, and knowledge is an aspect or feature of this relation.[33] With consciousness as the perspective of the *Phenomenology*'s inquiry, Hegel maintains the object-relational nature of consciousness, especially in the first sections of the work, by continually referring to "consciousness and its object," even though such a framing is something of an abstraction given that consciousness is always relating to more than one object.

Hegel's phenomenological project is committed to what Houlgate rightly describes as a "wholly *immanent* examination" of ordinary consciousness in an attempt to show "that the certainties of natural consciousness lead purely by themselves to the standpoint of philosophy."[34] Consciousness is so "led" because, upon careful examination, its experiences and knowledge of its objects are shown to be "riven with contradiction," or, we might say, are fraught with unexamined implications and irresolvable tensions.[35] In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel starts with ordinary conscious experience and takes the reader through how, when pressed, the perceived certainties and unavoidable tensions entailed in its understanding give way to increasingly complex forms of consciousness, wherein the truth of its object *and* the truth of consciousness itself are revealed. Hegel refers to the properly philosophical perspective achieved at the end of this process, the point on which the *Phenomenology* concludes, as "Absolute Knowing."[36]

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[33] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §82, p.52.
[34] Stephen Houlgate, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 7. This "immanent" approach is at the very heart of Hegel's understanding of the *dialectical* nature of reason, which, as Houlgate explains, means that reason "develops through producing concepts, or through producing modes of existence, which negate themselves and transform themselves into something new. Hegel believes that such dialectical reason is at work in nature; but he sees it at work above all in human history leading us through our actions and choices to develop more self-conscious and thus more explicitly rational, self-determining and free forms of human life." Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel*, 251.
[35] Taylor, *Hegel*, 129.
[36] A notoriously difficult concept, for Hegel, Absolute Knowing refers to "the point where knowledge no longer needs to go beyond itself, where knowledge finds itself, where Notion corresponds to object and object to Notion". Hegel, *Phenomenology of Sprit*, §80, p. 51. Houlgate clarifies the clear epistemological *and* ontological dimensions to Absolute Knowing: consciousness determines that its object "is not merely the *object* of consciousness after all—not merely something distinct from consciousness to which consciousness stands in relation—but is in fact

Along the phenomenological journey Hegel walks the reader through, the contradictions consciousness encounters in each of its different shapes takes one (or some combination) of three basic forms. At each step of its development, consciousness is shown to rest on a tension between the subjective (first-personal) and the objective (third-personal) dimensions of existence and experience, the universal and the particular domains of conceptuality, or the abstract and the concrete nature of phenomena. The *Phenomenology* ultimately arrives at the "Absolute"—both in embodied, communal form as "Absolute Spirit" and as a philosophical perspective, "Absolute Knowing"—which refers to the achievement of a state of consciousness's existence wherein all such contradictions are overcome. A key point to keep in mind, which Hegel indicates along the way and is in some sense proven by the work's culmination, is that consciousness is by its very nature the capacity for self-conscious and rational self-determination. In the forms of self-consciousness and Spirit, then, consciousness seeks to more fully *become* and *know* itself as precisely this, which the contradictions noted above prevent.[37]

According to Hegel, prior to the realization of Absolute Spirit, the development of consciousness tends to move toward the achievement of the former pole of the aforementioned tensions at the expense of the latter in each pair; i.e. increasing knowledge and understanding of oneself or an object in the world involves reference to increasingly universal categories and concepts, which inevitably abstract from the object in its concrete particularity. These

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identification in form to consciousness itself and so is that wherein consciousness 'finds itself'… "Absolute knowing thus knows its object to be *being* that is *conceptual* or *rational* in form." Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel*, 64. Such a reading of Hegel and the *Phenomenology* clearly relies on a certain understanding of Hegel's *Logic* and the relations between the two projects. On this, see Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel*, 6. That said, in affirming the preeminence of the *Logic*, Houlgate tends to understate the constructive and creative power of the *Phenomenology* as a stand-alone work.

[37] In fact, Hegel refers to just this capacity with the term "Spirit." More fully, for Hegel Spirit refers to the distinctive capacity for self-awareness and self-interpretation, and, further, for self-determination. For reasons that will become clear, Hegel refers to humans as "spiritual" beings, given that they share in this natural capacity, and he argues that Spirit is fully realized in a certain sort of community of persons. For a helpful elaboration, see Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy*, 43-52.

developments amount to genuine philosophical advances, but they are never pure gains, because, as noted, they always come at a cost. In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel explains the general shape of consciousness's logical development from naïve immediacy about the world of experience to conceptually, self-consciously, interpersonally, and then rationally mediated knowledge until arriving at the conclusion that determinate knowledge of oneself and one's agency is only finally achieved (a status he calls "certainty") by being part of a certain sort of human community.[38]

The Development of Self-Consciousness in Relation to Others

I will now introduce and proceed through the *Phenomenology*'s chapter on self-consciousness. In so doing, I present Hegel's account of the emergence of self-consciousness, along with his reasoning about the importance of recognition and the dependence of knowledge and self-knowledge on confirmation by other persons. This reasoning remains central to the argument of the text as its focus moves from the subject of the self-consciousness self to the development of Spirit.

Hegel begins the *Phenomenology* by examining the most immediate and basic shape of consciousness as it stands before an object—the sheer immediacy of its experience of the object as *this*, *here*, and *now*[39]—and then proceeds to take the reader through the different "shapes" that consciousness takes on the way to Absolute Knowing.[40] The first shape that is relevant to the

[38] In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel essentially argues that a certain sort of human community provides the grounds and context for the objectivity, particularity, and concreteness to accompany consciousness's increasingly subjective, universal, and abstract knowledge, especially of itself and its action in the world. This, in short, is how Hegel seems to understand his intervention in the wake of Kant's transcendental idealism, which stood as the height of philosophical achievement in his day. More on this below.
[39] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §95, p. 59-60.
[40] Houlgate explains that the relation between these different shapes is "not historical, but *logical*." That is, "the connection between the shapes is always one of logical necessity, rather than historical causality." Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel*, 61. In other words, while the historical record often provides helpful examples of different shapes of consciousness, and even of their successive development, history does not provide a straightforward account of the necessary development of consciousness. This is in contrast to the views of Taylor (whose view is

project at hand is "Self-Consciousness," which is thematically at the very heart of the *Phenomenology*. According to Hegel, self-consciousness follows from the shape of consciousness he calls "Understanding," wherein consciousness comes to know its object as "governed by inner forces and laws" in which "consciousness recognizes principles of its *own* understanding."[41] Therefore, he indicates that *implicit* in the understanding of its object—what is involved in consciousness offering an "explanation" of its object—is consciousness's awareness of itself.[42] Making *explicit* the self-awareness involved in understanding its object, Hegel claims that self-consciousness "is essentially the return from *otherness*."[43]

Hegel explains that the development of self-consciousness involves consciousness turning its awareness and concern toward itself. As *self*-conscious, he explains that consciousness becomes concerned with its own coherence or unity, to which its object as a site of difference now stands as an interruption. That is, whereas knowledge and experience were initially occasioned by an encounter with an object, the object now becomes for consciousness an obstacle to *self*-knowledge. So following, Hegel says, consciousness is driven to render its encounters with difference—with the difference of objects in the world—as differences that exist *for* or even *within* the life of consciousness itself, an endeavor that amounts to denying the object its own content and integrity.[44] In fact, Hegel claims that self-consciousness emerges as the very

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partially, though not entirely, historicist; *Hegel*, 171, 365) and Pippin (*Hegel's Idealism*, 161, 165), and it provides an important counter to any attempt to read in the *Phenomenology* a teleological account of the development of consciousness and Spirit in history.

[41] Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel*, 68. For more explanation on this view, see Houlgate, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 80-82. This is another difference from Pippin's interpretation of the *Phenomenology*'s "Inverted World" (in "Force and the Understanding") section, which Pippin reads as pertaining to the theme of apperceptive unity. Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism*, 140-141.

[42] "The Understanding's 'explanation' is primarily only the description of what self-consciousness is… The reason why 'explaining' affords so much self-satisfaction is just because in it consciousness is, so to speak, communing directly with itself, enjoying only itself; although it seems to be busy with something else, it is in fact occupied only with itself." Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §163, p. 101.

[43] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §167, p. 105.

[44] In other words, this means that consciousness aims to see only itself in its objects. Houlgate, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 80.

"movement" of consciousness appropriating or incorporating into itself the differences it encounters.[45] He therefore argues that self-consciousness is driven to undermine or "negate" the independence of its object and to integrate the object into its own life in order to achieve determinate "certainty" about itself, by which Hegel means a measure of unity, cohesion, and confirmation of its own existence.[46]

As told, however, this account is incomplete. Recall that, according to Hegel, consciousness is fundamentally consciousness of some object. Hegel therefore insists that self-consciousness involves a two-fold relation: consciousness simultaneously relates to its object and, *amid* or *within* that relation, to itself. This double relation creates a complication for consciousness's movement toward unity and self-certainty.[47] As Hegel puts the matter, self-consciousness's "Desire [for its own unity] and the self-certainty obtained in its gratification, are conditioned by the object."[48] Therefore, consciousness's relation to its object is the necessary context within which self-knowledge can emerge. Consciousness knows itself *in* its relation to an object, *as* that which is relating to the object. Consciousness further depends on its object because, emerging as it does as the movement of integrating difference, without the difference provided by the object, no generative movement can occur and genuine self-consciousness

[45] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §167, p. 105. As Taylor nicely puts this, "It is this longing for total integrity which for Hegel underlies the striving of self-consciousness." Taylor, *Hegel*, 148.
[46] In full, "[self-consciousness] destroys the independent object and thereby gives itself the certainty of itself as a *true* certainty, a certainty which has become explicitly for self-consciousness itself *in an objective manner*." Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §174, p. 109.
[47] I use a number of reflexive terms in this chapter such as self-knowledge, self-understanding, self-interpretation, and self-certainty. Given that they are not all exactly synonymous, it is worth parsing some of their distinctions. I use self-knowledge in reference to any basic information that a self gains or possesses about itself. Relatedly, I use self-understanding and self-interpretation to refer specifically to the recursive process undertaken by a self to make sense of some information about itself. I use self-certainty to refer to the state of satisfaction, assurance, or confidence that a self enjoys when some information and/or interpretation of itself is confirmed by an authority able to grant the information/interpretation the status of truth or validity.
[48] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §175, p. 109.

cannot emerge; as Hegel puts it, absent the movement of integrating difference, self-consciousness is "only the motionless tautology of: 'I am I.'"[49]

What is more, the *status* of consciousness's object is quite important as well. According to Hegel, consciousness's object cannot be easily internalized and reduced to a mere "appearance" of difference because the object has come to be known through experience to possess an independent, integrated unity of features, characteristics, and relations that are the object's own.[50] In other words, consciousness's knowledge of its object as a *determinate unity* resists the simple reduction of the object to a mere "negation" within the life of consciousness.[51] Thus, no mere negation of an object can deliver the certainty self-consciousness seeks.

According to Hegel, therefore, in order for self-consciousness to "achieve satisfaction," its object must come to be known as existing *for* consciousness—becoming something that reflects back to consciousness an affirmation of its unified existence—while remaining an independent object.[52] Hegel explains that the only way for this to occur is for the object to determine *for itself* to exist for the sake of self-consciousness (as he puts the matter, for the object to effect "the negation within itself").[53] The only sort of object able to negate itself, it seems, is another self-consciousness, and so Hegel claims that "*self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness*."[54]

[49] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §167, p. 105. Here one can see evidence of the relational dynamism that characterizes Hegel's ontology, in contrast to anything like being (self-conscious or otherwise) as a static and undifferentiated monism. Hegel's portrayal of primitive self-consciousness is of an insatiable, metabolizing, almost imperial entity. There are clear analogies here to, among other things, the life of a living organism (i.e., the need to consume and metabolize food).
[50] That is, as an independent unity, the object has not yet been integrated into consciousness, and so the object stands quite literally as an interruption of consciousness's own integrated unity.
[51] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §168, p. 106. This is especially true, Hegel claims, for living things. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §169-172, p. 106-109.
[52] Houlgate, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 89.
[53] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §175, p. 109. This suggests the move of an object to set its own internal integrity to the need(s) of consciousness, so that it exists for consciousness.
[54] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §175, p. 109-110.

Suggested by the structural reciprocation in the aforementioned quotation, for Hegel, this line of thinking implies something even more radical still. Given the development to this point, and keeping the two-fold relation of self-consciousness in mind, Hegel summarizes that the satisfaction of self-consciousness entails consciousness coming to terms with itself in both dimensions of its existence, both as subject, as the universal "I" of first-person experience, and as object, as a particular, determinate, integrated unity. He therefore concludes that self-consciousness can come to know itself as such "only in being acknowledged" *as* a self-consciousness *by another* self-consciousness, for only another self-consciousness can negate itself and provide this sort of recognition.[55] This recognition can only come from *outside* of self-consciousness, and a consequence of this insight is that the self becomes de-centered in its search for satisfaction. Hegel thus claims that only by being in a relation wherein consciousness comes to know itself as an other *for another self-consciousness* does its own "unity of itself in its otherness [become] explicit for it."[56]

Some more elaboration is in order regarding what Hegel means by knowing oneself as, in my phrasing, a particular, determinate, integrated unity. I take Hegel to be saying that self-certainty involves the knowledge of oneself *as a concrete, coherent whole*, which, by definition, is not a simple, static, and undifferentiated monism or self-sameness but rather the internally dynamic movement of differentiation and unification that is embodied in the world. Such a picture of self-consciousness aligns with Hegel's enigmatic claim in the *Phenomenology's* Preface that "The Truth is the whole. But the whole is nothing other than the essence consummating itself through its development."[57]

[55] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §178, p. 111.
[56] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §177, p. 110.
[57] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §20, p. 11.

As Hegel's depiction of self-consciousness has determined to this point, a self-consciousness is its own determinate unity, but it is hampered in realizing a sense or status of *wholeness* by remaining fundamentally dependent on something that must remain outside of or other than itself, namely, another self-consciousness.[58] Therefore, according to Hegel, the "truth" of self-consciousness is to be found in a certain sort of relation with another self-consciousness. Hegel suggests that this insight offers the first glimpse of what he calls "Spirit" [*Geist*], which he explains here as "the unity of the different independent self-consciousnesses which, in their opposition, enjoy perfect freedom and independence." Significantly, Hegel claims that a key feature of Spirit's genuine realization is the ability of its members to identify *first-personally* with the community constituted by their relations. In Spirit, self-conscious persons come to identify their individuality *as a feature of their relation*, and so Hegel describes Spirit as the "'I' that is 'We' and 'We' that is 'I.'"[59]

I have to this point offered Hegel's conception of self-consciousness rather abstractly, but it is clearer and closer to Hegel's own concerns to think about the development of self-consciousness in terms of freedom or self-determination, which lie at the very core of Hegel's thought. As Allen Wood rightly claims, for Hegel, freedom properly understood is "the final human good."[60] However, it is important to note that Hegel sought to advance a distinct conception of freedom that was, following from his reasoning laid out above, concrete and

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[58] As a summary of self-consciousness, Taylor explains, "The subject depends on external reality. If he is to be fully at home this external reality must reflect back to him what he is." Taylor, *Hegel*, 152.

[59] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §177, p. 110.

[60] Allen W. Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 20, 40-41. Convincingly accounting for some important differences between the two projects, Will Dudley rightly describes the project of the *Phenomenology* as providing "an account of how consciousness *appears* to itself," which is distinct from the *Philosophy of Right*'s attempt to offer "an ontology of free will." It does not follow, however (nor does Dudley claim), that the *Phenomenology* does not think about human reason and being as purposive and agentive, which it certainly does. Will Dudley, "Ethical Life, Morality, and the Role of Spirit in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*," in *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit: A Critical Guide*, eds. Dean Moyar and Michael Quante (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 145-146.

determinate, involving the relation of a person's self-conscious agency to its *actualization* in the world.[61] In other words, self-certainty is properly and most fully encountered in the knowledge of one's own agency as a self-determining being.

Among the many legacies of Kant's groundbreaking philosophy was renewed concern about the status of human freedom.[62] Kant had argued forcefully that the ability to direct one's own will and to choose the principles of its actions, the self-legislating capacity of rational creatures he calls "autonomy," is the very "ground" of human dignity.[63] Yet, his account of freedom was focused entirely on the *rational will* that is independent of the empirical world, and he found it impossible to prove the existence of freedom, which left persons unable to know their status as free *agents*. Instead, Kant concluded that, being the "necessary condition…of the complete fulfillment of the moral law," human freedom must be "postulated" by practical reason.[64]

Kant's successors, most notably J. G. Fichte, found this indeterminacy regarding human freedom unsatisfactory and so adopted an *intersubjective* solution to knowledge, experience, and action. Robert Williams explains that, "If the question of freedom is, 'how may the subject find itself as an object?' Fichte's reply is that the subject requires an other subject to 'objectify' it and thereby occasion its consciousness of freedom."[65] In this way, Fichte introduced the concept of

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[61] Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought*, 46. Wood therefore explains that, for Hegel, freedom "is a relational property." Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought*, 47. Most accurately, "Genuine autonomy for Hegel is a mediated autonomy." Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*, 7.
[62] "The post-Kantian development of German idealism is in part an attempt to overcome Kant's formal notion of autonomy." Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*, 34.
[63] Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 4:436, p. 85.
[64] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 5:132, p. 246.
[65] Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*, 35. Williams draws this rendering of the question of freedom from Fichte's *Grundlage des Naturrechts nach Principien der Wissenschaftslehre* (*The Science of Rights*), 3:33. Relatedly, although the rich discussions of Hegel's philosophy of action are outside the scope of this project, note Hegel's later critique of purely formal construals of freedom and morality (keeping in mind the necessity of recognition): "in the action as such, the doer attains a vision of *himself* in objectivity, or to a feeling of self in his

recognition as the "intersubjective mediation of freedom," which Hegel adopts and transforms in his *Phenomenology*.[66] Williams helpfully explains that Hegel transforms Fichte's notion in two important ways, by casting "the other" in a positive role (rather than being merely a "restriction"), which is evident in Hegel's account of recognition, and by extending "the principle of reciprocal recognition beyond the dialogical situation into the political sphere."[67]

Returning to the *Phenomenology*, after describing the rise of self-consciousness, Hegel explains that in its initial stage individuals are often driven into conflict by their desire to secure recognition from one another.[68] Importantly, as Williams elaborates, "[w]hat each seeks is not [only] the recognition of the mere fact of his existence but the recognition of his freedom."[69] Referring to the dramatic, primitive form in which this often plays out, Hegel explains that the conflict usually ends when one party gains power over the other and, given that the conflict is driven by the need for acknowledgement, forces the other into subservience—a servitude that hopes to guarantee recognition. This scenario is the outline of Hegel's famous dialectic of lord and bondsman, wherein the party assuming the position of "lord" hopes to relate "himself

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existence, and thus to enjoyment…[the purpose or principle of an action] becomes a reality in the deed of an individuality, and the action is thereby charged with the aspect of particularity." §665, p. 404.

[66] "For Fichte, the consciousness of freedom is intersubjectively mediated." Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*, 35-36. See also Pinkard, *German Philosophy, 1760-1860*, 119-123, and Paul Franco, *Hegel's Philosophy of Freedom*, 24-25.

[67] Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*, 39, 25-26.

[68] Williams explains that Hegel presents this as happening "in the absence of social institutions" and is therefore to be understood as a "methodological abstraction…constructed for purposes of analysis." Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*, 60. In other words, Hegel presents this conflict in a very abstract and general way in order to consider the basic form, rather than any historical context or necessary particular elements, of a conflict in which selves often end up engaging.

[69] Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*, 60. Here is an instance where it seems the "post-Kantian" Hegelians offer an anemic and unwarrantedly indirect reading of the text itself. Rather than reading the lord/bondsman dialectic as the search for the recognition of one's *actual* and *embodied* freedom in the sense I have described, Pinkard explains it as the pursuit of the legitimacy of one's *reasons* or *maxims*. No doubt that this is involved in knowing or coming to terms with one's own agency (not to mention one's status as a free and independent agent), but it seems too narrowly cognitive to capture all of what Hegel writes in these passages. The post-Kantians can surely claim that this search for legitimacy can (does?) take place in embodied encounters and conflicts, but their reading seems to consistently take Hegel at least one step removed from his words. Pinkard, *German Philosophy, 1760-1860*, 227-229. See also, Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 46-62; and Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism*, 155-170.

mediately to the bondsman through a being that is independent, for it is just this which holds the bondsman in bondage."[70] On this account, the lord negates the particular and distinct integrity (the "being-for-self") of the bondsman by holding them in subservience, which secures from the bondsman the recognition that "constitutes the *truth* of [the lord's] certainty of himself."[71] However, Hegel claims, the recognition secured by the lord is ultimately unsatisfactory on account of the fact that, because the bondsman is held against their will, "What now really confronts [the lord] is not an independent consciousness, but a dependent one."[72] Paradoxically, he goes on to argue, the bondsman can even eventually enjoy a greater (albeit limited) degree of freedom in vulnerability and labor than the lord is able to in power and plenty.[73]

Hegel presents the lord and bondsman relation as deficient and ultimately unsatisfying, which is thus dialectically instructive in its failure to secure genuine and lasting recognition for either of the parties involved. What its failure reveals is the need for recognition to be *mutual* between persons, an arrangement, he writes, wherein "Each is for the other the middle term, through which each mediates itself with itself and unites with itself; and each is for itself, and for the other, an immediate being on its own account, which at the same time is such only through this mediation." In such a relation, Hegel explains, both individuals "*recognize* themselves as *mutually recognizing* one another."[74]

That said, there is apparently no straight and easy path from the lord/bondsman scenario to mutual recognition. Instead, moving imminently through the dialectic, Hegel explains that the

[70] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §190, p. 115. Houlgate rightly notes that Hegel presents this scenario as representative of the relational dynamics occurring between two selves and not necessarily an account of any historically particular instance of slavery or domination. Houlgate, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 95.
[71] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §191-192, p. 116.
[72] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §192, p. 117.
[73] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §195-196, p. 118-119. Taylor insightfully elaborates on the significance of material reality [*Dingheit*], labor, and death in the lord/bondsman relation, which I cannot attend to here; Taylor, *Hegel*, 154-157.
[74] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §184, p. 112.

(constrained) freedom of self-actualization realized by the bondsman soon develops into a higher form of freedom. Gaining a sense of individuality and self-reliance through labor and production, Hegel explains that the consciousness of the bondsman is driven inward. In the new stage that emerges, self-consciousness understands itself as "a being that *thinks*, and that…holds something to be essentially important, or true and good only in so far as it *thinks* it to be such." Hegel then traces the development of this *indeterminate* sense of freedom through forms that are analogous to the ancient schools of Stoicism and Skepticism, both of which take a profoundly indifferent attitude toward embodiment and the world.[75] Unsurprisingly, because Stoicism and Skepticism have "only *pure thought* as [their] truth," the freedom they end up affirming proves unsatisfactory for "lacking the fullness of life…the living reality of freedom itself."[76] On Hegel's telling, any such a form that has "[*w*]*ithdrawn* from existence into itself" gives rise to the experience of division between the self's inner (subjective) and outer (objective) life.[77] Hegel refers to this "inwardly disrupted" consciousness as the "Unhappy Consciousness," for which the struggle that shaped the lord/bondsman dialectic has become internalized.[78]

Hegel describes the unhappy consciousness as internally divided into "Unchangeable" (rising above the flux of life and gaining the status of *universal*) and "Changeable" (contingent) parts, which are experienced as "alien to one another." Identifying its own "essence" with the unchangeable part, but being exposed to the effects of time and change, here the self experiences estrangement from universality and its true self.[79] Hegel claims that the troubling dualism

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[75] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §198, p. 121.
[76] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §200, p. 122.
[77] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §201-206, p. 122-126.
[78] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §206-207, p. 126. "What we have here, then, is the inward movement of the pure heart which *feels* itself, but itself as agonizingly self-divided, the movement of an infinite yearning which is certain that its essence is such a pure heart, a pure *thinking* which *thinks* of itself as a *particular individuality*… At the same time, however, this essence is the unattainable *beyond* which, in being laid hold of, flees, or rather has already flown." Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §217, p. 131.
[79] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §208, p. 127.

characterizing the unhappy consciousness then gives way to the shape of consciousness he calls "Reason," which purports to heal the division between mind and world and regain universality by discerning that both thought and being are composed of and/or governed by reason.[80] Entering the shape of reason, consciousness "now has, therefore, a universal *interest* in the world, because it is certain of its presence in the world, or that the world present to it is rational."[81]

The Development of Spirit as a Community of Persons

I now turn briefly to Hegel's portrayal of reason as a shape of consciousness before following the *Phenomenology* to and through the emergence of Spirit. Attending to Spirit, Hegel's focus shifts from the individual self to a community of selves, which provides, he suggests, the conditions for finally and fully overcoming the problems of self-knowledge and self-certainty.

I noted previously that, according to Hegel, prior to the shape of reason, consciousness had arrived at a new sense of the universal—which Hegel considered to be a genuine philosophical gain, being necessary for rationality and morality—but was "unhappy" and internally divided for having located the universal entirely external to itself, the particular, contingent individual. Hegel describes reason as the shape consciousness takes in locating its own "*unity*" with the universal, in which consciousness now participates, securing for consciousness a universal that "no longer falls outside of it."[82] Here, reason's construal of the

[80] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §226-230, p. 136-138.
[81] Further, at the end of this passage, the pull of desire is still recognizably present: "[In the stage of reason, consciousness] seeks its 'other', knowing that therein it possesses nothing else but itself: it seeks only its own infinitude." Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §240, p. 145-146.
[82] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §231, p. 138.

individual self as *participating in* the universal is seen as another genuine philosophical advance, but at each step in consciousness's development through the different shapes of reason, Hegel considers the tensions that emerge.

Hegel claims that reason becomes foremost the source of rules and principles for thought and action, which he refers to as its capacity to determine "laws."[83] However, he explains, this creates a problem for reason's governance over human freedom: pure reason's (especially ethical) formal principles lack meaningful content and allow for contradictory conclusions.[84] Being thoroughly abstract and general, he argues, reason leaves individuals to draw on their particular contexts to fill in the content of reason's moral directives, which results in a tension between the status and authority of reason (as *universal*) and the source of its content and site of its actualization (individuals in their *particularity*).[85] This tension can be overcome, he continues, only when the law's authority, content, and actualization reside in the universal. Hegel concludes that the universal must be concrete rather than purely abstract, embodied and substantive rather than purely theoretical and formal. Thus, consciousness is led to determine that the proper universal is to be found in a community of persons that "*actualizes itself*, albeit in and through individuals."[86] Hegel refers to the shape of consciousness that identifies universality with human community as Spirit.[87]

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[83] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §299, p. 180.
[84] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §419-431, p. 252-258.
[85] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §434, p. 260. I am intentionally setting aside the question of whether these criticisms are, as Hegel seems to present them, legitimate criticisms of Kant's moral theory. Regardless of whether they are or not, they clearly indicate the concerns that animate Hegel's constructive thinking.
[86] Houlgate, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 144.
[87] This is importantly *not* to suggest that Hegel dismisses or denigrates reason in any way. He remains profoundly committed to reason, but he is convinced that it needs to be "sublated" (preserved yet transcended) into Spirit. Nevertheless, "It is the task of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* to prove that it is a fundamental misjudgment to take reason as the highest human faculty, the fundament of moral and legal action, and the goal of history." Ludwig Siep, "Practical Reason and Spirit in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*," in *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit: A Critical Guide*, eds. Dean Moyar and Michael Quante (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 173.

As mentioned, Hegel introduces the concept of Spirit in the *Phenomenology*'s section on recognition, which foreshadowed Spirit in its conclusion that, as Siep explains, "the very constitution of self-consciousness is plural."[88] Having dialectically arrived at the point where the contradictions of reason as the *abstract* universal give way to human community as the *concrete* universal, Hegel explains that Spirit "is…self-supporting, absolute, real being. All previous shapes of consciousness are abstract forms of it."[89] Given its communal nature, Hegel claims that Spirit is to be found in "the *ethical life* [*Sittlichkeit*] of a nation," whose "*living ethical* world is Spirit in its *truth*," that must now come to its own self-awareness.[90]

Houlgate explains that, for Hegel, Spirit is the shape of consciousness in which consciousness "knows itself to be the embodiment of reason—reason that it understands also to be immanent within the world and so to be genuinely objective." Moreover, he continues, "spirit is self-conscious reason that relates to an other, whom it recognizes also to be self-conscious reason and who recognizes the first in turn as such reason;" it therefore ultimately refers to "a community of reciprocal recognition." In short, Spirit dawns at the awareness of the importance of reciprocation not only between one self-consciousness and another (mutual recognition), but also between the standards that shape and guide individuals and those of their community, which individuals both embody and extend. This focus on Ethical Life is fundamental to Hegel's thinking about Spirit and, as the reasoning to this point suggests, points to the relation between an individual's own normative standards and the "laws and customs" of their community, which

[88] Ludwig Siep, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Daniel Smyth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 88. Williams thus explains that, "Recognition is the existential genesis of the concept of spirit." Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*, 9.
[89] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §440, p. 264. Spirit is thus clearly the crowning achievement of the *Phenomenology*, a point that contrasts with Pippin's claim that in the development of self-consciousness "a decisive closure in the [*Phenomenology*'s] basic argument has occurred." Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism*, 166.
[90] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §441-442, p. 265. Thus, as Houlgate rightly clarifies, "Spirit, for Hegel, is not some disembodied cosmic consciousness, manipulating human activity from on high, but is a distinctive shape of human consciousness." Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel*, 78.

"give expression to [the community's] particular understanding of what it is rational to do."[91] Here, a community gives grounding, substantive content, and direction to the lives of its members regarding their ends and obligations, with which, in turn, its members come to self-identify. Hegel describes the ideal of congruence between a *particular* individual and the *universal* normative standards of their ethico-political context as one in which "the laws proclaim what each individual is and does; the individual knows them not only as his universal objective thinghood, but equally knows himself in them, or knows them as *particularized* in his own individuality, and in each of his fellow citizens."[92] Most importantly, by identifying with such a community, he further explains, persons might be able to enjoy a more expansive sense of self-determination.

In the chapter on Spirit, Hegel analyses Spirit's different shapes (shifting now from shapes of consciousness to shapes of Spirit) by locating representative examples in historical communities and epochs. Hegel locates the first shape of Spirit ("True Spirit") in the Ancient Greek polity, whose Ethical Life serves for him as a paradigm of unity between individual citizen and political community in presenting a conception of "the individual that is a world."[93] Siep elaborates that this elusive phrase has two meanings in the context of Hegel's use: first, the holist perspective that "the ethical world of the Greek polis is an individual, complete in itself," and second, that the person living in it is "a world" whose "self-understanding is that of an executor and conservator of the customs, religion, and interests" of the community.[94] For the citizen of the Greek polis, therefore, their community—which serves as the universal—is

[91] Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel*, 78-79.
[92] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §351, p. 213.
[93] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §441, p. 265.
[94] Siep, "Practical Reason and Spirit in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*," 177.

importantly *not* "something alien to it."[95] More specifically, as Mark Alznauer explains, in the Ancient Greek polis Hegel saw "the first form of social order in which the laws are taken as authoritative because they established the freedom of the individuals they govern," whose very actions in turn contribute to and perpetuate their social order.[96] Hegel notes the Ancient Greek awareness of and accounting for the importance of a community's Ethical Life in the moral formation of its members, both for their own individual wellbeing and for the wellbeing and maintenance of the community itself.

However, Hegel explains, in Ancient Greece this harmony was burdened by a contradiction regarding differing sources of the community's norms, a contradiction that emerges between obligation to the gods, one's family, and one's political community, which Hegel depicts with reference to Sophocles's tragedy *Antigone*.[97] In short, Hegel claims that the Ancient Greeks failed to see that the norms of their communal Ethical Life ought to derive "from the concept of freedom," and that these norms "must reflect and honor the subjective rights of the individual."[98] Hegel's suggestion here is that, despite the ideal relation between citizen and polis in the Greek city-state, in that context the grounds for freedom were not transparently located in

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[95] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §439, p. 264.
[96] Mark Alznauer, "Spirit in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*," in *The Oxford Handbook of Hegel*, ed. Dean Moyar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 134. See Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §439, p. 264, for his claim that Spirit is the "*ground* and *starting point*" of a person's action as well as its "purpose and goal." As Taylor puts it, on Hegel's picture of the Ancient Greek polis, the citizen "is at one with a larger subject, with a universal of which he senses himself to be an emanation." Taylor, *Hegel*, 172.
[97] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §469f, p. 283. For a lucid analysis of Hegel's discussion of *Antigone* and the tensions it indicates in Ancient Greek Ethical Life, see Molly Farneth, *Hegel's Social Ethics: Religion, Conflict, and Rituals of Reconciliation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 18-28. Regarding the implications of Hegel's account, Farneth also makes a compelling case for the claim that "Hegel's criticism of Greek *Sittlichkeit* is a criticism of a shape of spirit that takes its norms—including gender norms—to be natural and shielded from scrutiny and critique." Farneth, *Hegel's Social Ethics*, 28-32.
[98] Alznauer, "Spirit in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*," 142. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §476-483, p. 289-294. Farneth rightly clarifies the gendered nature of this contradiction, especially with regard to its depiction in *Antigone*: "Greek *Sittlichkeit* [is] burdened by the unresolvable conflict between women and men who take their ethical obligations to issue from different, at-times-conflicting, and yet nonrevisable sources," rather than seeing obligations (rightly) as "socially constructed." Although Hegel's account importantly troubles natural and fixed gender norms, he nevertheless holds troublingly patriarchal views. Farneth, *Hegel's Social Ethics*, 30-32.

the rational capacity for self-determination. According to Hegel, members of the Ancient Greek Ethical Life [*Sittlichkeit*] experience their relation to the community *immediately*, absent self-conscious awareness and reflection.[99] Because of this contradiction and insufficient accounting for individuality and the grounds for freedom, Hegel claims that the shape of Spirit approximated by the Ancient Greeks gives way to a new one.

Hegel then proceeds to present Spirit as assuming different shapes analogous to the shapes of consciousness, which develop from a lack of self-awareness to self-conscious awareness emerging in opposition to the object/world and finally to self-conscious integration. Emerging out of the shape of "True Spirit" seen in Ancient Greece, Hegel claims that Spirit becomes characterized by the claim to a certain status of individuality and equality of persons at the expense of unity with their cultural and political "world." Locating this shift historically in the classical Roman period, Hegel argues that in such a context, individuals no longer think of themselves as parts belonging to a collective whole but rather "as a mere aggregate of atomized persons."[100]

Next, Hegel explains the second major shape of Spirit, "Self-Alienated Spirit," which corresponds historically to the European Enlightenment and is characterized by one's socio-political context having for persons "the character of being something external, the negative of self-consciousness."[101] Here the grounds for human freedom are self-consciously located in the rational capacity for self-determination, but such freedom is understood and experienced as thoroughly abstract and formal, being fundamentally other than and often defined in opposition

[99] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §476, p. 289.
[100] Hegel refers to this as "lifeless Spirit." Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §477, p. 290. Further, "Since…this shape of spirit 'rests on the alienation of oppositions,' [§486] not on a harmony between them, it is described as a mechanical rather than an organic or living unity." Alznauer, "Spirit in *Phenomenology of Spirit*," 143. Houlgate elaborates: "Moreover, each person conceives of himself quite *abstractly* as a bare rights-bearing self." Houlgate, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 150. See also, Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §479-483, p. 290-294.
[101] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §484, p. 294.

to the socio-political community on which persons depend. Thus, in this shape, Hegel argues that a person's ends risk arbitrariness, their obligations lack substantive content, and the status of their freedom is limited and uncertain: "The self knows itself as actual only as a *transcended* self."[102]

Following the rational and historical unfolding of this shape, Hegel claims that Self-Alienated Spirit leads to the conquering of "faith" (as representational knowledge that posits a transcendent, external world) by "enlightenment" (as the reign of pure reason). This overcoming is another facet of the turn away from one's embodied and institutional socio-political community. So following, he explains, enlightenment leads to "Absolute Freedom," wherein "utility" becomes consciousness's key framework and freedom is zealously pursued entirely in the negative (and content-less) sense.[103]

Finally, Hegel claims that this leads to the third major shape of Spirit, which develops through the stages of "Morality," "Conscience," and a final stage wherein individuals come to understand the universal as actual and serving as the locus of both normative authority *and* content. That is, rather than being actualized and given content by individuals (as in reason, previously), here the universal is understood to be "essential, substantial and authoritative *in its own right*," as a coherent, existing whole whose members both know themselves as, and are known by, the community to be constituent parts.[104] Only a community that develops a sense of its own unified, coherent existence as constituted by relations of mutual recognition among its

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[102] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §491, p. 299.
[103] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §582, p. 355; §589, p. 359. Hegel notably locates this phenomenon in the Terror of the French Revolution. See especially Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §592-§594, p. 360-363. Hegel writes that "Absolute freedom has thus removed the antithesis between the universal and the individual will," but it has done so tyrannically, at least in part because of its commitments to utilitarianism and a negative freedom for its own sake. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §595, p. 363.
[104] Houlgate, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 172-173.

members can realize what Hegel calls "*absolute* Spirit."[105] As a sublation of the naïve and self-alienated shapes of Spirit, Absolute Spirit marks the reestablishment of the unity between self and society that characterized the Greek polis, but now fully self-aware of both the grounds of human freedom in the rational capacity for self-determination *and* the importance of the community's Ethical Life for its preservation, content, and enhancement.

Hegel argues that, most fully, "Spirit is the knowledge of oneself in the externalization of oneself; the being that is the movement of retaining its self-identity in its otherness."[106] This classically Hegelian locution conveys that the full realization of Spirit involves overcoming pervasive dualisms between inner and outer, subject and object, self and other, not by outright collapsing the difference between them but by drawing the two sides into a higher, non-oppositional unity. Absolute Spirit thus refers to certain ideal conditions in which individual persons are able to attain a stable and satisfactory sense of wholeness and determinate self-understanding as rational and free beings that results from being members of, and standing in reciprocal and organic relation to, a properly organized community.

Organism, Embodiment, and Transcendence in the Life of Spirit

Having presented Hegel's distinctive, phenomenological analysis of the development of consciousness through the shapes of self-consciousness and Spirit, two key elements have remained underdeveloped that deserve further elaboration before turning to the themes of alienation and belonging. First, I have only gestured thus far to an especially important concept for Hegel, that of "organism."[107] A complex notion in Hegel's usage, which can only be briefly

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[105] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §670, p. 408.
[106] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §759, p. 459.
[107] I attend here only to the limited scope of the *Phenomenology*, but the concept of organism is among the most important for understanding Hegel's philosophical system. For helpful background on its role in the eighteenth and

outlined here, it is so important because Hegel claims that self-consciousness and Spirit are structurally organic.[108] For Hegel, an organism is a self-sufficient whole—a self-preserving, self-organizing, and self-perpetuating entity, whose ongoing existence is its own end. In other words, an organism is an "end in itself."[109] Further, he writes that an organism is a living, dynamic entity, whose unified existence is the "expression" of fluid, reciprocal, and non-purely instrumental relations among its constitutive parts.[110]

Second, throughout the *Phenomenology* Hegel insists that self-consciousness and Spirit strive after and become in their fullest realizations concrete, determinate phenomena in the world. Taylor helpfully refers to this critical point in Hegel's philosophy as the "principle of necessary embodiment."[111] Taylor explains that Hegel draws on two traditions of thought that lead him to this point, one from Aristotle regarding the nature of being(s) as the unity of form and matter (what has been called "hylomorphism"), and another from J. G. Herder regarding the need for thought to have a medium of expression.[112] This second, Herderian point is especially crucial because, as I have sought to make clear, Hegel is committed to the view that selfhood—both in the individual form of self-consciousness and the social form of Spirit—is constituted by the activity of self-realization in the world *as a concrete particularity*. In other words, for Hegel,

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nineteenth century intellectual movements of Romanticism and German Idealism, see Karl Ameriks, "Interpreting German Idealism," and Frederick Beiser, "The Enlightenment and Idealism," both in *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, ed. Karl Ameriks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[108] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §258, p. 157. For a helpful account of the role and meaning of organism in Hegel's thinking more generally, see Cinzia Ferrini, "The Transition to Organics: Hegel's Idea of Life," in *A Companion to Hegel*, eds. Stephen Houlgate and Michael Baur (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011); for an analysis of the concept for Hegel's ethical and political thinking specifically, see Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*, 300-318.

[109] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §256-259, p. 156-158.

[110] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §262-276, p. 159-166.

[111] Taylor, *Hegel*, 83.

[112] Taylor, *Hegel*, 87.

a self is a subject that is also an object who comes to know (or strives to know) itself in both dimensions of its existence.[113]

Having clarified these two features of his thought, it is now clear that Hegel thinks the experience of tension between the subjective and objective dimensions of experience and existence, the universal and the particular domains of conceptuality, and the abstract and the concrete nature of phenomena compels the self into new forms of consciousness. On my usage of the term, we can say that the *experience* of these tensions, as contradictions in or inadequacies of one's schemes for self-understanding and knowledge of the world that unsettle or even undermine self-determination (in either the immediate or the long term), amounts to alienation. To summarize, the first form of alienation appears in Hegel's analysis of the conflict between the knowledge of oneself *as a subject* and the knowledge of oneself *as an object*. This emerges for Hegel at the dawning of self-consciousness, wherein the self is motivated to attain a sense of self-certainty regarding its existence as a universal "I" of first-personal experience, on the one hand, and its knowledge of itself as a particular, embodied, determinate unity, on the other. In both dimensions of its experience, the self encounters objects (instances of the not-self) that frustrate this pursuit. Here, the self has no coherent account of itself as both subject and object, which prevents a person from knowing oneself and one's status as a free agent. Hegel concludes that the dialectical development of self-consciousness reveals that overcoming this alienation involves entering into a relation with *another self*—a relation ideally characterized as one of mutual recognition. Here, one attains certainty and coherence only in being recognized *as* a self

[113] For more on what he has famously referred to as Hegel's "expressivism," see Taylor, *Hegel*, 15ff. Further, "For this expressivist theory is opposed to the dualism of post-Cartesian philosophy (including empiricism), and that on both sides of its ancestry. This dualism saw the subject as a center of consciousness, perceiving the outside world and itself;" in contrast, Hegel's view "is radically anti-dualistic. And so was [his] theory of the subject." Taylor, *Hegel*, 81-82. Taylor credits Isaiah Berlin with this basic insight. As a result of this feature of Hegel's thought, Wood and others have referred to Hegel's philosophical anthropology and ethics as oriented toward "self-actualization." Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought*, 17-35.

by another self. However, the development of consciousness does not end here because in relations of mutual recognition persons enjoy only limited freedom.

Because mutual recognition is not the frequent outcome of selves in pursuit of self-confirmation, conflict being rather the more common result, Hegel explains that individuals are often driven inward for their knowledge and self-certainty. This internal turn tends to take varying forms, and it culminates (as "Reason") in a fully abstract, formal, and disembodied conclusion. Although this conclusion heals a strict contradiction between the contingent world of finitude and flux and the universal domain of truth (seen in the shape Hegel calls the "Unhappy Consciousness"), reason rests on untenable tensions in especially its rendering of freedom and the moral life. Hegel claims that consciousness is led to overcome these tensions when the universal takes the form of a concrete human community, a stage of consciousness that he calls Spirit.

Tracing the shapes of Spirit through historically recognizable examples, Hegel presents the North Atlantic world of the Enlightenment as characterized by an oppositional relation of the individual to their social context (what he calls "Self-Alienated Spirit"). Here we can see the text's second major form of alienation (and Hegel's most frequent use of the term), which amounts to the experience of being dependent on and shaped by a social context that stands in opposition to one's capacity for self-determination.[114] Hegel then presents the final and ultimately satisfactory shape of Spirit ("Absolute Spirit") as overcoming this second form of

[114] Taylor is distinctly lucid in explicating this element in Hegel: "This alienated identification, as against the happy identification of the Greeks, thus does not express itself in an explicit consciousness of oneness with the society; rather it comes out in the sense that they must aspire to close the gap between themselves and this social reality, that they must give up their individual particularity and come closer to the essential substance of their lives in serving a wider cause, such as the state. This sense that the substance of their lives lies beyond them is the essence of alienation, and the service, discipline and self-transformation which it inspires is what forms men for the next stage." Taylor, *Hegel*, 178.

alienation, and, because the community of Absolute Spirit is constituted by relations of mutual recognition, it thereby overcomes the first form of alienation as well.

As I indicated earlier, Absolute Spirit refers to the development of consciousness into an organic community that is self-aware of the dynamic relationships constituting its own existence. As mentioned, organisms are, for Hegel, constituted by part-whole relations according to which individual parts contribute to and cohere around the life of the organism as an end in itself. Consistent with its modeling on the basic structure of the self-conscious self, Spirit's self-conscious members possess a crucial, irreducible status as self-conscious (i.e., "spiritual") beings themselves. In Absolute Spirit, Hegel explains, persons understand themselves as embodiments of and contributors to the life of their community, and their community becomes self-conscious through its members' awareness of its dependence on them to manifest (actualize), extend (maintain), and enhance its ongoing life.[115] Here, the importance of Hegel's concept of Ethical Life becomes especially clear, as it refers to a contextually particular, normative social environment that fosters "the absolute spiritual *unity* of the essence of individuals in their independent *actual existence*" by forming its members through collective practices, rituals, and customs.[116]

Importantly, the consonance between individual and community achieved in Absolute Spirit is not only for the wellbeing of the community as a whole. Such a construal risks casting individuals as mere instruments or cogs in the realization of Spirit, and Hegel's conception of organism and his view of individuals as self-conscious beings resists this. Rather, the self-conscious dependency of individuals on their community has also been brought fully into view.

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[115] As Houlgate puts this, "individuals not only find their common identity as citizens expressed in the laws and customs, they also see their own *individual* identities protected and promoted by them." Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel*, 79.
[116] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §349, p. 212.

In Absolute Spirit, individuals become fully aware of their own dependence on relations of mutual recognition for the attainment of stable knowledge of themselves and their status as self-determining being, and on a community's thick context of practices and traditions for their development into persons aware of and able to use their freedom in rational and self-sustaining (rather than contradictory and self-defeating) ways. Absolute Spirit therefore marks the alignment of individual and communal wellbeing, which allows for individuals and their community to enjoy true self-determination.

With this overall picture in view, there is a final salient point to draw out of Hegel's thinking in the *Phenomenology*. Taylor, for one, gets something critically right in his reading of the deficiency Hegel locates in the Enlightenment, even if he goes astray in his full interpretation of it. Regarding the tension between the trajectories of "Faith" and "Enlightenment" in Spirit's self-alienated shape, Taylor argues that, according to Hegel,

> The basic error of the Enlightenment is to have seized only half the truth. It is right to have debunked the pretensions of kings and churches, to have seen that universal scientific consciousness can penetrate fully external reality, and should thus be considered of greater significance. It is right to perceive that ultimately rational subjectivity is dominant. But it is wrong in thinking that this subjectivity is simply human, in leaving no place for a cosmic *Geist* except the slot of the supreme being. For in fact human subjectivity only achieves dominance as the vehicle of this greater subject. Men have to accept that there is significant reality outside them, and in return they can feel fully *bei sich* in so far as they cease to identify themselves just as men, but rather see themselves as vehicles of absolute subject. The basic mistake of the Enlightenment is to refuse this transcendence and try to achieve this consummation on behalf of man alone; it tries to make man's subjectivity alone dominant instead of participating in the dominance of the absolute subject.[117]

This paragraph is representative of Taylor's noted metaphysical overreach, but it is all the while distinctively attentive to a feature of Hegel's thought that is often under-appreciated by more recent interpreters. Although he wrongly relates it to a cosmic spirit, Taylor rightly puts his

[117] Taylor, *Hegel*, 182.

finger on the *verticality* intrinsic to Hegel's conception of Spirit, on the transcendence entailed in Hegel's conclusion about the holistic, communal context necessary for the full development of consciousness. Rather than referring to a "cosmic spirit," however, I contend that verticality and transcendence are key features of Spirit as a communal, organic whole.

This same vertical or transcendent dimension is nicely explicated by Josiah Royce in reference to Hegel's portrayal of the development of rational self-consciousness through its own activity, a theme I did not mention previously.[118] Royce discerns from this that Hegel's anthropology suggests "The individual in order to come to himself…needs a world where he may find something to which he can devote himself as to an objective." For such an individual, Royce continues, "The true world must become for me the realm of my life task, of my work, of my objectively definite and absorbing pursuit. Only so can I truly come to myself and to my own." In such an instance, the direction of one's life is no mere "object of sentiment," but rather is seen by oneself as "a worthy mode of self-expression."[119]

These two passages draw out what has been mostly implicit but nevertheless fundamental to the journey of self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology*. On Hegel's reasoning, the self's fullest realization and freedom involve being drawn into a larger life that includes yet transcends the individual without negating it, initially in interpersonal relations of mutual recognition and finally in a human community constituted by them. This is a key feature of Hegel's philosophical anthropology, and it stands at the very center of my engagement with his thinking. Selves are only able to arrive at satisfactory self-knowledge, and are thus only able to *be* genuinely self-

[118] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §347ff, p. 211ff, but specifically "*Virtue and the way of the world*," §381-393, p. 228-235.
[119] On the social dimension of this, he continues, "in my calling, I have my colleagues who work with me in a common cause. This cause (*die Sache*) is ours. Here, then, are the conditions of an ideal society. Here, subject and object are at least, it might seem, upon equal terms." Royce, *Lectures on Modern Idealism*, 196-197. In this quotation, Royce is clearly foreshadowing his own later work on loyalty.

determining, by identifying themselves with some larger community of persons that possesses a coherent and self-reflective unity, which is facilitated by a culture laden with distinct practices, values, and traditions.[120] The first-personal experience of this membership, what I am terming a sense of belonging, is found precisely in the opportunity to participate in relations of mutual recognition and to see oneself as a legitimate expression or embodiment of the community to which the person contributes and on which the self depends. This is the fulness of Hegel's aforementioned ideal description of Spirit as the "'I' that is 'We' and 'We' that is 'I.'"[121]

Political Belonging in Hegel's Philosophy of Politics and Religion

My examination of the *Phenomenology* concluded with the point that satisfactory self-knowledge depends on a self's membership in a community, suggesting but not clearly making a case for what sort of community this might be. Now, I will explain why Hegel concludes that the kind of community he has in mind is *political* in nature, in which membership is necessary for selves to live their fullest lives of genuine self-determination. According to Hegel, this is because "The [political community] is the actuality of concrete freedom."[122]

Up to this point, I have left unattended the *Phenomenology*'s consideration of religion. In that text, Hegel introduces religion as a moment in the life of Spirit, a shape that posits a fundamental distinction between God and the world, divinity and humanity, the Absolute and the

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[120] Wood puts this point similarly: "The dialectical project of self-understanding and self-actualization is one in which individual human beings participate through the forms shaped by a cultural tradition." Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought*, 19.

[121] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §177, p. 110. All that said, I take Hegel to suggest that such a community, owing to its dynamic relational constitution and the distinct individuality of its members, is never realized in a fixed and final state of affairs. Absolute Spirit is by nature a fragile achievement. To the extent that it is realized, it is always impermanent, needing as a part of its Ethical Life certain reflective collective practices to sustain itself. For this, Farneth has helpfully elucidated some necessary "rituals of recognition" that emerge in the *Phenomenology*'s analysis. Farneth, *Hegel's Social Ethics*, esp. chapters 4 and 7.

[122] G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H. B. Nisbet, ed. Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), §260, p. 282.

particular self. As such, he claims that religion is a representational form of knowing he calls "picture-thinking."[123] Although we have seen that Hegel's philosophy ultimately seeks to overcome such pervasive dualisms, he nevertheless finds a critically important role for religion to play in the sensible, dispositional lives of persons. As I will show, religion plays a crucial role in his mature theorization of the political community.

Hegel's Political Theory: The Context and Conditions for Satisfactory Self-Knowledge

Hegel's later works on political theory, in particular his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1820) and his *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* (compiled from lectures he gave in 1822, 1828, and 1830), build on the previously noted emphases on embodiment and determinacy and make the case for membership within one's political community as necessary for the realization of "actualized freedom."[124] Wood explains that the "chief foundation" of Hegel's ethical and political thought is the claim "that rational individuals actualize their freedom most fully when they participate in a [certain kind of] state." Congruent with what I have previously said in the conclusion of my discussion of the *Phenomenology*, Wood further explains that Hegel understands the rational state to be "an end in itself," not in a manner that instrumentalizes its individual members but rather "because the highest stage of *individual* self-actualization consists in participating in the state and recognizing it as such an end."[125]

[123] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §678, p. 412.
[124] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §4, p. 35. As in my quotations of the *Phenomenology*, I will preserve Hegel's liberal use of italics in the *Philosophy of Right*. All emphases are his unless otherwise noted.
[125] Thus, Wood concludes, despite the seeming implication, that Hegel cannot be rightly understood as a straightforward collectivist. Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought*, 21. Wood is right to claim that Hegel's political philosophy insists on the inviolability of individuals (as "spiritual" beings) in their particularity. For an important example of this, see Houlgate's summary of Hegel's comments on slavery in Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel*, 187.

But why, for Hegel, is the state or political community (terms I use interchangeably) such a uniquely significant context?[126] That is the question my examination of the *Phenomenology* has led us to, which I will now take up. According to Hegel, a *political* community is a community of communities that is able to organize the different elements, institutions, and domains of human life into a coherent, self-sufficient whole. As such, a political community is unique in its capacity for genuine self-determination and the highest and most complete form of Ethical Life.

Hegel claims that a political community is "rationally" organized to the extent that it includes, secures, and unites these different institutions and domains in ways that are conducive to the development of individuals into rational, self-conscious, and self-determining beings. On his view, a *rational* political community maintains a structure and a culture that secure the opportunity for satisfactory self-knowledge and the actualization of freedom. Hegel thinks that the modern state of his time can be understood as particularly well suited to this end, as it brings together three representative domains: a domestic domain of intimate relations and attachments ("family"), an economic and vocational domain of individual freedom ("civil society"), and a governing and unifying domain ("the state").[127] Such domains, he thinks, correspond to the three broad stages of the development of Spirit (naïve un-reflectiveness, self as opposed to other, self and other integrated in a larger whole) and lend themselves to an order that promotes the full realization of selfhood and Spirit.

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[126] Hegel regularly uses a phrase translated as "political state" to refer strictly to the governing institutions of a political community, whereas he uses the term "state" to refer more generally to "the whole of a civilly and politically well-organized society." Kenneth Westphal, "The Basic Context and Structure of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. Frederick C. Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 259. See, for example, Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §273, p. 308, and §276, p. 314. I will use "political community" in place of Hegel's usage of "state" to avoid unnecessarily binding the discussions at hand to any historically particular form (i.e., the nation-state, even if that is Hegel's immediate context), all the while being clear that political institutions are a necessary and constitutive part of the community being referenced—institutions which are not generally implied by the term "community" alone.

[127] Hegel offers these as the divisions of Part Three in his *Philosophy of Right*, which he summarizes in §33, p. 62-63. For him, the rational state is the highest and most complete and concrete form of Ethical Life.

One of Hegel's signal contributions to modern political theory, and a point of important contrast with his predecessors in the social contract tradition, is not equating the political community with civil society.[128] Hegel claims that the domain of civil society, consisting primarily of economic exchange, legal institutions, and associational communities (such as professional societies and guilds), is critical for giving individuals the support and opportunity to express their individual autonomy and self-determination.[129] Accordingly, civil society on his depiction tends to be characterized by transactional or instrumental relations, and it tends to be governed by abstract principles and utilitarian calculations.[130] Nevertheless, Hegel explains, although civil society is focused on individuals in their particularity, it depends on a growing sense of cooperation to ensure the welfare of selves, first in terms of law, justice, and its enforcement, and then in a higher form that he calls corporations.[131] Implicit in civil society, then, and necessary for the full development of selves and their freedom, is the need for the unification of the disparate elements that compose civil society into a self-sufficient whole; as a whole, the political community is the manifestation of a *concrete* universal, whereas, in civil society, the universal is construed abstractly.[132]

Hegel holds that the political community is distinct in being that level or kind of community capable of being fully self-organizing and self-governing. Given its distinct scale, scope, and power, the political community is that which has the capacity to gather together the disparate elements of human life on which persons depend for their needs and development. For

[128] Franco, *Hegel's Philosophy of Freedom*, 278-279; Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*, 227.
[129] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §182-185, p. 220-223. Hegel argues that civil society develops out of the need for the development of "*particularity*" that cannot be adequately realized in the context of the family; Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §181, p. 219.
[130] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §235, p. 261.
[131] Hegel locates most fully in the "corporation" the kernel of the unity that must ultimately draw the disparate elements and atomized individuals of civil society into a unified whole. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §250-256, p. 270-274.
[132] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §259R, p. 274.

these reasons, Hegel writes that the properly organized political community is rightly understood as an “organism,” with respect to which its members (ideally) stand in non-instrumental, part-whole relations, and which is self-satisfying, self-producing, self-sustaining, and therefore self-sufficient.[133] The qualities of rational organization (being ordered to the fullest development of itself and its members), self-sufficiency (having the capacity to unite those elements of society on which humans depend), and organic nature (existing as an end in itself without instrumentalizing its parts) lead Hegel to claim that the political community is “an absolute and unmoved end in itself, and in it, freedom enters into its highest right.”[134]

Hegel insists on the importance of a rationally organized and organically structured political community because of its ability to secure the conditions for selves to become and to know themselves as self-determining. On the picture he provides, although not in every case explicit, a political community is able to do so by: 1.) promoting mutual recognition among its members;[135] 2.) reflecting back to each member their status as a dignified and free person in its cultural life and institutional practices; 3.) including and preserving the cultural and institutional contexts that imbue persons with substantive and meaningful ends and obligations; and 4.) securing genuine opportunities for individual self-expression and self-development (especially in civil society).[136]

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[133] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §269, p. 290. At the beginning of this chapter, I referred to this view as political holism. Hegel explains the non-instrumentality of individuals and their reciprocal relations with the state by explaining that the state can “not attain validity or fulfillment without the interest, knowledge, and volition of the particular, and that individuals do not live as private persons merely for these particular interests without at the same time directing their will to a universal end and acting in conscious awareness of this end.” Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §260, p. 282. Hegel’s organic theorization of the state is also a clear point of convergence with Rousseau’s organic conception of the body politic considered in the previous chapter.

[134] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §258, p. 275.

[135] Recognition plays a key role in each section of the *Philosophy of Right*, beginning with §51, p. 81. Williams patiently draws out this point in the second part of his *Hegel’s Ethics of Recognition*, chapters 6-12.

[136] Hardimon helpfully elaborates this point about the opportunities for individual development and actualization in *Hegel’s Social Philosophy*, 102-103.

What is more, Hegel claims that the political community is uniquely able to hold these elements together in a unity, not simply as a network of relations but as a cohesive, organic *whole* distinguished by its own culture and identity.[137] Since only a self-sufficient entity can be thoroughly self-determining, individuals can only be and know themselves as truly self-determining by coming to identify with a properly ordered political community. Therefore, Hegel writes, "Only in the state does man have a rational existence."[138] Yet, given its very nature, the political community can only be an organic whole if its members understand it as such, as a whole to which they belong as constituent parts.[139] Such a self-sufficient community that is rationally organized, internally self-aware, and fully self-determining, is what Hegel considers the full realization of Spirit.[140]

Turning to the perspective of the individual self, Hegel holds that determinate self-knowledge and self-understanding follow from locating oneself in a rational, concrete, self-sufficient community. Here the congruence with his dialectical conclusion regarding reason and Spirit in the *Phenomenology* is evident. On this reasoning, by identifying with one's political community as the universal—an encompassing, self-sufficient context within which persons can make adequate sense of themselves—persons are able to overcome alienation and attain

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[137] Although I cannot attend to the matter here, it is important to note that, for Hegel, a political community is to emerge from what he calls a "nation" [*Volk*], which is characterized by a *culture* consisting of its own practices, norms, rituals, etc. See G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History. Introduction: Reason in History*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 58-59. Especially helpful on this point is Moland, *Hegel on Political Identity*, chapter 3. Taylor insightfully elaborates on the extent to which, on Hegel's view, individuals rely on their cultural contexts for the language and symbols in reference to which they carve out their own identities. Taylor, *Hegel*, 380-381. Franco critiques Taylor for offering a "communitarian" reading of this socio-linguistic point, but I suspect that difference has to do with Franco's mostly formal reading of Hegel's political philosophy that only sparingly references the more culturally attuned *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*. See Franco, *Hegel's Philosophy of Freedom*, 224.

[138] Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, 94.

[139] For Hegel, Spirit only fully becomes Spirit when it understands itself—in and through the conscious lives of its individual members—as such.

[140] "[S]pirit…is self-sufficient being, which is the same thing as freedom… The business of spirit is to produce itself, to make itself its own object, and to gain knowledge of itself; in this way, it exists for itself." Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, 48.

determinate self-understanding as free beings. Hegel therefore argues that "it is only through being a member of the state that the individual himself has objectivity, truth, and ethical life."[141]

Hegel thus argues that the "*Union*" of individuals and the political community makes possible the "destiny of individuals," which is "to lead a universal life." Such a union, he explains, "consists in the unity of objective freedom and subjective freedom," wherein a person self-consciously identifies with given laws and institutions and so relates to the political community and its parts not as "something *alien*" but rather that "in which it has its *self-awareness*."[142] This is the point of Hegel's enigmatic claim that the fullest realization of freedom occurs when the individual's relations of dependence are transformed so that the will is able to be "with itself…[in an] other."[143] Similar to Rousseau, Hegel thinks that the alignment of subjective (internal, self-conscious) and objective (institutional, legal, and cultural) conditions entails the transformation of relations of dependence and allows for the highest form of freedom, in which persons might experience their obligations as "*liberation*" rather than "*limitation*."[144] That is to say, by being bound to the institutions, principles, and cultural life that ground a person's ends and obligations and promote free self-determination, persons can experience their duties to society not as impediments to their freedom but as necessary conditions for it.[145]

[141] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §258, p. 276.
[142] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §258, p. 276; §147, p. 191.
[143] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §23, p. 54. For more on Hegel's claim that freedom is a matter of being "with oneself" [*bei sich selbst*], see Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought*, 45-47.
[144] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §149, p. 192. This, Houlgate explains, occurs when a person "understand[s] the laws and institutions within which one lives to be determined by the character or structure of one's own freedom." Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel*, 185.
[145] Here, of course, is a parallel to Rousseau's claim that membership in a properly organized political community allows for the alignment of duty and interest. This also resonates with Rousseau's notorious claim about the possibility a person being "forced to be free." Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, I.VII, p. 150. For related reasons, Hegel dispenses with the concept of a "state of nature," Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, 98-99.

"Ethical Life" [*Sittlichkeit*] is in fact Hegel's term of art for these socially cohesive forces and refers to "The living reality of the state within its individual members."[146]

At this point, the *verticality* in Hegel's conception of the political community is in full view. According to his thinking, it is only by belonging to a concrete, self-sufficient whole, a context that includes but necessarily transcends the individual, that a person is able to enjoy genuine self-determination and live a "universal life."[147] Determinate self-knowledge and "*concrete freedom*" depend on persons being drawn up into a larger life with which they identify and see themselves as expressions of. As Hegel describes the reciprocation important to this point, "personal individuality and its particular interests should reach their full *development* and gain *recognition of their right* for itself (within the system of the family and of civil society), and also that they should, on the one hand, *pass over* of their own accord into the interest of the universal, and on the other, knowingly and willingly acknowledge this universal interest even in their own *substantial spirit*."[148]

On Hegel's picture, it is only by self-identifying with a rationally structured political community that is ordered to the free self-determination of its members—what I term the experience of *belonging*—that selves are able to attain satisfactory self-knowledge and enjoy true freedom.[149] As Taylor helpfully summarizes, Hegel's position is "that our highest and most complete moral existence is one we can only attain to as members of a community," which, especially when properly ordered as a rational political community, "is an embodiment of *Geist*,

[146] Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, 102.
[147] "The spirit in history is an individual which is both universal in nature and at the same time determinate; in short, it is the nation in general." Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, p. 51.
[148] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §260, p. 282.
[149] In such a context, Houlgate rightly explains, "the ethical individual finds freedom in the laws and customs of the society in which he lives because he recognizes that they accord with his innermost will and make it possible to for him to be who he is." Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel*, 195.

and a fuller, more substantial embodiment than the individual."[150] Similarly, Siep rightly claims that Hegel's theory of the political community includes "the 'ontological thesis' of the higher reality of the unification of individuals over their separate existence."[151]

Hegel refers to the sense of belonging that I am focusing on here, rather non-intuitively relating it to the concept of patriotism, in the following passage from the *Philosophy of Right*:

> The political *disposition*, i.e. *patriotism* in general, is certainly based on truth (whereas merely subjective certainty does not originate in *truth*, but is only opinion) and a volition which has become *habitual*. As such, it is merely a consequence of the institutions within the state, a consequence in which rationality is *actually* present, just as rationality receives its practical application through action in conformity with the state's institutions. – The disposition is in general one of *trust* (which may pass over into more or less educated insight), or the consciousness that my substantial and particular interest is preserved and contained in the interests and end of an other (in this case, the state), and in the latter's relation to me as an individual. As a result, this other immediately ceases to be an other for me, and in my consciousness of this, I am free.[152]

This paragraph makes at least three things clear. First, for a self to experience what I am calling a sense of belonging, certain subjective (internal, dispositional) *and* objective (concrete, institutional) conditions must obtain. Writing that this experience "is merely a consequence of the institutions within the state" being rational, Hegel places onus on the state (objective conditions), although he clearly mentions an important "volition[al]" element is involved. Second, a sense of belonging depends on seeing—and on being able to see, given the right institutional, formal, and cultural conditions—oneself as part of a larger whole. As he clarifies in his Remark on this paragraph, Hegel explains that "Patriotism…is that disposition which…habitually knows that the community is the substantial basis and end."[153] Third, in light

[150] Taylor, *Hegel*, 378. However, here, too, I disagree with Taylor in grounding this point in his cosmic spirit interpretation of Hegel.
[151] Ludwig Siep, "Hegel's Liberal, Social, and 'Ethical' State," in *The Oxford Handbook of Hegel*, ed. Dean Moyar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 524.
[152] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §268, p. 288. For a helpful elaboration of Hegel's view of patriotism, See Moland, *Hegel on Political Identity*, chapter 2, esp. 51-55.
[153] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §268R, p. 288-289.

of the fundamentally self-conscious nature of selves and the reasoning above, to experience a sense of belonging is to be free. Theorizing the political community as a transcendent whole that grounds and guides a person's fullest development and life, along with attending to dispositions such as "trust," brings us to the matter of religion, to which I now turn.

Religion in the Life of Actualized Spirit: Hegel and Civil Religion

In his *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel brings up the matter of religion just after his discussion of patriotism. He makes the connection clear by claiming that "Religion is the relation to the absolute *in the form of feeling, representational thought, and faith*."[154] That said, while religion so understood serves as an important "*foundation*" for a political community, he claims that the orientation of religion characteristically refers to its object as something entirely other than the world. Religion is therefore related to but distinct from the domain of the political community, the latter of which is concerned foremost with "present spirit, *unfolding* as the actual shape and *organization of a world*."[155] It is nevertheless the case that religion's role in shaping human dispositions make it, for Hegel, a necessary feature of a well-functioning political community.[156] Such a perspective brings Hegel clearly into the tradition of civil religious thinkers who, like Rousseau previously, not only recognize the importance of religion for political life, but who also find it necessary to theorize politics by referencing categories, themes, practices, and even beliefs commonly associated with religion.[157]

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[154] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §270R, p. 293.
[155] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §270R, p. 292.
[156] In fact, although he is clear that the state "can have no say in the content [of religious belief]," Hegel is so insistent on the necessity of properly cultivated dispositions that he argues provocatively "the state ought even to require all its citizens to belong to such a community." Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §270R, p. 295.
[157] Andrew Buchwalter also presents Hegel as a thinker of civil religion, but he focuses on the distinct content of Protestant Christianity for this task rather than the dimensionality involved in religion as such. Andrew Buchwalter, "Elements of Hegel's Political Theology: Civic Republicanism, Social Justice, Constitutionalism, and Universal Human Rights," *Symposium* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2017), 140-146.

Hegel had been interested in the relation between religion and politics since the very beginning of his career, not firstly for grounding political legitimacy or sovereignty but rather for theorizing the forces that bind communities together. In his early "Tübingen Essay" (1793), Hegel reflects on the importance of a *Volksreligion* for modern society. Thomas Lewis explains that, in this early essay, Hegel uses the term *Volksreligion* in reference to the common beliefs and practices that cultivate "a common ethos according to which a society acts," which in turn "overcomes social fragmentation." Lewis convincingly argues that the term should therefore be translated as "civil religion."[158] Bearing obvious similarity to Rousseau's thinking on the matter just thirty years prior, the notion (though not the term) explicitly re-emerges in Hegel's later *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*.

Hegel's mature philosophy of religion presented in the *Lectures* is systematic and complex, and only the briefest of outlines can be made. According to Hegel, religion and philosophy share a common object, namely, the Absolute (in the words of the *Lectures*, "the eternal truth, God and nothing else but God").[159] However, whereas philosophy refers to a purely *conceptual* form of knowledge, for Hegel, religion refers to the assortment of ways in which persons come to relate to and experience the Absolute: "Religion is the manner or mode by which all human beings become conscious of truth for themselves."[160] On Hegel's conception,

[158] This, despite its most literal translation being "folk religion." Lewis, *Religion, Modernity, and Politics in Hegel*, 26-27. Lewis centralizes the theme of civil religion in Hegel's writings on religion, arguing that "Hegel's quest for a modern *Volksreligion*, or civil religion, is not the singular motive of his work; but it is integral to grasping his religious thought as well as his broader engagement with the new social order he saw emerging." Lewis, *Religion, Modernity, and Politics in Hegel*, 248.

[159] G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, trans. R. F. Brown, P. C. Hodgson, J. M. Stewart, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, 3 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984-1987), 1:152-153. We have record of Hegel giving these lectures on four occasions, in 1821, 1824, 1827, and 1831. I will focus almost exclusively on the 1827 lectures because they are the latest and most complete. For more on this, see Peter Hodgson's editorial introduction, esp. 1:1-8.

[160] Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 1:180. "We must remember that Hegel did not consider faith and philosophy to be offering two rival accounts of the world. Rather, he thought that they both tell the same story and reveal the same truth, but that they take hold of that truth in different ways: faith through feeling, images and the concrete historical person of Jesus Christ, and philosophy through concepts." Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel*,

religion is distinct in attending especially to the first-personal, existential experience of a person's awareness of and relation to the Absolute, typically rendered by religion as "God."[161]

Hegel claims that, in regard to knowledge of and relation to God, religion takes one of three basic "determinations," which all maintain an essential difference between God and the world, positing that "the human being and God are related [to each other] *as distinct*." In the first determination, religion takes the form of intuition and "feeling;" in the second, it takes the form of "representation;" and in the third, it takes the form of "thought."[162] Hegel also insists on the importance of the "*practical*" dimension of religion, which he refers to as its cultic life, or "cultus." Ever faithful to the triadic structure, he offers three basic forms of cultic practice: acts of devotion (i.e., prayer), symbolic acts of sacrifice that evoke the feeling of reconciliation with God (i.e. the sacraments), and acts of repentance that suppress individual egoism and commit persons to the service of a greater cause.[163]

Hegel concludes his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* by arguing that Protestant Christianity is the "consummate religion." Very briefly, he claims that this is because freedom is its primary principle and its doctrines (especially its doctrine of the Trinity: abstract and universal God the "Father," the differentiation of and reconciliation offered in Christ, and the

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247. As Taylor insightfully puts it, as a form of "*Vorstellung*" [representation], religion "*narrates*" the relation between concepts rather than showing "the inner connections" between them. Taylor, *Hegel*, 480.

[161] "[Religion pertains to] the loftiest object that can occupy human beings… Everything that people value and esteem, everything on which they think to base their pride and glory, all of this finds its ultimate focal point in religion in the thought or consciousness of God and in the feeling of God." Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 1:149-150.

[162] Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 1:179. Hegel explains that religion as feeling (or "faith") focuses on the "*subjective* side," whereas religion as representation focuses on the "*objective* side," and religion as thought integrates subjective and objective elements. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 1:386-414.

[163] Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 1:445-446. As is quite evident here and elsewhere, Hegel's philosophy of religion is decidedly Christian. For an explanation and defense of the view that "It is because Hegel is a Christian that he thinks in the ways he does… In other words, Hegel identifies the Christian logic with the logic of reality itself," see Adams, *Eclipse of Grace*, 180-181. Similarly, Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel*, 270-271. For an alternative view that suggests Hegel's social theoretical and post-Kantian philosophical concerns lead the way, see Lewis, *Religion, Modernity, and Politics in Hegel*, chapter 6.

unity in the community of the Holy Spirit) and cultic life provide the most accurate representation of and encourage forms of life most appropriate to the journey of Spirit to self-awareness.[164] Given these features, he claims, the Christian religion consists of features that might allow its members and their communities to become transparent to themselves as reflexively self-determining.[165] Although Hegel thinks that Christianity is especially conducive to freedom and Spirit's self-realization, and therefore most suitable to the modern state and its members, he sees a critically important social and political role for religion more generally, Christian or otherwise.

At this point, Hegel's philosophy of religion connects directly to the social and political theory he introduces in the *Phenomenology* and develops in the *Philosophy of Right*. Hegel explains that there is an important parallel between the cultic life of religious communities and the Ethical Life of socio-political communities, both of which utilize practices, rituals, and customs to align an individual's dispositions and will with a larger, transcendent context of meaning and being. In other words, the Ethical Life of a cohesive and well-functioning socio-political community requires something like a cultic life of its own. For this reason, he explains, "If heart and will are earnestly and thoroughly cultivated for the universal and the true, then there is present what appears as *ethical life*. To that extent ethical life is the most genuine cultus."[166]

This indicates a clear reemergence of Hegel's earlier concern for religion as a cohering social force. Having defined religion as that which attends to the inner life of a person's

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[164] This is the focus of the entire third part of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, summarized on 1:183-184. For further explanation, see Peter C. Hodgson, "Hegel's Philosophy of Religion," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth Century German Philosophy*, ed. Frederick C. Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 244-252.
[165] Hegel describes Christianity as "the *consummate religion,* the religion that is for itself, that is objective to itself." Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 3:249. Further, he credits Christianity with the ideas of universal freedom and "self-conscious" freedom. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, 54.
[166] Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 1:446.

commitments and existential orientation, religion has an important role to play in a political theory like Hegel's that maintains the need for persons to identify with their political community. Like Rousseau, Hegel's view suggests that part of what is further unique about religion is the particular way in which it performs this task, although he does not explain the matter in quite this way. In the *Philosophy of Right* and the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, religion is known to cultivate human dispositions and attachments toward the members, values, and practices of a community by self-consciously locating persons within the context of a larger life. For Hegel, elemental to religion is the *vertical* dimension involved with orienting persons to a transcendent context of meaning. It is on this often under-appreciated but nevertheless clear point that his theory of civil religion is best understood. That said, civil religion for Hegel is not identical to religion, because religion remains other-worldly in its focus ("In religion, human beings are free before God"), whereas civil religion and the political community attend to "*freedom in the world*, in actuality."[167]

What we can call Hegel's civil religion is not about the establishment of a state religion or coerced belief, nor is it even firstly about religious-like forces that provide the social "glue" or sentimental grounding for a socio-political order.[168] Rather, I contend, for Hegel civil religion is about cultivating the attachments and dispositions that follow from persons self-consciously locating themselves within the context of their community as a larger, transcendent whole that promises a fuller life. Such a part-whole relation is at the heart of the experiential dimension of religion and its importance for the life of a political community.[169] As Mark Tunick writes,

[167] Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 1:452.
[168] In fact, Hegel stoutly defends the freedom of religion. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §270R, p. 295.
[169] Michael Quante and David Schweikard clearly articulate key aspects of Hegel's holism, including its vertical dimension *and* its sustained commitment to individual particularity (freedom), but they do not connect it with his view of religion. Michael Quante and David Schweikard, "'Leading a Universal Life': The Systematic Relevance of Hegel's Social Philosophy," *History of the Human Sciences* 22, no. 1 (2009).

according to Hegel, "Possessed of religion, members of the state will respect it as the whole of which they are parts… by being a part of the state, our lives have meaning as a part of something that transcends our particular existence."[170] Although Tunick is correct that Hegel maintains "To be free, people need to recognize that they are part of a totality that transcends their ephemeral existence," Tunick does not explain *why* that is the case aside from suggesting that doing so gives finite human life a sort of permanence.[171] It seems to me, however, that this is precisely because, as explained above, Hegel holds that locating oneself in a (properly ordered) political community is how one is able to secure satisfactory self-knowledge and the highest form of freedom.

Conclusion

In this chapter, after contextualizing and outlining his philosophy generally, I examined alienation as it appears in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, identified the two major forms it takes therein, and connected his thinking on the matter with his mature political theory. In so doing, I argued that alienation appears in Hegel's thought as the lack of satisfactory knowledge of oneself as rational and free amidst the self's profound dependencies on others and on a socio-political community. Further, I showed why Hegel holds that overcoming alienation by attaining satisfactory self-knowledge and genuine freedom is finally accomplished by coming to understand oneself as belonging to a properly ordered *political* community.

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[170] Mark Tunick, "Hegel and the Consecrated State," in *Hegel on Religion and Politics*, ed. Angelica Nuzzo (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013), 20.
[171] Tunick, "Hegel and the Consecrated State," 31-33. Similarly, although he better appreciates the transcendent dimension of the political community and its relation to freedom in Hegel's thought, Siep, "Hegel's Liberal, Social, and 'Ethical' State," p. 531.

As I have explained, Hegel maintains that political communities are bound together by an Ethical Life comprised of shared customs, norms, and practices, and that the self-conscious identification of selves with their political communities is best understood in terms of the inward domain of conviction that he claims is the more familiar "territory" of religion. I have, with Lewis and others, therefore located Hegel in the tradition of thinkers who theorize what Rousseau explicitly refers to as civil religion. Further, I argued that religion is, for Hegel, especially conducive to facilitating a self's attachments to its political community because, on his description, the properly ordered political community is best understood as a transcendent context of meaning and being. This accords with Hegel's portrayal of religion, which he suggests is naturally oriented towards transcendence. While Hegel holds that the political community is not *entirely* transcendent, given that selves participate in it as an actual, this-worldly community of other selves and institutions, he suggests that persons nevertheless stand in a *vertical* relation to it as parts to a larger whole. This verticality is often minimized in portrayals of Hegel's political theory and even more often overlooked in the connection he draws between religion and the commitments that persons make to their political communities, but it is critical in order to grasp the fullness of his constructive political philosophy.

Hegel thus joins Rousseau in contributing a transcendent dimension to modern political theory. This vertical dimension is especially evident in the significance of Hegel's novel (at least with respect to the social contract tradition) distinction between civil society and the political community mentioned above. Whereas he characterizes civil society as consisting of horizontal relations between individuals as (formal) equals, Hegel argues that the political community draws together the disparate elements of civil society into a larger, transcendent unity, to which individuals relate *vertically*, as parts to a whole. Hegel's conception of religion maps on directly

to this vertical dimensionality, and it also refers to the domain of subjective conviction, such that while he wishes not to conflate religion and the political community, he insists that "if political principles and institutions are divorced from the realm of inwardness, from the innermost shrine of conscience, from the still sanctuary of religion, they lack any real center and remain abstract and indeterminate."[172] In short, seeing the full picture of Hegel's political theory depends on grasping the importance of civil religion.

As has been suggested, Ethical Life and civil religion play an important formative role in the lives of individual selves. Like Rousseau, Hegel argues that becoming a member of a political community involves being shaped by its customs, norms, and practices in such a way that allows or encourages selves to see themselves as most fully free in being constitutive parts to the political community as a larger whole. Selves must therefore undergo some degree of formation in order to secure the alignment of individual and communal interests, concerns, and norms, but Hegel maintains (more strongly than Rousseau) that certain objective conditions are necessary for it. Given that a self is essentially an individual, self-determining being, whatever distinctive content the Ethical Life of a political community might have cannot legitimately undermine or deny this basic fact about its members.

Returning to what I noted at the very start, a Hegelian conception of political belonging refers to the achievement of a reciprocal relation between a self and its political community; in a sense, it involves the self and its political community "claiming" one another. On the one hand, this involves the self committing and contributing to the ongoing life of the political community. On the other, a self is able to *experience* political belonging only when its status and capacity as a rational and free being are protected, promoted, and reflected back by the fellow members,

[172] Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, 104. Hegel's reference to the "innermost shrine of conscience" is a clear indication of his affinity for Protestant and especially Lutheran Christianity.

institutions, culture, and governance of its political community. This provision of external or objective confirmation provides satisfactory self-understanding, overcomes alienation, and allows the self to fully identify with its political community and enjoy true self-determination.[173]

Accordingly, a Hegelian conception of political belonging involves the self coming to understand itself as a legitimate *expression* of its political community. This may seem like a metaphorical way of putting the matter, but it indicates something important about the subjective, lived dimension of political belonging and what it means for an individual to experience its personhood and freedom protected, promoted, and reflected back by its political community. The part-whole relation between an individual self and its political community that Hegel presents is premised on this ideal reciprocation: the life of the individual manifests, contributes to, and enhances the life of the community, and the life of the community grounds and secures the individual's continued existence, satisfactory self-knowledge, and freedom. Notably, this implies that the political community stands with respect to the individual as the larger, transcendent whole I have been describing.

Whether or not Hegel's expansive philosophical system is convincing, or whether one finds his portrayal of the political community as a self-sufficient and self-determining whole is theoretically or practically workable, four aspects of his view will remain with us, each of which was either present in or anticipated by Rousseau. The first is that satisfactory self-knowledge depends on some "objective" confirmation and is necessary for wellbeing and/or human freedom. I have and will continue to refer to the absence of this as the experience of alienation. The second is that having a person's status as a rational and free being confirmed and promoted

[173] Here the republicanism of Hegel's view (much like Rousseau's) is clear, and he regularly uses classical language in reference to an individual's identification with their political community (i.e., as the "fatherland"). For example, Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, 102.

by their political community is crucial for their wellbeing and/or freedom. This deep connection between satisfactory self-knowledge, recognition, and freedom is perhaps the single most important contribution of Hegel's philosophy to the theorization of alienation and political belonging. Relatedly, the third is that a person's political community stands as a concrete, transcendent whole to which they (ideally) relate as constitutive parts. Finally, the fourth is that something religious-like or akin to religion (for Rousseau and Hegel, civil religion) is distinctly able to cultivate proper relations within a political community by facilitating a person's self-conscious location in and identification with a larger life. These four points will travel with us through the next two chapters and, although the connections between them may vary, they will remain important for the intervention that each of the four thinkers in this project are making.

With those points in mind, it is important to note two key limitations in Hegel's arguments. First, although with more normative resources at his disposal, deriving from his ontological claims about the nature of selfhood and Spirit being essentially ordered toward self-determination and an argument for the necessity of recognition, without more refined principles, Hegel's account of political belonging risks endorsing—not unlike Rousseau's—an uncritical model of self-donation. Also like Rousseau, then, Hegel's model risks being used to justify oppressively homogenizing political communities. Second, this problem is related to Hegel's lack of accounting for the experience of *imposed* mis-recognition and alienation, such as occurs in racist contexts. Never appearing on Hegel's radar, the fact of imposed alienation heightens the importance of thinking carefully about the differences between just and unjust forms of political belonging. A Hegelian account of political belonging needs to be informed by the experience of imposed alienation and must think more carefully about the necessary conditions for realizing a just form of political belonging.

In the next two chapters, I will turn to W. E. B. Du Bois and Martin Luther King Jr., who occupy a very different position and perspective than Rousseau and Hegel, but whose thinking is nevertheless structurally analogous to theirs. Victims of anti-Black racism in the twentieth century United States, Du Bois and King speak from and to a context of imposed alienation and non-belonging, adding a layer of complexity to the themes under consideration. Among other things, they will help fill in the gravity of the harm incurred by alienation, theorize alienation and belonging in relation to oppression, and introduce critical concepts for overcoming the limitations in Rousseau's and Hegel's writings.

3. W. E. B. Du Bois: Double-Consciousness, Self-Assertion, and Sorrow Songs

Although the term alienation never appears in W. E. B. Du Bois's early masterpiece, *The Souls of Black Folk*, the theme—most notably in his reference to the "double-consciousness" experienced by Black Americans around the turn of the twentieth century—plays a prominent role therein. My reading of *Souls* and my focus on alienation in this chapter are not wholly innovative, and neither is my reading of Du Bois in conversation with Jean-Jacques Rousseau and G. W. F. Hegel. However, my approach is distinct for reading him in close proximity to the interpretation of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* that I offered in the previous chapter. Whereas many who read Du Bois in relation to Hegel do so in reference to the latter's philosophy of history, my attention will be on the similarities in their accounts of self-consciousness.

In this chapter, I argue that Du Bois provides in *Souls* an account of alienation as the experience of divided selfhood that is imposed on Black Americans by the forces of anti-Black racism. Although importantly different in ways I will address from the accounts of alienation offered by Rousseau and Hegel, I contend that Du Bois shares with them a similar conception of the self, a structurally analogous account of alienation, and the position that alienation is finally overcome by realizing a sense of belonging to one's political community. Du Bois adds to their accounts a connection between alienation and oppression and a distinct account of the role of religion in working to overcome injustice and secure a political community to which Black persons can belong. This connection between religion and politics is different from the conceptions of civil religion found in Rousseau's and Hegel's writings. In *Souls*, Du Bois

presents what I will call a "civil protest religion," which facilitates the attachment of persons to a principally just vision of their political community, serving thereby to encourage its realization.

I will rely on the previous chapter's analysis to illustrate connections in Du Bois's portrayal of alienation between self-knowledge, freedom, and political belonging. Du Bois contributes key developments to theorizations of these themes, especially in relation to Rousseau and Hegel, that have remained under-appreciated. Although some interpreters have connected Du Bois's conception of double-consciousness (his distinct account of alienation) to the problem of non-belonging, they have done so mostly without attending to the details of that connection and the accompanying conception of the self.[1]

I will focus here primarily on *Souls* because it provides Du Bois's most acute and sustained accounts of alienation, belonging, and their relation. Further, *Souls* presents his fullest engagement with religion in relation to these themes. To illuminate Du Bois's thinking on these matters, I will also reference his early essays "The Conservation of Races" and "The Individual and Social Conscience" and make connections between *Souls* and his other books *The Negro Church*, *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil*, and *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept*.[2]

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[1] Lewis Gordon, for one, writes that Du Bois's early work offers an "existential phenomenological reading of the nihilistic threat of denied membership as a struggle of twoness, of two souls, of double consciousness." Lewis R. Gordon, *Existentia Africana: Understanding Africana Existential Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 92. Similarly, Robert Gooding-Williams writes that, according to Du Bois, "The feeling of being denied the normative status of membership in American society through the betrayal of the ideal of reciprocity is a feeling of double consciousness." Robert Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois: Afro-Modern Political Thought in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 81.

[2] Du Bois's views do evolve over the course of his long intellectual career, yet, although he does change his mind about some things, his view of alienation (even though he does not continue using the phrase "double-consciousness") seems to remain relatively stable. For a helpful thematic overview of his career that is sensitive to these developments, see Paul C. Taylor, "W. E. B. Du Bois: Afro-modernism, Expressivism, and the Curse of Centrality," in *African American Political Thought: A Collected History*, eds. Melvin L. Rogers and Jack Turner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021).

This chapter will proceed as follows. First, I will set the stage by outlining Du Bois's view of alienation and placing him in conversation with Rousseau and Hegel before contextualizing Du Bois's early life and writings. Next, I will identify and explain three prominent concepts in *Souls* that are especially relevant to the topic at hand: soul, the veil, and double-consciousness. With these concepts in view, I will consider the themes of alienation and belonging in *Souls*, highlighting their connection to recognition, self-knowledge, and political belonging. Then, I will attend to the place and role of religion in *Souls*, and in particular to the music of African American spirituals, to explain his conception of civil protest religion. Finally, I will conclude by taking stock of the important contributions Du Bois makes to the theorizations of alienation and belonging.

Du Bois and Alienation: In Proximity to Rousseau and Hegel

Potential connections between Du Bois and Hegel (and nineteenth and twentieth century German thought more generally) have been the subject of considerable attention.[3] More recently, Frank Kirkland's careful consideration of the concept of double-consciousness brings Du Bois more directly into conversation with Rousseau than previous readers have done.[4] Needless to say, Du Bois has often been read in relation to the ideas of Rousseau and Hegel, and I read them here as united by similar approaches to the common theme of alienation.[5] Doing so helps to

[3] This appears to have been energized, at least in the last fifty years, by Joel Williamson's "W. E. B. Du Bois as a Hegelian," in *What Was Freedom's Price?*, ed. David G. Sansing (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1978). Although he emphasizes the importance of a Hegel-like understanding of freedom in Du Bois's work, Williamson, like many others, focuses on the connections between Du Bois and Hegel's philosophy of history. There is plenty of good reason for doing so, to be sure, but Williamson leaves the connections to Hegel's philosophy of self-consciousness untouched. See Williamson, "W. E. B. Du Bois as a Hegelian," 33-36.
[4] Frank M. Kirkland, "On Du Bois' Notion of Double Consciousness," *Philosophy Compass* 8, no. 2 (2013).
[5] Among others, Stephanie Shaw draws a direct connection between Du Bois's and Hegel's accounts of alienation while acknowledging that the theme emerges in different contexts of their respective thought. Stephanie J. Shaw, *W. E. B. Du Bois and The Souls of Black Folk* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 122. Much of my analysis in this chapter is similar to Shaw's, but she insists on a strong structural similarity between *Souls* and

clarify some of the implicit aspects of Du Bois's own position as well as some distinct elements of his thought.

To be sure, Du Bois writes about alienation with respect to the experiences of Black Americans, as I will elaborate below. Any attempt to connect this to a more general phenomenon must not move too quickly past the salient particularities of its emergence. Yet, I contend that alienation is a deeply *human* phenomenon, which allows for resonances across racial and contextual differences, a fact that undergirds the powerful force of Du Bois's writing about it. Moreover, I am interested in considering the insights that this experience offers into the human condition, an outright denial of which entails denying of the humanity of Black Americans.

I propose that, in *Souls*, Du Bois offers an account of alienation as the noxious experience caused by the denial of mutual recognition by other persons, which impedes the possession of satisfactory self-knowledge and interrupts the essential human capacity for self-determination.[6] Du Bois maintains that alienation refers to the experience of the lack of recognition of a person's basic status and capacity as a dignified and self-determining being. For him, alienation pertains to the disquieting *internal* experience brought about by this lack of recognition, which implies a perspective on human nature and selfhood similar to Hegel's—namely, that humans are the sorts of creatures whose knowledge of themselves (and their world) depends upon confirmation by other persons, without which they toil in a troubling state of indeterminacy and uncertainty.[7] So

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Hegel's *Phenomenology* that I do not. Further, although her reading of Hegel is similar to mine and stresses the matters of recognition, self-knowledge, and self-determination, it does not maintain their relation in quite the same way, nor does it stress the matter of self-certainty that I did in the previous chapter.

[6] Shaw claims that *Souls* as a whole "is a substantial commentary on the importance of self-determination, the sovereign right to be whatever one's aspirations and abilities encourage and allow." Shaw, *W. E. B. Du Bois and The Souls of Black Folk*, 8.

[7] This is a much more narrow and focused account of alienation than others have read in *Souls*. See, for example, Thomas C. Holt, "The Political Uses of Alienation: W. E. B. Du Bois on Politics, Race, and Culture, 1903-1940," *American Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (Jun. 1990), 302-303. Holt rightly emphasizes the importance of self-knowledge in Du Bois's writings, and he helpfully stresses the matter of exclusion (non-belonging), but he does not do so in reference to a Hegel or a Hegel-like conception of the self.

following, holding a reflexive conception of persons whose freedom is an expression of who they understand themselves to be, Du Bois, like Hegel, maintains that the lack of satisfactory self-knowledge is an interruption or obstacle to genuine freedom. Although this line of argument does not receive explicit elaboration in *Souls*, I submit that it is the best way to make adequate sense of Du Bois's powerful account of alienation and its effects on persons.

Despite how it might seem, such an interpretation does not minimize the significance of the material wellbeing of persons, on which Du Bois insists. Rather, it follows from my focus in this project on the experiential dimension of political life. Du Bois in fact remains quite concerned about the material conditions of persons throughout the text, and he is adamant about the relation between material and "spiritual" (intellectual, psychological, and relational) wellbeing.

In a brief address Du Bois delivered just two years after the publication of *Souls* entitled "The Individual and Social Conscience" (1905), the connections between Du Bois's and Hegel's conceptions of the self are especially apparent. In the address, Du Bois presents a conception of the human self for whom recognition of and by others is critical for wellbeing, arguing the need for coming to "the recognization [*sic*] of one's self in the image of one's neighbor."[8] What is more, the topic of Du Bois's address is how the achievement of a genuine "social conscience" does not begin with the abstract appreciation for humanity as such but rather with the recognition of other persons as other *selves*. Through such recognition, he claims, a person is able to encounter "the essential humanity" of others, which "is yet for us and in us, the greatest fact in the world." Developing this line of thinking in a way that is quite resonant with Hegel's notion of

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[8] Robert W. Williams and W. E. B. Du Bois, "'The Sacred Unity in All Diversity': The Text and a Thematic Analysis of W.E.B. Du Bois' 'The Individual and Social Conscience' (1905)," *Journal of African American Studies* 16 (2012), 458.

Spirit addressed in the previous chapter, which gestures beyond the inter-personal context and toward the decidedly communal direction that Du Bois's thinking takes, Du Bois explains that, "Once this [essential humanity] is recognized, then comes the only practical synthesis in this world of self-sacrifice and self-development: the recognition of myself as one of a world of selves, not as *all*, but as one; not as nothing, but as *one*."[9]

Structurally analogous to Rousseau and Hegel, in *Souls*, Du Bois presents two broad forms of alienation. The first form refers to the lack of mutual recognition from other persons, in particular from those possessing disproportionate power and status, and the second refers to the lack of adequate recognition from one's political community (its institutions, representative individuals, fellow citizens, and culture) regarding one's status as rational and free. Like both Rousseau and Hegel, Du Bois also maintains that alienation is overcome in the realization of a sense of belonging to one's political community.

Although the political community plays a significant role in Du Bois's writings and *Souls* in particular, he does not directly explain what it is. As the analysis below will clarify, Du Bois invokes Romantic conceptions of the "nation" as that community of persons bound by shared governance and a distinct way of life, or culture. Important for this view is that different domains of life, and Du Bois mentions several (economic, educational, even religious or ecclesial), are governed by and/or otherwise shaped by their exposure to the political community. Even if indirectly, for Du Bois all aspects of life occurring within a political community are indelibly and profoundly shaped by its culture and way of life. Therefore, addressing matters of justice and alienation, for him, must include attending to the political community itself. Notably different than Romantic conceptions of the nation, though, Du Bois advocates that the United States

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[9] Williams and Du Bois, "'The Sacred Unity in All Diversity,'" 459.

develop a political community that is characteristically *pluralist*, being one that recognizes, affirms, and includes the different peoples—most notably, Black Americans—who feature in its history and contribute to its flourishing.

Distinguishing Du Bois's perspective from Rousseau's and Hegel's, however, is the experiential and theoretical significance of race. For Du Bois, a person's identity is never simply as an abstract individual. Instead, he maintains that a person's identity is always, in part, as a member of a particular world-historical race of people. I will elaborate on his philosophy of race below, but it is important to say here that Du Bois's account of personal identity involves seeing persons as individual instances or members of a distinct race of human beings.

As much as this chapter is thematically consistent with the previous two, it marks an important shift in this dissertation. Du Bois writes from a very different social, economic, and political context than do Rousseau and Hegel, not simply because of his time and place but also because he is a Black man in a profoundly anti-Black racist context. Du Bois writes from and about what can be understood as a distinct instance of pernicious, imposed alienation and exclusion (non-belonging). This introduces a much stronger sense of oppression to the experience of alienation than previously considered, which Rousseau and Hegel fail to both theoretically account for and practically respond to instances of in their own contexts.

Alienation is therefore neither a passing nor a primarily theoretical concern for Du Bois; it is an ever-present and painful reality. Du Bois writes about alienation from the breach, as it were, from the bowels of the dialectic (in more Hegelian parlance), humanizing that injurious locale and identifying resources to maintain one's humanity therein. Although Rousseau and Hegel speak about alienation as they likely experienced it, neither was exposed to it in same way as Du Bois, in the form of systemic, dehumanizing, and maliciously imposed racism. For

Rousseau and Hegel, alienation was a regular feature of modern life, for reasons of economic and social competition (Rousseau) or the self/other differentiation fundamental to the development of the self (Hegel). The alienation Du Bois considers, however, emerges from the denial of the acknowledgement of the full humanity of Black Americans by the racist cultural, political, and economic hegemony of white American society.

This means that the alienation Du Bois writes about is considerably different from the sort addressed by Rousseau and Hegel, at least in terms of its origin, history, impact, and experience. However, I endeavor to show that Du Bois nevertheless holds a structurally analogous account of the self and the experience of alienation, which allows for its consideration alongside their portrayals. In fact, Du Bois's account indicates that white supremacy involves something like the weaponization of alienation as Rousseau and Hegel describe it. That said, although the complex matters of racism, racial exclusion, and racial injustice are not reducible to or exhausted by the themes of alienation and belonging, a close reading of Du Bois suggests that a full accounting of their experience and the harm they inflict includes attention to these phenomena.

Contextualizing Du Bois and His Early Works

Because of the idiosyncratic nature of *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), the importance of context and personal experience for the text, and scholarly disputes about his intellectual heritage, it is necessary to contextualize Du Bois's life and early work. A full-blown biography is far beyond the scope of my project and can be readily found elsewhere, but it is critical to provide a brief sense of Du Bois's personal and intellectual history.

Du Bois was born and raised in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In *Souls*, he writes both about his childhood experiences with racism in the postbellum North as well as his adult experiences with the pernicious *de facto* and *de jure* racism of the Jim Crow South. Not fifty years from the Civil War and a time when chattel slavery was legal in much of the U.S., Du Bois writes *Souls* on the heels of the devastating compromises that ended the Reconstruction Era.

Du Bois was formally educated at Fisk University and Harvard College, earning undergraduate degrees from both. He then studied at Friedrich Wilhelm University (later renamed the University of Berlin) before returning to the U.S. to become the first African American to earn a PhD from Harvard.[10] At university, Du Bois was initially drawn to philosophy, and, although he ultimately moved toward the study of history, economics, and social institutions (later locating himself in what became the discipline of sociology), he remained very much a philosopher in orientation.[11] Du Bois's formal education steeped him in the worlds of nineteenth century German and American philosophy, both of which were characterized by legacies of Romanticism and speculative thought (most notably German Idealism) and a more recent turn toward the empirical (especially in the form of American pragmatism).

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[10] Much has been written about these formative years in Du Bois's life, and the most thorough treatment I am aware of is David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1993), chapters 4-6.

[11] W. E. B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept*, in *Writings: The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade, The Sous of Black Folk, Dusk of Dawn, Essays and Articles*, ed. Nathan Huggins (New York: The Library of America, 1986), 582. There he credits William James with talking him out of pursuing a career in philosophy proper. I follow Shaw (who draws this initiative from the work of Lucius Outlaw) and Gooding-Williams in reading *Souls*, along with many of Du Bois's other writings, as works of philosophy. Shaw, *W. E. B. Du Bois and The Souls of Black Folk*, 3. Gooding-Williams calls *Souls* "Du Bois's outstanding contribution to modern political philosophy." Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois*, 1.

It is instructive to locate Du Bois philosophically at this intersection of idealism and pragmatism, which is supported by his biography. Early on at Harvard, Du Bois found a mentor in America's most prominent pragmatist, William James.[12] However, unlike his mentor, Du Bois does not appear to hold pragmatism and idealism in strong opposition.[13] Instead, Du Bois seems closer to the view held by Josiah Royce, who suggested that idealists and pragmatists be seen as fellow travelers, at least with regard to their views on "the relation of truth to action, to practice, to the will," who jointly held that "truth is…an activity, a creation, an attainment."[14] In occasional dialogue with Royce, the leading scholar and proponent of Hegel and idealism in the United States at the time, Du Bois formally studied German philosophy with George Santayana at Harvard.[15] His later studies in Germany were focused mostly on the social sciences, but while there he was further exposed to the influence of the German Romantics and Idealists.[16]

These elements of Du Bois's intellectual biography certainly do not establish Du Bois as a straight-forward German Idealist or Hegelian, but they do mark important instances of

[12] Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, 578-582.
[13] Shahoon Zamir convincingly argues that Du Bois was a shrewd critic of James and pragmatism, and that he is better placed in proximity to Royce and Hegel. Shamoon Zamir, *Dark Voices: W. E. B. Du Bois and American Thought, 1888-1903* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), chapter 2. Sandra Adell notes important differences between Du Bois and James on the construction of the self/self-consciousness, in Sandra Adell, *Double-Consciousness/Double Bind: Theoretical Issues in Twentieth-Century Black Literature* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 13-14. Although somewhat tangential to my focus, I resist the readings of Du Bois that straight-forwardly claim him as a pragmatist. Most famously, see Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 138-150. An especially powerful case is made for Du Bois's *religious* pragmatism by Jonathon S. Kahn in his *Divine Discontent: The Religious Imagination of W. E. B. Du Bois* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 12-15, and chapters 1-3. However, his argument does not attend to the specifics of Zamir's case against reading Du Bois as a pragmatist, and—I think not incidentally—it does not attend well enough to the dynamics of self-consciousness that a Hegelian- or German Idealist-like reading can.
[14] Royce, *Lectures on Modern Idealism*, 86. Lewis argues further that Du Bois shares stronger "intellectual temperament" and "affinity" with Royce and Hegel than James. Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois*, 88-89, 139-140.
[15] Du Bois writes briefly about his interactions with Royce as a member of Harvard's Philosophical Club in *Dusk of Dawn*, 581. As a student, Du Bois studied Hegel with Santayana in a course on modern French and German philosophy that likely involved a close study of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (and this just as Santayana had become a professor, the year prior to which Santayana took a course on Hegel and the *Phenomenology* with Royce). Needless to say, Du Bois's exposure to Hegel and America's most prominent Hegelian (Royce) at Harvard is well established. Zamir, *Dark Voices*, 113, 248 n. 2.
[16] Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois*, 139.

exposure to streams of thought with which I place him in conversation, even though he offers little direct proof of their influence in the way of textual evidence. All that to say, reading Du Bois with Hegel in mind is neither an artificial imposition nor unwarranted. Instead, a close and contextually sensitive reading of Du Bois requires it.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognize the problems involved with uncritically placing Du Bois primarily or exclusively in the context of white Euro-American thinkers and streams of thought. Doing so denies obvious facts about his social location, experience, and education, as well as his cultural and intellectual influences. Moreover, it risks uncritically locating Du Bois in an intellectual lineage long characterized by the exclusion and abuse of Black people like him, which perpetuates historic inequities insofar as it functions (however implicitly) as a source of legitimation.

For the purposes of this chapter, I read Du Bois in conversation with Rousseau and Hegel because of the structural similarities and instructive contrasts between them, and I am not suggesting that Du Bois should or even could be rightly understood within a mostly white, Euro-American lineage of thought. Even a cursory reading of *Souls* would refute such a position, given the obvious influence that figures like Alexander Crummell and Frederick Douglass and institutions like the Black church have on him. Although space precludes an adequate engagement with the wide range of Du Bois's influences and interlocutors, I do not reference Rousseau and Hegel as representing a legitimizing normative tradition.

Lastly, in terms of positioning the text, almost forty years after its publication, Du Bois considered *Souls* as the first in a trio of publications, along with his *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* (1920) and *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (1940), that broadly addressed "the hurts and hesitancies that hem the black man in

America."[17] It would be problematic to naïvely read into *Souls* intentions and motivations retrospectively assigned almost half a century later, but it is meaningful to note the continuity Du Bois himself drew between his works covering a considerable period of time. The continuity between these texts extends beyond their subject matter to their content, which is important for using them to help illuminate *Souls*.

(Mis-)Recognition and Freedom in The Souls of Black Folk

Du Bois's considerable *oeuvre* covers a range of academic disciplines, perspectives, and literary forms, and the genre of *Souls* itself is difficult to pin down. Its form and content are not those of a traditional text of philosophy, and yet, whatever else it might be, *Souls* is a deeply philosophical work. In fact, on first glance, *Souls*'s eclecticism can be disorienting. The book contains autobiographical sketches, literary vignettes, historical analyses, anthropological and religious reflections, and cultural and political commentary. Indeed, *Souls* is something of a composite work that combines several previously and independently published essays with a number of new ones. However, its variations of form and content seem to accomplish most effectively what Du Bois explains is the unifying purpose of the work: "to sketch, in vague, uncertain outline, the spiritual world in which ten thousand thousand [Black] Americans live and strive."[18] Here, Du Bois uses the language of "spiritual world"—noticeably resonant with both the German Romantic/Idealist and Black American religious contexts—to reference the inner, existential dimension of Black American life.

[17] Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, 551.
[18] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, in *Writings: The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade, The Sous of Black Folk, Dusk of Dawn, Essays and Articles*, ed. Nathan Huggins (New York: The Library of America, 1986), 359.

Du Bois is clear in *Souls* that white Americans are among his target audience, to whom he aims to introduce the plight of Black Americans whose circumstances he casts as no matter of provincial concern: "for the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line."[19] Broadly speaking, Du Bois sets out in *Souls* to describe and reflect on the conditions, experience, and meaning of Black life in the U.S. This sets for *Souls* a decidedly phenomenological agenda.[20] All of the essays in *Souls*, even those written from an objective or analytical perspective, such as the social scientific second essay "On the Dawn of Freedom," are clearly animated by existential concerns and seek to convey a richly textured sense of the lived reality of Black Americans. On Du Bois's description, his aim in *Souls* is not merely to detail the mistreatment of Black Americans by individuals and the social and political orders of the day; it is to "show the strange meaning of being black here in the dawning of the Twentieth Century."[21]

Du Bois begins each essay in *Souls* with a different excerpt of poetry, typically from a European or American poet (although he once each references the work of a Persian poet, the Bible, and an African American folk song), and several bars of music from an African American spiritual. The selected lines of poetry relate in some way to the content of each respective essay, and, although the bars of music are listed without lyrics, the frequent pairing of European literary texts with music from African American spirituals makes a subtle argument of its own. Namely, as someone with an incredibly capacious vision, Du Bois draws together and finds connections between insights from both sources. Such a move marks serious attention to African American wisdom, experience, and insight, and, pairing it with the poetry as he does, suggests an equality and possible collaboration among the different sources and traditions they represent. In doing so,

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[19] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 359.
[20] Gordon explains that Du Bois's work involves an important "hermeneutical turn" and attempts to study the experience of Black Americans "from the *inside*." Gordon, *Existentia Africana*, 63, 92.
[21] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 359.

Du Bois includes the voices of African American experience and insight in the reservoir of human wisdom alongside the voices of (mostly) white European and American culture.[22] In a rather straightforward sense, Du Bois, a Black man educated by the most esteemed institutions in Europe and the United States, embodies the synthesis of what were commonly held as mutually exclusive and contradictory ways of knowing and being, which he expresses in this subtle way.

Yet, by including the bars of spirituals without lyrics, he also presents an obvious contrast between the forms of the paired epigraphs, one purely linguistic and the other strictly musical. On one hand, this contrast could suggest a certain compatibility and mutual enrichment. On the other, the contrast underlines their distinctiveness, however potentially compatible the two different ways of knowing may be.

The significance I ascribe to these paired epigraphs is a prominent one in *Souls*, which is related to Du Bois's philosophy of race, becomes explicit at the end of its sixth chapter. There Du Bois longs for the opportunity denied Black Americans to have respected and valued "the unknown treasures of their inner life" and to have their experiences and insights "give the world new points of view." He movingly envisions such an opportunity as being able to commune, as an equal, intellectually and artistically with some of the European world's most heralded figures: "I sit with Shakespeare and he winces not. Across the color line I move arm in arm with Balzac and Dumas, where smiling men and welcoming women glide in gilded halls… I summon Aristotle and Aurelius and what soul I will, and they come all graciously with no scorn nor condescension… Is this the life you grudge us, O knightly America?"[23]

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[22] Lewis makes a similar point, claiming that Du Bois paired the epigraphs in this way "to advance the then-unprecedented notion of the creative parity and complementarity of white folk and black folk alike." Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois*, 278.
[23] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 438.

Key Concepts: Souls, the Veil, and Double-Consciousness

With few obvious references and no footnotes, *Souls* demands careful reading, and it is important to keep track of several key concepts in the work. For the purposes of this chapter, the most salient concepts are "soul," "veil," and "double-consciousness." Du Bois does not didactically elaborate on all that he means by these concepts, and so it is important to notice their intellectual context outside of the work along with their rhetorical deployment within it.

The first concept, "soul," is prominently featured in the work's title. There, it names the fundamental humanity of Black persons, who, Du Bois claims against his racist and dehumanizing milieu, possess a "spark of divinity."[24] It also implies an anti-materialist philosophical anthropology and conception of human wellbeing, which is born out in Du Bois's critiques of Booker T. Washington and capitalism more generally. To claim Black persons as possessors of souls is to claim for them a status (in this case equal to white persons), dignified internal life, and something about the nature of their wellbeing, namely, that it must involve attention to the "spiritual" (and not strictly material) dimension of their lives. What is more, Du Bois characterizes the souls of Black folk as being in a state of "unreconciled" striving, possessing a thwarted vitality and frustrated potential.[25]

The first essay in *Souls*, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," which is an edited version of an essay that was published previously in the August 1897 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*, lays the important groundwork for the text as a whole and introduces the key concepts of the "veil" and "double-consciousness." Here, in perhaps its most famous passage, Du Bois writes,

> [T]he Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of

[24] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 514.
[25] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 364.

> others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.
>
> The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self.[26]

Du Bois clearly uses the concept of double-consciousness to depict the experience of Black Americans as one of internal division.[27] And this, he writes, follows from having one's very existence and identity problematized and constantly thrown into question: "Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question… How does it feel to be a problem?"[28] As he writes in the above quoted passage, Du Bois explains that Black Americans are prevented from enjoying a sense of unified self-consciousness and thereby experience an unrelenting and disquieting sense of their own "two-ness." Although I will explain below why Du Bois thinks

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[26] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 364-365.

[27] The notion of divided selfhood was common in the nineteenth century, and Du Bois seems to have been influenced by a number of thinkers on the matter, yet his innovation seems to be casting the division as that between subjective and objective (or recognitive) identity. Ralph Waldo Emerson appears to have introduced the actual phrase "double consciousness" in his 1843 lecture, "The Transcendentalist," in which he uses it as a reference to the spiritual/transcendence and material/immanence distinction. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Transcendentalist," in *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Brooks Atkinson (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 93. Similarly, William James writes about the "divided self" who experiences a tension between "the natural and the spiritual" (although his Gifford Lectures were given just after the initial publication of Du Bois's opening chapter in *The Atlantic Monthly*, the concept of divided selfhood was prefigured in James's earlier work on psychology). William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 125ff. Prior to them, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe writes in *Faust* (1790), "Two souls, alas! reside within my breast, / and each is eager for a separation: / in the throes of coarse desire, one grips / the earth with its senses; / the other struggles from the dust / to rise to higher ancestral spheres." Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust I & II*, ed. and trans. Stuart Atkins (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), lines 1112-1117, p. 30. For more on these connections, see Zamir, *Dark Voices*, 153-168; and Dixon D. Bruce Jr., "W. E. B. Du Bois and the Idea of Double Consciousness," *American Literature* 64, no. 2 (June 1992). For an insightful connection between Du Bois and Frederick Douglass on this theme, see David W. Blight, "Up from 'Twoness': Frederick Douglass and the Meaning of W. E. B. Du Bois's Concept of Double Consciousness," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 21, no. 3 (Winter 1990). Shaw connects Du Bois's usage to African American folk tradition in Shaw, *W. E. B. Du Bois and The Souls of Black Folk*, 16-17.

[28] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 363. He also expresses this wrenching experience explicitly in the language of theodicy: "Why did God make me an outcast and a stranger in mine own house?" Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 364.

that double-consciousness can be potentially dialectically generative, he quite clearly presents it as the experience of frustrated unity that is deleterious.

To begin unpacking this dense and critical passage, there are at least four things to consider. First, Du Bois invokes the metaphor of the "veil," which plays a prominent role in *Souls*. Du Bois fully introduces the metaphor in the first chapter of *Souls*, as he recaps a story from his childhood when he first understood that fellow members of his community saw him as deficiently different because of his race. He writes about this, "it dawned on me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil."[29] There and elsewhere, Du Bois uses the metaphor as a reference for that which stands between the lived realities of white and Black Americans.[30] More fully, Du Bois uses the metaphor of the veil as a reference to the denial of mutual recognition and material opportunity for Black Americans.[31] As Elvira Basevich nicely puts this, for Du Bois, "The veil represents a kind of spiritual homelessness that exiles Afro-descendent peoples from the Americas as their homeland, as they are denied a political community where they can feel safe, connected, and secure."[32]

Second, notice that Du Bois contrasts double-consciousness with "*true* self-consciousness," such that the former (non-ideal state) marks the interruption or absence of the latter (ideal state).[33] That is to say, Du Bois claims that Black Americans are prevented from

[29] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 364.
[30] There are clear biblical resonances with this choice of metaphor, including to the book of Exodus (both in regard to the Ark of the Covenant and the story of Moses on Mount Sinai). For more on this, see Edward J. Blum, *W. E. B. Du Bois: American Prophet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 80. Zamir also connects it to Hegel's use of the metaphor of the curtain in the *Phenomenology*. Zamir, *Dark Voices*, 135-136.
[31] Elvira Basevich captures this well: "…Du Bois uses the idea of 'the veil' in *Souls* as a metaphor to signify the systematic racist misrecognition of the moral equality of persons." Elvira Basevich, *W. E. B. Du Bois: The Lost and the Found* (Medford: Polity Press, 2021), 50.
[32] Basevich, *W. E. B. Du Bois*, 51. Note that Basevich connects this to membership in one's political community, which I will do below.
[33] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 364. Emphasis mine.

realizing genuine, integrated self-consciousness and are thrown into a condition of internal division—a condition of conflictual two-ness rather than coherent unity. As a result, he writes, the history of the Black American has been marked by the painful "longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self."[34] To be sure, double-consciousness is no accident of fate or product of nature; Du Bois is clear that double-consciousness is a harmful imposition on Black Americans by the anti-Black racism of so many individuals, institutions, and cultural forces in the United States.

Third, Du Bois explains that the internal division of double-consciousness is of a particular sort. On his explanation, double-consciousness results from the "American world" only allowing Black Americans to "see [themselves] through the revelation" of the pejorative and powerful "white gaze." More specifically, Du Bois writes that double-consciousness entails "always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity."[35] He later writes of the same phenomenon, highlighting the psychological impact, as the experience of being "imprisoned, conditioned depressed, exalted, and inspired. Integrally a part of [a society] and yet, much more significant, one of its rejected parts; one who expressed in life and action and made vocal to many, a single whirlpool of social entanglement and inner psychological paradox."[36] We can say quite clearly, then, that Du Boisian double-consciousness refers to the experience of profound incongruence between, on the one hand, a Black American's sense of their own identity and status and, on the other, the degraded identity and status imposed on them by the dominant racist culture.

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[34] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 365.

[35] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 364. The apt locution "white gaze" is from Frantz Fanon (*le regard blanc*), *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 90, 95. Although he does not explicitly mention Du Bois when he uses the phrase, Fanon is clearly referring to a phenomenon quite similar to what Du Bois calls double-consciousness. At one point, Du Bois speaks of the force of "white contempt," which parallels Fanon's phrase. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 365.

[36] Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, 555.

Fourth, Du Bois asserts that the internal division of double-consciousness is most basically about the struggle to be "both a Negro and an American" in a context that refuses their compatibility. Du Bois maintains that this oppositional logic is deeply flawed. In response, he argues that overcoming double-consciousness involves the "merging" of one's "double self into a better and truer self," but in such a way that "neither of the older selves [is] lost." The stubborn incompatibility of these two identities, he claims, is on account of the former being derided and deemed inferior by the culture and leaders of the latter.[37]

Suggested by this reference to a synthetic self, Du Bois introduces the notion that selves are often *plural*, consisting of more than one identity, and that such plurality itself is not a problem. Quite explicitly, he wants to preserve these differences but render them non-competitive or non-contradictory. This internal plurality is never really considered by Rousseau or Hegel (at least not as anything possibly good or necessary), whose accounts risk homogenization at different points, and this move by Du Bois is an important theoretical advance. Because of his hospitality to internal plurality, Du Bois should be understood as aspiring after a *coherent* or *integrated* since of self, a sense of self that can hold its different identities as comprising a coherent or integrated whole, rather than a unified sense of self, which implies singularity.[38] Further, Du Bois's argument here is not only that selves might be plural, but also that the political community of the United States itself might be a synthesis of plurality.

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[37] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 365. Du Bois's account of what he calls the possible "merging" of the two identities—one that locates the two identities in a higher unity that transcends yet preserves their distinctiveness—bears strong similarity to Hegel's conception of *aufheben* [often translated as some variation of "sublate" or "sublation"]. My reading of double-consciousness is generally quite similar to Basevich's, but I press further into the dynamics of misrecognition and its references in *Souls*. Basevich, *W. E. B. Du Bois*, 32-33.

[38] Of course, it is undeniably the case that human identity is always plural. Extending this Du Boisian insight, I would suggest that the violence of white supremacy—which, by carving up the world into the binary terms of white/non-white, elevates *race* to the supreme or only meaningful aspect of a person's identity—can be understood as trading on a problematically monolithic conception of the self. According to this picture, the reductively "monochromatic" logic of white supremacy can be seen as committed to repudiating the plurality of human selfhood, to effectively denying both the plurality *among* humans and also the plurality *within* the human person.

In sum, Du Bois's concept of double-consciousness is an acute, contextually distinct, and powerful account of alienation analogous to those offered by Rousseau and Hegel. At the most basic level, despite the important differences between them, all three of these thinkers offer accounts of alienation grounded in an internal division introduced by the mis-recognition of one's identity by others. On this point, similar to Rousseau and Hegel, Du Bois offers insight into the psychologically damaging effects of mis-recognition. Robert Gooding-Williams rightly argues that, for Du Bois, "the Negro's history of strife could be accurately described as aiming both at reciprocal recognition…and at the attainment of self-conscious manhood and a truer self."[39] Further, Gooding-Williams writes, "Du Bois suggests that the goal of this striving is a self that would be truer in its conscious representation of itself."[40] That said, the full extent of the unfreedom that results from such mis-recognition is evident only in view of Du Bois's reflexive, self-interpreting philosophical anthropology, which I will explore below.[41]

Relevant to Du Bois's concept of double-consciousness—that is, to his distinct account of the alienation imposed on Black Americans—are the two aspects of his view of personal identity. The first refers to a person's identity *as an individual person* and the second to their

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Therefore, along with being obviously harmful toward non-white people, white supremacy is also harmful to those who adhere to it because its denial of the full humanity of some "others" entails a profound, ongoing denial of their own internal plurality. Countering the logic of white supremacy thusly requires introducing, as Du Bois does, not simply an account of the goodness and full humanity of Black persons (those designated as "not-white"), absolutely necessary though that is, but also an account of the always already plural self that might realize a sense of internal coherence. Despite its potential limitations, Du Bois's philosophy of race, along with his account of double-consciousness, suggest that Black Americans confront white supremacy with human plurality both among (outwardly, in terms of physical appearance such as skin color) and within (in terms of their multiple identities) human persons.

[39] Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois*, 84.

[40] Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois*, 85.

[41] Despite several parallels between my reading and Gooding-Williams's, mine attends more to the inner-workings of recognition and its connection to self-knowledge and concludes differently about the nature of "second-sightedness," which I address below. Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois*, 85-86.

identity as a member of a world-historical people. In light of these two aspects, Du Bois attends to Black Americans as individuals *and* as members of a distinct group or "race" of people.[42]

First, Du Bois speaks to the capacity of Black Americans as persons, as equals with their fellow white citizens in terms of worth and the possession of the capacities for education, self-expression, and self-determination. This is most apparent in the second half of the opening chapter in *Souls*, where Du Bois identifies three distinct aspirations in the movements for Black liberation in the United States: economic freedom, political freedom, and cultural (or educational) freedom.[43] Du Bois argues that each of these is important and that previous movements have failed to adequately appreciate their interdependence, theoretically and practically. He claims, therefore, that genuine liberation requires that "all these ideals must be melted and welded into one."[44] For Du Bois, all three of these elements are necessary for the self-determination of Black Americans *as persons*. Du Bois does not consistently speak directly to this individual dimension, nor does he regularly use more familiar language like "dignity," but it plays a prominent role in his autobiographical sketches and narrative vignettes (for example, in the fourth and thirteenth chapters).

Notably, the three forms of freedom that Du Bois identifies as necessary conditions for the self-determination of Black Americans—economic, political, and cultural/educational—refer to elements within the scope or purview of a *political community*. That is to say, they all refer to matters internal to and that are governed by the institutions and norms of a community bound by a shared political order and culture. Therefore, for Du Bois, true liberation for Black Americans

[42] This is consonant with the view of prominent German Romantics and Idealists, who insisted on both the individuality and the sociality of human development. See Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Lines of Descent: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Emergence of Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 64.
[43] Du Bois varyingly refers to these as "physical freedom, political power, the training of brains and the training of hands;" as "work, culture, liberty;" and as "the freedom of life and limb the freedom to work and think, the freedom to love and aspire." *The Souls of Black Folk*, 370, 371.
[44] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 370.

entails maintaining a sense of their own dignity, enjoying the status of formal and material equality, and exercising genuine self-determination as full members of the U.S.—as he writes, "for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face." As Du Bois summarizes this, drawing together the formal, material, social, and psychological conditions necessary for liberation, "the end of [the] striving" of "the American Negro" is "to be a co-worker in the kingdom of culture."[45] I suggest that such a status, here marked by the equality implied by the prefix "co-" and the basic capacity indicated by the term "worker," is best understood as the realization of a sense of belonging to one's political community. I will return to this point below.

Regarding the second aspect of his view of personal identity, Du Bois maintains that the aforementioned three forms of freedom are also necessary for the freedom and flourishing of Black Americans as a distinct group of people. On this point, he speaks to the status of Black Americans as members of a world-historical people, whom he refers to in *Souls* as "the Negro people." It is critical here to note the influence of the German philosopher J. G. Herder on his philosophy of race. Herder famously theorized that persons are best understood as members of a people group (*Volk*), and that each people group has a distinct character of life and way of being that he referred to as its "spirit" (*Volksgeist*).[46] As Kwame Anthony Appiah explains, Herder argued both that each *Volksgeist* "possess something of distinctive value," and that humanity as a whole is only able to realize wholeness and harmony amidst and through these differences. For

[45] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 365. Notice Du Bois's refusal to focus only on the material or the "spiritual" aspects.

[46] Appiah helpfully elaborates this element of Herder's thought and its relation to Du Bois in Appiah, *Lines of Descent*, 45-54. It should not escape notice that Du Bois opted to use the English word "folk" in the title of *Souls*, which is likely a reference to the German word "*Volk*."

Herder, Appiah writes, “part of the providential point of human history is that each people, each Volk, should express its distinct character through its history, because it is only through each nation’s following its distinctive path that history as a whole can achieve its meaning.”[47]

Although readily apparent in *Souls*, this line of thinking is most clearly articulated in Du Bois’s early essay, “The Conservation of Races” (1897). In that text, Du Bois approaches the question of race empirically, taking it as an obvious fact “that human beings are divided into races.”[48] Animating his perspective is the view that persons can only properly be made sense of as members of groups, and he holds that the critical contextual unit is that of race: “the history of the world is the history, not of individuals, but of groups, not of nations, but of races.”[49] In brief, Du Bois claims in “Conservation” that races are distinguished not foremost by physical traits but rather by particular ways of life, communication, and norms/values that develop over time and in different contexts, histories, and environments.[50] As such, Du Bois argues that members of “the Negro people” ought to protect against “absorption” into white America and being pressed into the service of imitating “Anglo-Saxon culture” by refining and contributing their own “wonderful possibilities of culture” as the “stalwart of originality” they are.[51] Du Bois’s views on

[47] Appiah, *Lines of Descent*, 46.
[48] W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Conservation of Races,” in *Writings: The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade, The Souls of Black Folk, Dusk of Dawn, Essays and Articles*, ed. Nathan Huggins (New York: The Library of America, 1986), 815.
[49] He criticizes the tendency “to see the Pharaohs, Caesars, Toussaints, and Napoleons of history and forget the vast races of which they were but epitomized expressions.” Du Bois, “The Conservation of Races,” 817.
[50] That is to say, Du Bois holds that “spiritual, psychical, differences” are the key distinguishing factors between races rather than physical characteristics, although he thinks that they influence one another (like a good idealist, never settling for a dualism between the “spiritual” and the material). Du Bois is therefore not advocating a kind of racial essentialism but rather a way of accounting for historical and contextual differences that develop in tandem with distinct “*ideals of life*.” Du Bois, “The Conservation of Races,” 818-819. As Appiah rightly summarizes, in “Conservation,” Du Bois is attempting to “replace the biological conception [of race] with a historical and sociological one—and to do so without robbing the term of its social efficacy.” Appiah, *Lines of Descent*, 100. See also Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois*, 47. This point is reinforced by Du Bois’s writing in a slightly later text (1919) that, “There are no races, in the sense of great, separate, pure breeds of men, differing in attainment, development, and capacity. There are great groups,—now with common history, now with common interests, now with common ancestry.” W. E. B. Du Bois, *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2004), 75.
[51] Du Bois, “The Conservation of Races,” 820.

race have been the subject of critical scrutiny in his own time and since, and I am not here interested in its criticisms and defense, but some sense of his perspective on the matter is critical for grasping his portrayal of alienation and belonging.

With this background influence in view, it is now possible to make proper sense of Du Bois's position that the development of self-determination is valuable both because it honors the dignity of Black Americans as persons, *and also* because it honors their membership within a world-historical group of people possessing a distinct way of life.[52] Ultimately, Du Bois's vision is for Black and white Americans to exist in relations of mutual benefit, exchange, and delight, such that "some day on American soil two world-races may give each to each those characteristics both so sadly lack."[53]

Before moving on, it is worth elaborating on the meaning of Du Bois's claim that double-consciousness, despite its harmful effects, involves what he calls the "giftedness of second-sight."[54] After all, what could be positive about such a harmful experience deserving the designation "gift"? Du Bois does not elaborate on this in *Souls*, but it is there suggested that the double-consciousness emerging from mis-recognition gives Black Americans a critical perspective with respect to the culturally and politically dominant worldview.[55] This is analogous to the potentially dialectically generative effect of alienation in Hegel's *Phenomenology*, explored in the previous chapter, that emerges from the occasion of contradiction or difference

[52] It is not quite right to claim that these two aspects of identity (as persons and as members of a race) correspond to two different forms of alienation in *Souls* because Du Bois does not really address interruptions in or impediments to a person's identification with a racial group that are caused by the forces of white supremacy. Rather, on my reading, it seems more accurate to say that, on his account, these two aspects of identity are involved in the alienation experienced by Black Americans both as individuals and as members of the political community in the United States.
[53] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 370.
[54] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 364.
[55] As Blum writes, "'second-sight' was a gift that allowed them to see beyond the myths and prejudices of modern America." Blum, *W. E. B. Du Bois*, 79.

with the reigning order of things that provides critical distance from it. Such a critical perspective, according to both Hegel and Du Bois, is a necessary catalyst in the ongoing development (and, at least ideally, improvement) of the reigning order.

Although he does not retain the term "second-sight," Du Bois appears to reflect on precisely its giftedness in his later *Dusk of Dawn*. There, he explains, "Apparently one consideration alone saved me from complete conformity with the thoughts and confusions of then current social trends; and that was the problems of racial and cultural contacts. Otherwise I might easily have been simply the current product of my day."[56] He continues,

> Had it not been for the race problem early thrust upon me and enveloping me, I should have probably been an unquestioning worshiper at the shrine of the social order and economic development into which I was born. But just that part of that order which seemed to most of my fellows nearest perfection, seemed to me most inequitable and wrong; and starting from that critique, I gradually, as the years went by, found other things to question in my environment.[57]

Written almost forty years after *Souls*, these references speak to his perspective on both the nature of second-sightedness and the reason for considering it a gift. As jarring and harmful as Du Bois presents double-consciousness to be, it manifests a distance from the reigning ideology that allows for the development of a critical consciousness with which a person can better consider the norms, practices, and organization of their own context.

Alienation and Belonging in Souls

I mentioned above that I take Du Bois to share with Hegel the view that human beings are confronted with the problem of attaining adequate self-knowledge, which renders them dependent for confirmation about their basic status and capacity on the recognition of others.

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[56] Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, 572.
[57] Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, 573.

According to this view, without such confirmation, which gives self-knowledge a certainty and objectivity it otherwise lacks, individuals remain uncertain about their status as dignified, rational persons capable of self-determination. Further, as for Hegel, I submit that Du Bois maintains persons are self-interpreting beings whose lives and freedom are expressions of—and are therefore conditioned by—their self-understanding. Something like this view is necessary to account for the profound harm and *unfreedom* caused by mis-recognition that Du Bois seems to suggest. Although much of this line of reasoning lies beneath the surface in *Souls*, its implications emerge at critical moments in the text.

Among those who read *Souls* in proximity to Hegel, Shamoon Zamir provides the most thorough analysis of their connections on the matter of self-consciousness. Zamir insightfully reads *Souls* as influenced by Hegel's *Phenomenology* regarding the matter of divided selfhood, for which the "primary concern is…recognition." He also rightly claims that "Du Bois's psychology…is committed to a political understanding of alienation and a social and historical location of the self," but Zamir does not really attend to the inner dynamics of the Hegelian recognitive self.[58] Perhaps partially as a result, Zamir does not connect recognition (and the self-knowledge received from it) with freedom or self-determination as strongly as he might.[59]

One place this connection between recognition and freedom is apparent is in the third chapter of *Souls*, entitled "Of Booker T. Washington and Others." Here, Du Bois famously critiques Washington's trade education program for Black Americans. Du Bois's criticism is multi-pronged, and he charges Washington with advancing a troublingly accommodationist

[58] Zamir, *Dark Voices*, 116-117. For his reading of Du Bois and Hegel on the lord and bondsman dialectic, see, 134-139.
[59] Instead, Zamir focuses more on connecting Du Bois with Hegel's historicism and his perspective on the role of labor for self-determination. Zamir, *Dark Voices*, 117, 126; 130, 152. Further, where the point of recognition is most relevant, Zamir suggests (wrongly, I think) that Du Bois is closer to Jean-Paul Sartre's later work on alienation than he is to Hegel. Zamir, *Dark Voices*, 139.

approach that gives up the struggles for political power, civil rights, and higher education for Black Americans.[60] This, Du Bois claims, amounts to survival "only thorough submission."[61] By forgoing these struggles, he argues, Washington's approach is self-defeating.[62]

Among the reasons Du Bois levels the charge of self-defeat is that he contends Washington's approach "insists on…self-respect" yet simultaneously "counsels a silent submission to civic inferiority such as is bound to sap the manhood of any race in the long run."[63] This mention of the harmful effects of a sense of inferiority offers a glimpse into Du Bois's thinking about the insidious nature of racist mis-recognition. Agreeing with Washington's basic position "that the Negro must strive and strive mightily to help himself," Du Bois insists however that Washington "is especially to be criticized" for failing to attend to the fact that "it is equally true that unless his striving be not simply seconded, but rather aroused and encouraged" by the culture and community at large, there can be no "hope for great success."[64]

Here, it seems, operative behind Du Bois's reasoning is a reflexive anthropology according to which the full possession of one's basic status and capacity as a dignified individual capable of self-determination *depends* upon proper recognition by others. In light of such a view, Du Bois dismisses Washington's view as "practically accept[ing] the alleged inferiority of the Negro races" by "adjusting all thought and action to the will of the greater [white] group."[65] In contrast, Du Bois lauds the approach of Frederick Douglass, who advocated for "assimilation

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[60] There are yet more aspects to his critique, which I do not address, including that Washington's approach is crassly materialist (this being simultaneously a strong anti-capitalist and anti-material reductionist essay, among other things) because/and it devalues the intrinsic value of a classical education. Du Bois, *Souls*, 398, 393.
[61] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 398.
[62] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 399.
[63] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 399.
[64] Not to mention, Du Bois criticizes how Washington's view "has tended to make the whites, North and South, shift the burden of the Negro problem to the Negro's shoulders…when in fact the burden belongs to the nation." Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 403.
[65] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 398, 396-397.

through self-assertion" rather than through submission.[66] It follows for a view like Du Bois's that, in a demeaning context, the only non-self-defeating way to live is by insisting upon one's dignified status and capacity for self-determination. Even if such insistence is thwarted by the lack of mutual recognition, he seems to suggest, ceasing to insist on one's own dignity entails worsening the harm of mis-recognition by (as he accuses Washington's approach of doing) functionally accepting it as true. Acquiescing to the less-than-human status imposed on Black Americans by the white majority, no matter how partial, Du Bois would likely say, is to give up a vital aspect of one's freedom, not just politically but also psychologically.[67]

A second place this connection appears is in the ninth chapter of *Souls*, "Of the Sons of Master and Man." In the chapter, Du Bois offers an empirical analysis of "race-contact" between white and Black Americans in different facets of public life, providing an overview of segregation in the southern United States.[68] After doing so, he turns to the less quantifiable and less obvious "atmosphere of the land, the thought and feeling, the thousand and one little actions which go to make up life." These, he explains, "are most elusive to grasp and yet most essential to any clear conception of the group life taken as a whole."[69] With these less empirical datum, Du Bois claims, can be found the heart of the nation's "spiritual turmoil."[70]

While nevertheless affirming the significance of segregation on material inequities, Du Bois also insists on accounting for their psychological and spiritual impact. About these, he writes,

[66] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 397. Italics original.
[67] For Du Bois, "Whereas the politics of self-assertion presses blacks to demand rights, the politics of adjustment invites them to belittle and ridicule themselves—this to view themselves as contemptible and laughably unworthy of the recognition that would extend them rights… Put simply, [Washington's position] encourages and reinforces double consciousness." Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois*, 94.
[68] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 476.
[69] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 487.
[70] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 488.

> In a world where it means so much to take a man by the hand and sit beside him, to look frankly into his eyes and feel his heart beating with red blood; in a world where a social cigar or a cup of tea together means more than legislative halls and magazine articles and speeches,—one can imagine the consequences of the almost utter absence of such social amenities between estranged races, whose separation extends even to parks and street cars.[71]

The harmful "consequences" he refers to are those clearly resulting from the denial of mutuality and solidarity between Black and white Americans. It follows that Du Bois finds this to be a problem both because of the material *and* "spiritual" effects on Black persons, which for him can never been fully disentangled.

A third place that the connection between self-knowledge and freedom emerges in *Souls* is chapter twelve, "Of Alexander Crummell." In this chapter, Du Bois provides a brief biography of Alexander Crummell, a Black Episcopal priest in the nineteenth century, focusing on the psychological and existential effects of the racism he encountered. Du Bois is clear about his admiration for Crummell, and, although he serves as a hero for Du Bois, his life and vocation are tragically thwarted at nearly every turn.

What Du Bois admires so greatly about Crummell are his character, his strong sense of purpose, and his commitment to his calling. The short biography Du Bois provides of Crummell revolves around the misalignment between his integrity and education and the obstacles that confronted him throughout his life. As a result, Du Bois writes about Crummell's confrontation with three "temptations" facing those who are forced to live behind the veil: hate, despair, and doubt.[72] According to Du Bois, Crummell's treatment by institutions (especially General Theological Seminary, which denied him admittance on account of race), public leaders (namely, ecclesial ones), and white society more generally were personally crushing. Although "He did

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[71] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 490.
[72] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 512.

his work…nobly and well," Du Bois explains that Crummell was left to struggle mightily, "alone, with so little human sympathy."[73]

For Du Bois, Crummell represents the potential of every person to know "that full power within, that mighty inspiration which the dull gauze of caste decreed that most men should not know."[74] In other words, Du Bois offers Crummell as an example of the genius that persons possess in their natural capacities for learning and self-determination *and* how that genius can be devastatingly undermined—though, importantly, never entirely extinguished—by the absence of mutual recognition from empowered institutions and individuals.[75] Sandra Adell perceptively reads Du Bois's chapter on Crummell in conversation with Hegel's analysis of self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology*, particularly regarding the aspects on which I have elaborated. On just the point I have been raising, Adell rightly claims that Du Bois portrays Crummell as a person in pursuit of, and one denied access to, critically important external confirmation of his own basic status and capacities. She writes, "Guided by the ethical challenge to 'know thyself,' Crummell desires to pass beyond the limits of 'book-learning' into the realm of the knowable in order to ground for himself his own *self-certitude*."[76]

In the three examples I have provided, we can also see the importance of a sense of *belonging* for Du Bois to overcome alienation. For one, we can see how Crummell's experience

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[73] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 520.
[74] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 519.
[75] Shaw reads this account of Crummell as having strong parallels with Hegel's account of the transition from consciousness to self-consciousness. Shaw, *W. E. B. Du Bois*, 91-92. Shaw later rightly connects the story of Crummell with the Hegelian process of Spirit "*becoming* in and for itself and in and for its other." Shaw, *W. E. B. Du Bois*, 97-99.
[76] Adell, *Double-Consciousness/Double Bind*, 24. Emphasis original. Further, Adell places Du Bois in close proximity to Hegel with respect to the importance of overcoming the subjective/objective split (at least with regard to self-knowledge) through recognition. She writes that, on Du Bois's portrayal, Crummell "seek[s] to move beyond the realm of finite knowledge and into that of infinite knowledge. The striving for this kind of knowing is, for Du Bois, characteristic of an epoch in which philosophy seemed to suddenly bring into sharp focus the dichotomy between the subject (the self) and the object (the world). In 'Of Alexander Crummell' Du Bois describes this dichotomy as the primary metaphysical problematic of the nineteenth century." Adell, *Double-Consciousness/Double Bind*, 25.

of alienation is directly related to his lack of a sense of belonging, to the Episcopal church in particular (although he is ultimately ordained and appointed) and to American society in general. More significantly, however, the matter of belonging is evident in Du Bois's depiction of alienation in "Of the Sons of Master and Man" (the second example above), which he describes consisting "of the almost utter absence" of mutual recognition by the dominant white society. Du Bois elaborates on the significance of this lack of recognition and how it is related to and perpetuates a denial of belonging; that is, it conveys not simply a lack of formal or abstract equality, but also exclusion from the ongoing life of a larger, collective existence. Most fully, Du Bois explains that such mis-recognition is fundamentally a denial of *both* abstract equality, the "generous acknowledgement of a common humanity," *and* the fact and inclusion in "a common destiny."[77] Maintaining a connection between individual/interpersonal and communal dimensions, Du Bois clearly implies a relation between the experience of alienation and the status of belonging.

Further making this connection, Du Bois suggests in "Of the Sons of Master and Man" that racism undermines "sympathy and cooperation" between white and Black Americans.[78] Gooding-Williams notes that the concept of sympathy is a special one for Du Bois, who invokes it also in the chapter on Crummell.[79] Gooding-Williams rightly concludes in view of its usage that, "For Du Bois, sympathy requires acknowledgement as well as knowledge." In short, he explains, for Du Bois, "[sympathy] is a movement beyond the recognition of a shared identity to an expressed and explicit proclamation of human community."[80]

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[77] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 490.
[78] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 490. Later in the same chapter, Du Bois hopes for "a union of intelligence and sympathy across the color-line." Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 492.
[79] "The nineteenth was the first century of human sympathy…" Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 514.
[80] Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois*, 103.

Returning to the first example I noted, Du Bois's chapter on Washington, we can see a final instance of the importance of belonging for his thinking. Recall that part of Du Bois's criticism is that Washington's approach, he claims, largely accepts the status of "civic inferiority" for Black Americans.[81] By contrast, as Basevich helpfully articulates, in *Souls* Du Bois's political thought is organized around "the ideal of civic enfranchisement," which references the individual, legal, and cultural conditions pertaining to "the social and political inclusion of persons as free and equal civic fellows."[82] Basevich aptly uses the language of "civic fellowship" to capture as a central feature of Du Bois's perspective the bonds among persons who regard one another as equal members of a polity.[83] Martha Jones's historical work on the struggle for Black citizenship in the nineteenth century provides helpful background for this claim, arguing that citizenship was and remains best understood as a matter of determining "who belongs and by what terms" to a political community.[84] Civic fellowship therefore names well the experience among persons who belong—and regard one another as belonging—to a common, larger life and a "common destiny."[85]

As indicated previously in reference to the three forms of freedom Du Bois advocates in the first chapter of *Souls* (economic, political, and educational/cultural), the fellowship and belonging referenced here, rightly termed "civic" by Basevich, is importantly *political* in nature. That is, it names the experience of a person who enjoys the status of full and equal membership in a community that is defined by political institutions, norms, and culture.[86] Du Bois's vision is

[81] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 399.
[82] Basevich, *W. E. B. Du Bois*, 62.
[83] Basevich, *W. E. B. Du Bois*, 61-62, 71-72.
[84] Martha S. Jones, *Birthright Citizens: A History of Race and Rights in Antebellum America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), xiii. So following, Jones explains that the claim by Black Americans to birthright citizenship was a claim of "unassailable belonging." Jones, *Birthright Citizens*, 1.
[85] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 490.
[86] Although it is clearly implied by her argument, Basevich does not connect this as strongly and directly as she might to the phenomenological and recognitive problem of double-consciousness.

not exclusively political, to be sure, but it does train much of its focus on that domain. It is clear that Du Bois considers the political community to encompass the appropriate scale, scope, and power capable of unifying the different elements necessary for the full freedom of Black Americans. What is more, at times Du Bois refers to the political community as a larger, almost transcendent whole, to which its members relate as parts. He even occasionally uses classically republican terminology, reminiscent of Rousseau's organically constituted "body politic," such as references to a "common Fatherland," to do so.[87]

Uniting the two main themes I have addressed, in *Souls* Du Bois argues (albeit at times implicitly) that the particular, imposed form of alienation experienced by Black Americans—double-consciousness—is finally (or finally able to be) overcome in the realization of a sense of belonging as an equal, dignified member of the United States. Because he maintains double-consciousness is caused by the denial of adequate recognition from white society inter-personally, culturally, and institutionally, the status of full and equal membership that is reflected by a person's fellow members and reflected in the institutions and culture of the political community is necessary for its overcoming. Lastly, having argued for connections between Du Bois's and Hegel's conception of self-conscious selfhood, we can now see fully how in the experience of belonging a person receives robust confirmation of their own capacity for rational self-determination, which allows for the enjoyment of genuine freedom.

Toward the end of *Souls*, Du Bois offers a rich summary of his portrayal of the existential situation facing Black Americans. He writes,

> …we must remember that living as the blacks do in close contact with a great modern nation, and sharing, although imperfectly, the soul-life of that nation, they must necessarily be affected more or less directly by all the religious and ethical forces that are to-day moving the United States. These questions and movements are, however, overshadowed and warned by the (to them) all-important question of their civil, political,

[87] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 401.

> and economic status. They must perpetually discuss the "Negro Problem,"—must live, move, and have their being in it, and interpret all else in its light or darkness.[88]

To be sure, Du Bois's reference to the problem confronting Black Americans as "the all-important question of their civil, political, and economic status," given that these three statuses manifest within and are governed by a political community, supports my claim that Du Bois's analysis of the problem at hand can be summarized as one of belonging to one's political community. What is more, Du Bois's description in the above excerpt strongly implies clear dimensionality to a person's status and relationship to their political community: Du Bois's language references persons experiencing their political community as a larger, transcendent context, within which they make sense of their lives and world. I will return to this point below.

In the quoted passage above, note further that Du Bois refers to the plight of Black Americans by invoking Biblical references to the divine, which suggests both a sense of its felt significance along with this point about the transcendent dimension involved in a person's status within their political community. Employing language attributed to St. Paul in the Christian New Testament (Acts 17:28), Du Bois explains that the "Negro Problem" has been made so encompassing and threatening for Black Americans that they are forced to "live, move, and have their being in it, and interpret all else in its light or darkness."[89] Du Bois therefore utilizes religious language and references to make adequate sense of key aspects of the experiential dimension of political life. I now turn to the matter of religion in *Souls*, which is critical for understanding the text as a whole and especially the themes of alienation and belonging in it.

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[88] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 501-502.
[89] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 501-502.

Sorrow Songs and Civil Protest Religion in Souls

Du Bois's relationship to religion is ambiguous, and, although his writings allow for multiple interpretations, interpreters have tended to conclude that his work is antireligious or irreligious. Such a view, however, risks minimizing the enormous presence of religion in his writings.[90] In the most general terms, Manning Marable is surely right to describe Du Bois as having a profound "religious sensibility."[91] I concur with Edward Blum that instances of Du Bois's apparent animosity toward religion are not best understood as indications of his opposition to religion as such but rather as critiques of "faith used for fraud, belief used to bully, and Christianity when used to control."[92] Nevertheless, not being an outright opponent of religion does not make Du Bois a supporter or defender of it, but my argument only relies on his clear acknowledgment of its individual and communal benefits.

Speculating about the content of Du Bois's religious belief is outside the scope of this project, but his use of religious themes and references is critical for understanding *Souls*. Importantly for my project, Du Bois insists on the significance of religion for grasping the existential situation of Black Americans: "Whither went [the Black American's] longings and

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[90] For a thorough account of this problem in the secondary literature, see the introduction chapter in Blum, *W. E. B. Du Bois*. In reference to Blum's argument regarding the unfortunate paucity of scholarship that take Du Bois's religious dimension seriously, Kahn writes that, aside from his own book, "In truth, there are only two substantial and sustained writings on Du Bois and religion. The first is Manning Marable's essay 'The Black Faith of W. E. B. Du Bois'… The second is Edward J. Blum's *W. E. B. Du Bois: American Prophet*." Kahn, *Divine Discontent*, 9. Added to this list should be the more recently published Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., *An Uncommon Faith: A Pragmatic Approach to the Study of African American Religion* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2018), which culminates in its final chapter, "An Uncommon Faith: Rereading W. E. B. Du Bois on Religion." As well, although less helpful on this score, see Gary Dorrien, *The New Abolition: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Black Social Gospel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

[91] Manning Marable, "The Black Faith of W. E. B. Du Bois: Sociocultural and Political Dimensions of Black Religion," in *The Past is not Dead: Essays from the Southern Quarterly*, ed. Douglas B. Chambers and Kenneth Watson (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 149.

[92] Blum, *W. E. B. Du Bois*, 10. For example, Du Bois writes elsewhere about "the utter failure of white religion… A nation's religion is its life, and as such white Christianity is a miserable failure." This is from his essay, "The Souls of White Folk," which appears in Du Bois, *Darkwater,* 26. Notably, Du Bois places his famous (and religion-positive) "Credo" (originally published just after *Souls* in 1904) at the opening of *Darkwater*.

striving, and wherefore were his heart-burnings and disappointments? Answers to such questions can come only from a study of Negro religion."[93] My focus in this section is on the most obvious reference to religion in *Souls*, the music of African American spirituals, and I will argue that Du Bois presents religion as playing an important role in the formation of a just political community to which Black Americans can realize a sense of belonging.

Religion appears again and again in *Souls*, and it becomes the very subject of analysis in the book's tenth chapter, "Of the Faith of the Fathers," where Du Bois offers something of a short sociological analysis of African American religion that focuses on Christian revivals in the American South. Elaborating on what he takes to be its characteristic elements, Du Bois remarks especially on the music. According to Du Bois, this religious music plays an almost mystical role in the religion of Black Americans, both in the sense of its purported resonance with Black Americans—a resonance that goes beyond its lyrics and accounts for Du Bois's sense of intuitive familiarity with it even upon first hearing—and because of its status as "the singular spiritual heritage of the nation and the greatest gift of the Negro people."[94]

In the book's fourteenth and final chapter, Du Bois turns even more fully to the Black spirituals, to a representative selection he refers to as "sorrow songs." There, several important features of Du Bois's characterization of this religious music are evident. First, Du Bois claims both that the spirituals carry with them something palpable from religious and communal practices indigenous to the African continent, and that they have evolved to speak to the experience of chattel slavery in the United States. He writes, "Sprung from the African forests,

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[93] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 495.

[94] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 536-537. I use the language of "African American religion" and "the religion of Black Americans" in order to describe Du Bois's analysis in *Souls*. Not least because of its homogenizing implications, Du Bois's description of Black religion in the United States risks perpetuating stereotypes and generalizations. On this, see Curtis J. Evans, *The Burden of Black Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), especially chapter 4, which focuses on Du Bois.

where its counterpart can still be heard, it [what he calls "The Music of Negro religion"] was adapted, changed, and intensified by the tragic soul-life of the slave, until, under the stress of law and whip, it became the one true expression of a people's sorrow, despair, and hope."[95] This developmental point is key for his understanding of the songs, because it establishes them as a potent source of insight into the experience of Black Americans at the time. Du Bois puts this point sharply: "these songs are the articulate message of the slave to the world… They are the music of an unhappy people, of the children of disappointment; they tell of death and suffering and unvoiced longing toward a truer world, of misty wanderings and hidden ways."[96]

Second, the developmental point connects to one about the thematic content of the songs. As suggested, Du Bois claims that the spirituals evolved to carry "the voice of exile."[97] That is, they speak to the condition of persons whose "home is unknown." Therefore, he explains that the "soul-hunger…restlessness…[and] wail" expressed by the songs convey something specifically akin to the particular experiences that are the focus of this chapter.[98] Du Bois thus presents the religion of Black Americans, and particularly its music, as a critically important source for insight into the existential condition of Black Americans, *especially because* it articulates the experiences of alienation and non-belonging.

Third, Du Bois contends that the spirituals, and religion more generally, have been morally formative for Black Americans. He explains how religion has served an important communal role, especially in light of the destruction wrought by slavery on the homes and families of Black Americans, and that it has shaped the "inner ethical life" of so many Black

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[95] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 494. He explains that, "The songs are indeed the sittings of centuries; the music is far more ancient than the words… [resembling] primitive African music." Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 538-539.
[96] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 538.
[97] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 539.
[98] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 542.

Americans and helped to satisfy some of their most basic needs.[99] That said, Du Bois is equally clear that religion can and often has developed to conspire with the forces of oppression by (for example) endorsing "the doctrines of passive submission" and cultivating "the elements…[of] character which made [Black Americans] valuable chattel."[100] Du Bois is often sharply critical of religion, whose shortcomings require education to overcome, but he is never entirely dismissive of it.[101]

These three points speak to Du Bois's view of the significance of religion and its music for Black Americans in the early twentieth century, as a source of moral formation and as expressive of an existential situation characterized prominently by alienation and exclusion. For Du Bois, religion and the spirituals also play an important collective and political role. Regarding the former, insofar as the spirituals and other aspects of the religion of Black Americans both carry with them resonant aspects of religious and cultural life from the African continent, as Du Bois supposes, and because they address the existential situation common to so many, Du Bois's line of reasoning clearly suggests that religion has a unifying effect among Black Americans for its expression of broadly shared history and life experiences.

Regarding the latter, Du Bois clearly indicates that the religion of Black Americans is decidedly political in focus, at least in its longing. For Du Bois, the spirituals point to a normative ideal: "Through all the sorrow of the Sorrow Songs there breathes a hope—a faith in the ultimate justice of things."[102] The songs, despite however much they (and other aspects of religious life) might conspire with the forces of oppression, thus adamantly maintain the injustice

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[99] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 499.
[100] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 499-500. In fact, Christianity seems to be nearly content-less on Du Bois's (mostly sociological) description, as he presents it greatly evolving according to external (socio-political, cultural) context.
[101] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 421.
[102] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 544.

of the treatment of Black Americans, insisting on their dignity in the face and wrongness of its denial. In *Souls*, Du Bois says little about the conception(s) of the divine in the religion of Black Americans, but the transcendent domain implied even in the songs is referenced (however distant from the present) as the storehouse or standard of value that stands resolute against the whims of historical contingency. This normative critique of present circumstances and the defiant struggle against them is, according to Du Bois, implicit in and fundamental to each of the songs.

Specifically, though, Du Bois contends that the sense of justice longed for is oriented not simply to inter-personal relations or even socio-economic conditions but rather more broadly to the domain of the political community as a whole. Having already carved out a sense of what Black liberation entails (the different forms of freedom and civic fellowship noted previously), Du Bois ends the chapter on the sorrow songs by turning his attention abruptly to the United States as one such community. Referencing the long history of abuse and exclusion, he writes directly to white Americans in the vein of prophetic rebuke: "Your country? How came it yours? Before the Pilgrims landed we [Black Americans] were here… Actively we have woven ourselves with the very warp and woof of this nation…and generation after generation have pleaded with a headstrong, careless people to despise not Justice, Mercy, and Truth, lest the nation be smitten with a curse." He concludes, in a tone exasperated but clear-headed: "If somewhere in this whirl and chaos of things there dwells Eternal Good, pitiful yet masterful, then anon in His good time America shall rend the Veil and the prisoned shall go free."[103]

The connection between religion and politics in *Souls* is worth considering further. Du Bois clearly does not offer the religion of Black Americans as a civil religion, at least not in the same way that Rousseau and Hegel understand the concept. Recall from the first chapter that

[103] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 545.

Rousseau presents civil religion as an important religious-like set of commitments and practices that bind persons to their political community and fellow citizens. For Rousseau, as I have argued, civil religion enhances the stability of a political order and facilitates a sense of belonging for its members.

Rousseau's republican orientation and conception of the general will, however, endorse a practice of self-donation to a person's own political community. Such a move rests on a conviction about the rightness of the actions of the sovereign, properly understood, and has precious few resources to defend against the sort of culturally majoritarian, racist oppression that Du Bois experiences as a Black man in the United States. Although Hegel has clearer normative principles at his disposal, as I argued in the previous chapter, his thinking about civil religion similarly fails to properly anticipate the sort of political exclusion and marginalization that a phenomenon like white supremacy advances. As seen in the previous chapter, Hegel counsels that patriotism involves "trusting" one's political community, but Du Bois has rather profound reasons *not* to trust the United States, yet he nevertheless remains being committed to it and its improvement.

Although political in orientation, Du Bois's presentation of religion does not uncritically commend itself to or defend the existing political community. Nevertheless, it does clearly seek to cultivate persons as certain kinds of citizens, and so it has decidedly civic or political import. Standing against the injustices of the current political order and resourcing struggles for its improvement, we might therefore claim that Du Bois presents the religion of Black Americans functioning in a way that is best understood as a civil *protest* religion, a fundamentally aspirational form of civil religion that facilitates the attachment of persons to their political community *as it should be* rather than as it is. However it is conceived, in traditionally Christian

theist terms or non-theistic deontic principles, such a view suggests a structure common to natural law thinking that holds an ideal moral order above the existing one, exposing the existing political community to the normative criticism of a higher order.

Such a form of civil religion refuses to accept the current organization of the political order, a move that is suggested by the conditions for *mutual* recognition (and the normativity of what I termed *satisfactory* self-knowledge) in Hegel's view and that is importantly counter to the structure of self-donation presented by Rousseau. Instead, civil protest religion as seen in Du Bois's writings is *assertive* about certain nonnegotiable elements—in this case the dignity of Black Americans as equal and self-determining (rational and free) persons. Unlike Rousseau, as a victim of vicious anti-Black racism Du Bois does not uncritically accept his political community as good, nor can he uncritically accept the general will of its people, however much *a* political community is necessary for living well and however much he thinks a political community should be organically constituted. Yet, for Du Bois, religion's political effect is nevertheless constructive, affirming the significance of the political order for individual wellbeing while demanding its (in the case of the United States, at least) rather substantive renovation.

Given that Du Bois maintains alienation is only finally overcome by establishing a sense of belonging to one's political community, and that the genuine liberation of Black Americans as he describes it is necessary for the achievement of civic fellowship, at least three points are clear about the portrayal of religion in *Souls*. First, as mentioned already, religion is able to provide resources, in the form of a transcendent ideal or source of value, that ground the dignity of Black Americans and that therefore can help to hold off the soul-crushing acceptance of a person's lack of dignity in inhumane contexts. That is, it provides an ideal grounding for claims to the status

and basic capacities of Black persons, not least their capacity for self-determination, even when recognition by others and/or a concrete political community are lacking.[104] In fulfilling this role, religion on his description can also provide resistance to *unjust* forms of belonging, which would be any attempt to accommodate persons as less than equal or undignified members of a community.

Second, by working to attach persons to the ideal of the United States as it ought to be, we can say that Du Bois presents religion as important, if not necessary, for the cultivation of citizens who support and work toward the realization of their political community in its (more) just form. A third point is suggested by this second one, especially the implied movement from the first to the second. For Du Bois, religion insists on the realization—on the concrete actualization—of the ideal, even if it is resigned to the fact that this realization is to occur in the life to come. That is to say, on Du Bois's description, religion, and especially the spirituals, expresses an intractable longing for, and thereby emphasizes the importance of, living in a concrete community that recognizes and affirms the dignity of its members.

Additional evidence of Du Bois's understanding of religion's important civil or political function is found in his edited and chiefly authored book, *The Negro Church* (1903), published the same year as *Souls*. This text concludes with a brief section entitled "Resolutions" to which Du Bois signs his name, that articulates the importance of religion "for the sake of the state." Endorsing the writing of leading Social Gospel pastor Washington Gladden, "Resolutions" commends religion as a potentially (though not only) powerful *political* force. There, Du Bois, along with co-signers Mary Church Terrell and Kelly Miller, argues that religion plays a critical role in shaping persons to be active participants in civic life. Significantly, in the passage of

[104] To be sure, Du Bois does not seem to suggest that an ideal grounding or recognition is ever satisfactory in comparison to the concrete form of recognition offered by others and a political community.

Gladden's writing that the "Resolutions" co-signers reference, the civic preparation that religion is reportedly especially able to facilitate involves references to persons' attachments to their political community. This implication is clear in the contention that religion can play a key role in encouraging people "to build up [their country's] prosperity and to secure its peace," and even "to shed their blood in its defense."[105]

Conclusion

I have in this chapter examined the themes of alienation and belonging in Du Bois's early work, *The Souls of Black Folk*. After placing Du Bois in proximity to Rousseau and Hegel and contextualizing Du Bois and his early work, I considered his concept of double-consciousness as an acute, contextual, and powerful account of alienation. I have argued that Du Bois's account, like Hegel's, refers to the experience of internal division caused by the denial of proper recognition by others, which prevents the possession of satisfactory self-knowledge and disrupts the essential human capacity for self-determination. Further like Rousseau and Hegel, Du Bois presents two forms of alienation, one referring to inter-personal and social recognition and the other to the recognition received from a person's political community, both of which he suggests are overcome in the realization of a sense of belonging to one's political community. Finally, Du Bois joins Rousseau and Hegel in conceiving of religion as powerfully and perhaps uniquely able to bind persons to their political community.

These similarities aside, I have further explained that, as a Black man in a virulently racist context, Du Bois's experience of alienation differs significantly from that written about

[105] W. E. B. Du Bois, ed., *The Negro Church: Report of a Social Study Made under the Direction of Atlanta University; Together with the Proceedings of the Eighth Conference for the Study of the Negro Problems, Held at Atlanta University, May 26th, 1903* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2003), 208.

and experienced by Rousseau and Hegel. For one, I have argued that Du Boisian double-consciousness refers to maliciously *imposed* alienation perpetuated by the forces of anti-Black racism in the U.S. Du Bois writes of alienation as resulting from satisfactory self-knowledge being refused Black Americans by explicit and implicit white supremacist ideology, institutions, and culture. Although I maintain the monumental significance of this difference for the experience and context of the alienation Du Bois describes, it is nevertheless structurally similar to the alienation theorized by Rousseau and Hegel.

A second and related point of difference with Rousseau and Hegel is Du Bois's philosophy of race. I outlined above the basic contours of Du Bois's thinking on the matter, but many of its details and implications are beyond the project at hand. That said, his philosophy of race does bear on the themes of alienation and belonging in ways that I previously left unattended. Before addressing this point, however, I need to fill out his conception of belonging.

I mentioned previously that the necessary conditions for a Du Boisian account of just belonging are the recognition of a person's equal status and the recognition of their basic capacity for self-determination. Carrying over what I offered as a Hegelian conception of belonging from the previous chapter, I contend that a Du Boisian conception of belonging involves being able to understand oneself as an equal and free *expression* of one's community. Referring to the domain of the political, we might say that a sense of political belonging for him follows from 1.) experiencing one's status as an equal member and basic capacity for self-determination recognized and protected by the institutions, fellow members, and culture of one's political community; and 2.) self-consciously locating oneself in a part/whole relationship to the political community, according to which the person and the community stand in mutually (though asymmetrically) affirmative and beneficial relations. As I put it in the previous chapter,

in such a relationship, persons are able to understand themselves as manifesting, contributing to, and enhancing the life of the community, while the community grounds and makes possible the continued existence and satisfactory self-knowledge of its individual members.[106] As for Hegel, on Du Bois's view, it is plain to see how such an account of political belonging would overcome both the interpersonal/social and political forms of alienation evident in his work.

Further, it is in view of such an expressivist account we can see the significance of Du Bois's philosophy of race for political belonging.[107] Because Du Bois holds that a person's identity involves their racial identity (or identification with a race of people), and that each race of humans has a historically distinct way of life, belonging to a political community also involves for Du Bois seeing one's *race* as contributing to and being appreciated by the institutions, fellow members, representative leaders of one's political community. This point is clear at many points in *Souls*, from the epigraph pairings I referenced to the explicit claims Du Bois makes about Black and white Americans existing in relations of cultural, artistic, and philosophical mutual enhancement.[108] In sum, for Du Bois, political belonging for Black Americans involves their belonging as persons *and* as Black persons, whose individuality *and*

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[106] Shaw also draws a close connection between Hegel's conception of Spirit as fully realizable only in the context of a political community and Du Bois's view, yet she does not attend as closely to the inner workings of this relation. Shaw, *W. E. B. Du Bois and The Souls of Black Folk*, 107.
[107] This sort of expressivism, a concept found in Herder's and Hegel's philosophy that I addressed in the previous chapter (which has been notably identified by Charles Taylor), is a significant aspect of Gooding-Williams's reading of Du Bois. Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois*, 4, 14. Whereas Gooding-Williams addresses the expressivism point from what he takes to be Du Bois's conception of leadership (that a leader ought to express the life, values, and aspirations of their people), I do so from the perspective of the individual in relation to the political community as a whole. See also Taylor, "W. E. B. Du Bois," 241.
[108] As mentioned, such a view appears to be related to Herder's philosophy (cultures takes different expressions in the form of particular historical, geographical, and artistic ways of life that each have something to unique to contribute to the development of humanity), but it also has strong resonance with Friedrich Schiller's aesthetic philosophy. See especially letters four, five, and six in his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, in *Essays*, trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby, eds. Walter Hinderer and Daniel O. Dahalstrom (New York: Continuum, 1993), 92-104.

whose race can be understood as affirmed by, constitutive of, and contributing to the life of the political community as a whole.

In conclusion, it is important to reiterate four other distinguishing elements of Du Bois's account of alienation and belonging. First, Du Bois's account of belonging is assertive rather than submissive. Du Bois advocates an *assertive* mode of engagement with the political community, in sharp contrast to the model of self-donation found in Rousseau, explicitly because Du Bois is unable to trust that his political community would acknowledge his equal status and basic capacity for self-determination. Second, Du Bois's account speaks from and to a context of oppression and exploitation in a way that Rousseau's and Hegel's either overlook entirely or only abstractly consider. This introduces another dimension to understandings of alienation and what is required to overcome it in the experience of political belonging.

Third, from the context of oppression, Du Bois's take on the role of religion to shape citizens and bind them to their political community depends on a distinction between the political community as it is and as it ought to be. That is, to the thinkers in this project, Du Bois introduces what I have termed a civil protest religion, which provides oppressed persons with transcendent affirmation of their dignity in the face of its concrete denial and infuses persons with ideal conceptions of or principles for guiding their political community. Du Bois seems to suggest that religion is perhaps uniquely efficacious for these tasks and helps to develop citizens of a (more) just form of their political community. For these reasons, Du Bois can be rightly located among theorists of civil religion, but with this important difference.

Lastly, implied in the previous point, Du Bois's view of the political community and civil protest religion prominently references a transcendent dimension. On one hand, by maintaining a part/whole relation between individuals and their political community, Du Bois presents one's

political community as experienced by persons as the context of larger, transcendent life of meaning and being. On the other, by referencing an ideal that stands “over” or “above” the actually existing political community, there are at least two levels of transcendence or verticality implied in *Souls*, although they receive little explicit consideration. These four distinguishing features of Du Bois’s early writings will be evident in the next chapter, where I will explain how Martin Luther King Jr. transforms them in light of his theological and constructive political views and offers a democratic theory attuned even more to the matter of political belonging.

4. Martin Luther King Jr: Somebodyness, Nonviolence, and the Beloved Community

Martin Luther King Jr. may be the least obvious figure to include in the present project on alienation and political belonging, given that he does not make any explicit or obvious references to these themes. However, although these themes are mostly implicit in his writings, I contend that they play a significant role in his thinking. King is not only concerned with the experiential dimension of political life like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, G. W. F. Hegel, and W. E. B. Du Bois, he also shares with them key aspects of a theoretical framework, including an analogous account of human selfhood, the experience of its division caused by mis-recognition, and what is necessary to overcome it. However, as far as I can tell, King's writings have not yet been considered in light of the themes of alienation and belonging.

In this chapter, I will argue that, much like Du Bois, King presents an account of alienation as the experience of divided selfhood imposed on Black Americans by the dominant forces of anti-Black racism in the twentieth century United States. I will claim that King joins Du Bois in arguing that alienation follows from racist mis-recognition and that self-assertion is necessary to maintain a sense of one's own dignity, especially in dehumanizing contexts. Further, like Rousseau, Hegel, and Du Bois, I will contend that King maintains that alienation is finally overcome in the achievement of a sense of belonging to one's political community.

I will also argue that King departs with these figures on three key matters. First, King's moral and political thinking rests firmly on his expressed religious beliefs. King grounds the basic status and capacity of persons in a sturdy conviction about their value, which he anchors in a theological claim about their relation to God. An ordained Protestant minister and theologian,

King's relationship to religion is considerably different than the others in this dissertation, and its influence is thoroughly pervasive to his thought. Second, having anchored human value in a robust, transcendent origin (God), King's picture of the moral life involves commitments to ways of living and acting that attend to alienation, and in particular to the devaluation intrinsic to racist mis-recognition, by counseling a mode of dignified self-assertion. King's account of properly moral and political action is carefully designed to include dignified self-assertion while simultaneously recognizing the value, dignity, and basic capacities of others by striving after the inclusion of both self and other(s) as equals in the construction of their common life. I will argue that this is the underlying rationale of King's theory of nonviolence, which is expressive of a moral logic that I endeavor to unpack. Third, as mentioned, such moral thinking patterns a way of engaging and acting toward others that is constructive for building a community in which all members are treated with equal dignity. Such a community, which he refers to as the Beloved Community, stands as the ultimate aim of King's moral and political thinking, and King offers what I call a *civil protest theology* that serves to bind persons to it.

These points not only differentiate King from the other thinkers in this project, but they also distinguish him as the most constructively promising. On the account I am offering, Rousseau and Hegel introduced and robustly theorized the problem of alienation and offered a picture of political community that might overcome it by creating the conditions for persons to experience political belonging. Offering an analogous picture of the self, alienation, and political community, Du Bois intervenes by introducing the problem of *imposed* alienation and the need for self-assertion to overcome it. By effectively incorporating these insights, I will show that King's account of nonviolence emerges from a way of theorizing political life that attends to the problem of alienation by including the self-assertion necessary for persons to overcome it and by

committing to the affirmation of the equal status, basic capacity, *and inclusion* of every person in the (often contested) project of shaping and governing a common life to which all can belong.

In this chapter, I will draw on a number of King's writings, speeches, and sermons spanning the length of his public career. Tracing any line of thought in King's work poses a unique challenge because his writings are so often brief, sometimes topically specific, and, although often packed with theory, almost always written for the general public. These features require engagement with a sizable sample from the breadth of his writings. Given their nature, no one or two texts are adequate to examine King's thinking on any topic, and an overly narrow focus risks either a convenient parochialism with respect to his other writings and/or a self-serving eisegesis to which interpreters of King seem especially prone. At the same time, the sheer volume of his output combined with his widely acknowledged moral authority make King's writings a dense orchard ripe for cherry picking lines from various texts to make a point not entirely true to his own thought. To prevent this, I will as much as possible avoid referencing King's writings in a one-off manner and rather aim for, within what space allows, more sustained attention to texts while regularly connecting particular points to the general shape of his thought.

I will draw primarily from King's early sermons in the book *Strength to Love*, from the assortment of his writings and speeches from throughout his career that are collected in the volume *A Testament of Hope*, and from his longer works *Why We Can't Wait* and *Where Do We Go from Here*. To note, in these texts, King regularly uses gendered language ("brotherhood," "manhood," "man," "him/his") when referring to the general category that includes and/or the general qualities inherent in all human persons. I have preserved his original language in my direct quotations, but this detail is important to flag in order to clarify that, although King

regrettably uses non-inclusive terms, he is most accurately interpreted as using them (in these instances) in reference to what are in fact universal human categories and features.[1]

This chapter will proceed as follows. I will set the stage by outlining King's understanding of alienation and bring his account into proximity with those of Rousseau, Hegel, and Du Bois. By way of further introduction, I will then offer an overview of how King thinks about the relations between religion, ethics, and politics. With these broad, framing elements in place, I will then attend to the concepts of self-knowledge, self-regard, and self-assertion in King's writings and his operative conception of the self, which are not always apparent on a surface reading. Next, I will offer a constructive reading of King's moral and political theory and make the case for how it is oriented to and structured to overcome the problem of alienation by endorsing dignified self-assertion in working to build a common life to which all persons can belong. Finally, I will conclude by considering some extended matters relating to King's thought as viable for our contemporary context.

King and Alienation: In Proximity to Rousseau, Hegel, and Du Bois

King's writings show clear analogies with the figures in the three previous chapters, and we know that he read and/or studied the works of each of them. King references Hegel and Du Bois on several occasions, writing elaborately about the legacy of the latter and regularly claiming the influence of the former.[2] Although King never writes about Rousseau in any detail,

[1] The added difficulty here is that, in a project on alienation and belonging in which I claim King offers a helpful constructive vision, his prominent use of gendered language risks alienating some people. Further, even though I maintain that the general categories King uses that I am referring to here are best understood as universal human ones, I do not mean to imply that King was a consistent proponent of gender egalitarianism. On this, see Rufus Burrow, Jr., *God and Human Dignity: The Personalism, Theology, and Ethics of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Notre Dame: The University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 129-147.

[2] Among numerous other instances, King references Hegel's influence more than once in the sermons collected in Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength to Love* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), i.e., 13, 148. See also Burrow, *God and Human Dignity*, 84-85. Some have downplayed Hegel's influence on King, seeing it as mostly superficial, but I

he does mention studying his writings in graduate school.[3] Among other things, King shares with these thinkers a holistic conception of the political community.[4]

King's exposure to the thinking of these three figures is therefore well established, but my interest lies not in tracing lines of intellectual influence or proving strong dependence. Rather, his exposure to their writings further makes the case for reading him with them in mind, and it offers context to the analogies I locate between them.

Broadly, King joins Rousseau, Hegel, and Du Bois in theorizing about the existential dimension of political life. George Yancy points out "the existentialist sensibilities that inform King's understanding and description of white racism and its impact on black bodies." Yancy continues, writing that King "give[s] voice to the deep alienation, enduring pain, and depth of suffering experienced by finite and embodied black people within the context of their historical facticity."[5] Yancy's comments both highlight the centrality of lived experience for King and they help to remind us about the importance of not abstracting too quickly from King's writings regarding contextual matters to more general points. Heeding this reminder, I will attempt to

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think such a view suffers from a hasty reading of King's work and overlooks the considerable similarities regarding their respective senses of the self. For an example of this, see David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 46. King also references Du Bois in several places, and he shows considerable familiarity with his writings in an essay originally published in a book of writings by and about Du Bois. See Martin Luther King, Jr., "Honoring Dr. Du Bois," in *The Radical King*, ed. Cornel West (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015). As an interesting aside, upon his release from the Birmingham city jail in 1963 (during which time he wrote his famous letter), King mentioned that he had smuggled into his cell in solitary confinement a copy of Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*. Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963* (Simon & Schuster, 1988), 747.

[3] Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 92.

[4] Richard A. Jones, "Martin Luther King Jr.'s *Agape* and World House," in *The Liberatory Thought of Martin Luther King Jr.: Critical Essays on the Philosopher King*, ed. Robert E. Birt (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 139. There, Jones also makes a connection between King's writings and Rousseau's conception of the General Will and Hegel's conception of *Geist*.

[5] George Yancy, "Dr. King's Philosophy of Religion: Theology of Somebodiness," in *The Liberatory Thought of Martin Luther King Jr.: Critical Essays on the Philosopher King*, ed. Robert E. Birt (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 51.

honor the particularity of the experiences King writes about while also considering their implications for insights about the human self and the conditions for its wellbeing.

King has a social, recognitive conception of the self, which connects with his personalist metaphysics considered momentarily. He writes, "The self cannot be self without other selves. I cannot reach fulfillment without thou. Social psychologists tell us that we cannot truly be persons unless we interact with other persons. All life is interrelated."[6] Like Rousseau, Hegel, and Du Bois, King presents alienation as a sense of internal division arising from *mis*-recognition, from the lack of confirmation by others about certain basic facts of one's personhood. King shares especially with Hegel and Du Bois a sense of the human self as self-interpreting and dependent upon external confirmation of these basic facts in order to achieve a level of certainty about them. Accordingly, the lack of this confirmation by others affects the extent to which persons can know themselves as and therefore truly be the dignified and free persons they in fact are. On King's description, anti-Black racism entails the denial of confirmation from significant persons, institutions, and aspects of culture of the equality and dignity of Black persons. Owing to their self-interpreting nature, the reasoning goes, this lack of confirmation threatens to undermine the wellbeing of persons.

For King, alienation involves living under the weight of a degrading and dehumanizing self-image *imposed* by the persons, institutions, and culture of one's socio-political context, which undermines an internally held sense of one's own status and basic capacities as dignified and free. This means that King joins Du Bois in theorizing alienation as an exploitatively *imposed* phenomenon, which differs from the sort discussed by Rousseau and Hegel. That said, King does not offer a clear philosophy of race like Du Bois does, and he avoids the potentially

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[6] Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Ethical Demands of Integration," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), 122.

homogenous implications of Du Bois's proposal (and Romantic views more generally). Although he more often uses a theological and diverse conception of humanity, King's writings do suggest that Black Americans are united at least by a common history of unjust treatment.[7]

As I will explain further below, King memorably refers to the experience of alienation as being confronted with a sense of one's own "nobodiness," of being an individual who in the eyes of others "lacks individuality."[8] With segregation as the obvious example, King often writes about the divisive effects of racism that manifest in the social world and within individuals. He writes that "Racism is total estrangement. It separates not only bodies, but minds and spirits."[9] On this point, King writes about the emotional and psychological burden caused by anti-Black racism as often having a pervasive effect on persons by reminding them of the opportunities enjoyed by persons *and yet* that said opportunities are denied them: "the Negro knows that a cloud of persistent denial stands between him and the sun, between him and life and power, between him and whatever he needs."[10] The effects of this duality on a person's sense of self (and their freedom) manifest in the experience of alienation.[11]

Religion, Ethics, and Politics: King's Civil Protest Theology

Religion plays a role of fundamental importance for King, anchoring and influencing every aspect of his thought. Even more than the other figures I have considered, religion is not an

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[7] King also discusses the importance of "group identity" among Black Americans, both for solidarity in asserting a sense of dignity and for reasons of political strength. King insists that this must be an internally heterogenous conception of community. Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 131-133.
[8] King, *Where Do We Go from Here*, 126.
[9] King, *Where Do We Go from Here*, 74.
[10] King, *Where Do We Go from Here*, 110.
[11] In line with his metaphysical commitments described below, King also describes racism as evidence of unreconciled duality in the "soul" of the United States and in (to borrow a phrase from Du Bois) the souls of white folk. King, *Where Do We Go from Here*, 72.

easily isolable from King's moral and political thought. Rather than addressing it at the end of the chapter, then, as I have done for the previous three, I will mention here near the beginning some prominent influences on and elements of King's religious imagination, which saturate his thought and will reemerge throughout this chapter. In doing so, I will attend most to how these influences and elements shape his view of politics.

A full account of King's intellectual biography is excessive for this project, but a few points bear remarking on here. King was born into a family of Christian ministers and deeply formed by the bonds and resolve of his parents and grandparents. Intellectual biographies of King have too often overlooked the significance of his family and the Black church on him, but their influence cannot be overstated. His maternal grandfather and father were ministers before him—whose ministry consisted of, among other things, openly challenging segregation laws in the American South—and he grew up inspired by his family's faith and sense of community, which were crucial for maintaining a sense of dignity and solidarity in a particularly dehumanizing milieu.[12] By extension, King was also greatly influenced by the Black church, especially its focus on prophetic witness and social activism.[13]

King was also strongly influenced by the Social Gospel movement, a late nineteenth and early twentieth century movement in Christian theology most prominently in the United States that focused foremost on the application of Christian principles to matters of public life. Instead of being concerned with purely private or spiritual matters, such as practices of piety or the afterlife, Social Gospel writers focused their attention on social, economic, and political

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[12] Lewis V. Baldwin, "On the Relation of the Christian to the State: The Development of a Kingian Ethic," in Lewis V. Baldwin, Rufus Burrow, Jr., Barbara A. Holmes, and Susan Holmes Winfield, *The Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Boundaries of Law, Politics, and Religion* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 78.
[13] Burrow, *God and Human Dignity*, 77-83. The most significant and thorough work on this topic is Lewis V. Baldwin, *There Is a Balm in Gilead: The Cultural Roots of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

transformation. King was early on exposed to and influenced by the works of leading Social Gospel writers, especially Walter Rauschenbusch, while a student Crozer Theological Seminary and Boston University. Although critical of what he saw as the movement's naïve progressivism and relative silence on matters of race and racial injustice, King drew on the tradition's strong connections between theology, ethics, and social change.[14]

Lastly, for the purposes of this discussion, King was profoundly influenced by the tradition of personalism (or, as it is sometimes called, personal idealism). During his time in graduate school at Boston University, King studied under and was deeply shaped by leading personalists Edgar Brightman, Harold DeWolf, Walter Muelder, and others. King ultimately adopted a form of personalism, which provided a rich philosophical system that drew together into a robust framework many of his deepest commitments. Importantly, personalism's belief in a personal God as the source of value, in the sacredness (dignity) of all persons, and a relational metaphysics drew together and substantiated King's strong commitments to the dignity and equality of all persons and the relatedness of all things.[15] These elements form the backbone of King's moral and political theory, which will be important for my analysis below.[16]

These three prominent influences (and many others, to be sure) shaped King's thinking about, among other things, moral and political life. As suggested, and as will become

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[14] For more on this influence, see John J. Ansbro, *Martin Luther King, Jr: Nonviolent Strategies and Tactics for Social Change* (Lanham: Madison Books, 2000), chapter 5; Burrow, *God and Human Dignity*, chapter 2; and Kenneth L. Smith and Ira G. Zepp Jr., *Search for the Beloved Community: The Thinking of Martin Luther King Jr.* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1998), chapter 2. For more on King and the Black Social Gospel tradition, see Burrow, *God and Human Dignity*, 53-62.

[15] I have worded this sentence in this way in order to gesture to the point made forcefully by Burrow that King's personalism is best understood as a synthesis of the academic tradition noted here and what Burrow calls King's "homespun personalism," which involves the commitments and values that came from his family and the Black church. Burrow, *God and Human Dignity*, 79.

[16] For the most robust and even-handed treatment of King and personalism, see Burrow, *God and Human Dignity*, chapters 3-7. See also Ansbro, *Martin Luther King, Jr.*, chapter 5; and Smith and Zepp, *Search for the Beloved Community*, chapter 5.

increasingly clear in the analyses below, these influences inform his thinking about the principles and values that guide moral and political action. However, I want to note here a related point that might otherwise remain suppressed, that these influences, in particular personalism, also inform King's understanding of the proper relation between persons and their political community.

In the previous chapters, I have explained that Rousseau, Hegel and Du Bois each draw on religion in part for its conceptual resources to help theorize political life, and especially for how it can serve to bind persons to their political community. Following Rousseau, I have termed the employment of religious language and concepts for this binding effect "civil religion," and I have noted where and how the thinkers in the previous three chapters utilized it for their theorizations of political life. I have argued that each of them was civil religionists of a sort not only for using religious language and concepts for theorizing politics but also for theorizing the political community as an encompassing context within which most if not all other aspects of life (including social and economic) occur. Theorizing the political community this way, I have argued, renders it the context of a larger life, a transcendent context to which persons can belong.

Like these figures, King also construes the political community as an encompassing, transcendent context, but he does so with respect to a particular set of theological commitments. For King, the political community is to be judged according to the degree to which it realizes certain claims about persons, namely their equal dignity and interrelatedness. However, these are not simply abstract principles for King; they refer to a metaphysical context in which all of life and especially the political community are to be understood. This gives the political community the status of a transcendent context to which persons metaphysically do in fact belong as equal

members, but the actuality and experience of which must be realized in social, economic, and ultimately political life.

King regularly describes and promotes a metaphysics of interrelation and a conception of the ideal form of collective life he often refers to as the Beloved Community. In fact, King's activism and public life are not simply about advocating for certain principles of fair treatment, legal changes, or set of public policy initiatives, important though these are; rather, King is most centrally interested in and advocates foremost for a way of understanding persons and their common life according to which more just principles, laws, and policies would follow. For example, in an appeal to transform human interrelatedness into the normative ideal of "brotherhood," King remarks, "For some strange reason I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. And you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be. This is the way God's universe is made; this is the way it is structured."[17] King remains ever the Christian preacher in this way, calling persons to repentance and transformation through the renewal of their minds and referencing an already/not-yet sort of thinking that is common in Christian theology.[18]

It is perhaps obvious that such an understanding of their value and relatedness would bind persons to their political community, by way of the realization that they are already bound together *and* because, following from such a realization, persons become bound by obligation to realize the truth of their metaphysical relations in all domains of life. From this description, the case can be made that King is a proponent of civil religion. After all, he utilizes religious concepts and ways of thinking to describe the political community and its relation to persons,

[17] Martin Luther King Jr., "Remaining Awake through a Great Revolution," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), 269.
[18] For example, King counsels the need "to develop new attitudes" to appropriate to metaphysical interrelatedness *and* the conditions of contemporary life. King, "Remaining Awake through a Great Revolution," 269-270.

being both informed by religious traditions and invoking religious language. Yet, King does not advocate that persons uncritically bind themselves to their political community as it stands. Responding to the claim that King was obviously a civil religionist, Lewis Baldwin argues instead that King "emerged as more of a critic than a proponent of southern civil religion. Unlike the public faith embraced by most white southerners, King's civil religion was unequivocally and unapologetically prophetic."[19] Baldwin is right about King because, for him, the metaphysical framework he commits to exerts normative pressure on and stands as a critique of the status quo.

By advocating for a conception of the Beloved Community as an ideal form of community that is *at least* political in scope, King offers what we can understand to be a form of civil religion. Like Du Bois, though, King's civil religion strives to bind persons to an ideal form of their political community rather than to its actually or currently existing (unjust) state, a point that Baldwin references with the language of "prophetic." King can therefore be seen as offering what I have identified in Du Bois's writings as a civil *protest* religion.

However, unlike Du Bois, King offers a full-throated metaphysical and tradition-specific (Christian) account of the source of value and of how reality hangs together, and so, rather than simply invoking categories and values that can be more generally identified as religious or religious-like, King's perspective is more accurately termed *theological*. Although he goes to great strides to show that the Beloved Community is not exclusively Christian (setting aside the question of how convincing that may be), King arrives at this thinking by way of Christian commitments and traditions of Christian theology.[20] For this reason, King should be rightly seen

[19] Lewis V. Baldwin, "To Witness in Dixie: King, the New South, and Southern Civil Religion," in Lewis V. Baldwin, Rufus Burrow, Jr., Barbara A. Holmes, and Susan Holmes Winfield, *The Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Boundaries of Law, Politics, and Religion* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 47.
[20] This is not to suggest that King is informed *only* by Christian theology and/or Christian thinkers. King was also heavily influenced by, to take one example, Mohandas Gandhi, from whom he claims to have learned about the "method of nonviolence." Martin Luther King Jr., "An Experiment in Love," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), 16-

as offering a form of *civil protest theology*, which is more closely tied to a particular religious tradition (or traditions) and theological claims than what is conveyed by the more general term civil religion.

Self-Knowledge, Self-Assertion, and Self-Regard

Having spoken quite broadly and abstractly about King's account of alienation, some of his intellectual influences, and how religion, ethics, and politics are related for him, I will now begin to substantiate these claims by engaging King's writings. I will turn now to his accounts of alienation and selfhood, and in the next section I will attend to the inner workings of his moral and political thought, before arguing for how they are all related. Doing so involves first attending to his account of the experience of imposed alienation and his insights on what is required to overcome it.

King regularly describes the harmful internal, psychological effects of anti-Black racism and racial injustice on Black Americans by referencing concepts and lines of reasoning that match or strongly resonate with those in the previous chapters. Most importantly for this project, he describes many of these effects as resulting from the lack of mutual recognition by white persons and by the institutions and cultural artifacts of American society more generally. In this section, I will examine the themes of recognition, self-knowledge, and self-assertion as they appear in some of King's writings, attending especially to the sense of self that is operative in his thinking and drawing out related lines of reasoning.

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17. For more on the influence of Gandhi, see Ramin Jahanbegloo, *The Revolution of Values: The Origin of Martin Luther King's Moral and Political Philosophy* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2019), chapter 3; Ansbro, *Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 128-146; and Smith and Zepp, *Search for the Beloved Community*, chapter 3.

These themes are prominently found in King's 1957 article "Nonviolence and Racial Justice," where he writes about the legacy of anti-Black racism in the United States, "Throughout the era of slavery the Negro was treated in inhuman fashion. He was considered a thing to be used, not a person to be respected."[21] As he often does, here King references the instrumentalization of persons as one of the prominent wrongs committed against Black Americans by the institution of slavery for not respecting the dignity and autonomy that is rightfully theirs as human beings. This is a key part of King's diagnosis of the historical injustices perpetrated against Black Americans, the legacy (and even practice) of which continues long after the Civil War ended. At times, he explains this point in more deontic terms as a violation of the Kantian imperative that "all men must be treated as *ends* and never as mere *means*."[22]

Notably, however, King's analysis also includes a development more akin to Hegel's philosophy that accounts for this wrong in historical, intersubjective contexts, which entails attending to its recursive effects. In his extended description of the legacy of these circumstances, King writes, "Living under these conditions [of enslavement], many Negroes lost faith in themselves. They came to feel that perhaps they were less than human."[23] In that brief description, we can see evidence of King's account of the reflexive nature of the human self and therefore of the harm of internalized dehumanization.

According to King, what is wrong with the treatment of Black Americans is not only the denial of abstract equality but also prevalent mis-recognition and its reflexive effects on the oppressed. This point suggests that King maintains a position regarding the need for persons to

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[21] Martin Luther King Jr., "Nonviolence and Racial Justice," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), 5.
[22] King, *Where Do We Go from Here*, 103. Emphasis original.
[23] King, "Nonviolence and Racial Justice," 6.

receive confirmation from others about certain fundamental aspects of themselves, which is necessary in order to arrive at what I have previously called satisfactory self-knowledge. Moreover, King explains the damaging effects of this lack of mutual recognition and denial of satisfactory self-knowledge as insidiously encouraging in Black Americans the development of a "subservient attitude and [leading them to have] accepted the 'place' assigned [them]."[24] King therefore evidently shares with Hegel and Du Bois the extended line of thinking that when a person's status is not recognized, reflected back, and thereby confirmed by others, the person's very freedom can be undermined—not only externally by the denial of opportunities and fair treatment but also *internally* (thwarted from within) as well, and this in virtue of humans being dynamically self-interpreting creatures.

To be especially clear about an aspect of this point, I am not suggesting that King argues persons are unable to live dignified lives without receiving mutual recognition from all members of their social and political worlds, or that the absence of mutual recognition necessarily weakens a person's character or resolve. After all, the very examples of Du Bois and King speak quite forcefully to the contrary. Instead, I am arguing that—and, importantly, *why*—genuine harm is done to persons when pervasive mis-recognition occurs, harm that is intensified by its intentional and wide-spread imposition, which can render precarious and even potentially undermine human freedom and wellbeing.

So following, notice how King goes on to explain the increase in civil rights activities in the mid-twentieth century: "A myriad of factors came together to cause the Negro to take a new look at himself. Individually and as a group, he began to reevaluate himself. And so he came to feel that he was somebody." On King's description, the important sense of being "somebody" is

[24] King, "Nonviolence and Racial Justice," 6.

conditioned by external factors—inter-personal, social, economic, and political—that reflect back to persons something important about their status and encourage the development of an internal, self-conscious state. Note also the reflexivity of "somebodyness" in King's reference to the matter as one of second-order *self*-regard, which follows from, he claims, the opportunity for self-reevaluation.[25] Not unlike Hegel, then, we can see that King maintains that the self's self-knowledge is mediated by other persons, institutions, and broader culture.

For King, the word "somebody" (or "somebodyness," along with its opposites "nobody" and "nobodyness"/"nobodiness") often operates as a term of art. Unpacked in the language of this project, I contend that King's conception of somebodyness refers to the experience of having certain basic facts or features about oneself—most importantly pertaining to one's basic value and status—reflected back by others and thereby *confirmed*, which amounts to the attainment of what I have called satisfactory self-knowledge. This confirmation results from mutual recognition, from being regarded by others as possessing a basic parity of status, worth, and capacity. On some occasions, King uses Martin Buber's framework of "I" and "thou" to describe the experience of somebodyness, which further indicates the recognitive nature of it. On this, King writes elsewhere that a justly integrated society is one in which "the quality of 'thouness'" is honored in each Black person, "which is his due because of the nature of his being."[26]

Garth Baker-Fletcher offers the most sustained work on the concept of somebodyness in King's writings and explains that King uses it as a synthesis of a number of motifs that constitute his understanding of human dignity.[27] Although Baker-Fletcher does reference the reflexive

[25] King, "Nonviolence and Racial Justice," 6.
[26] King, "The Ethical Demands of Integration," 119.
[27] Garth Baker-Fletcher, *Somebodyness: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Theory of Dignity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 163. Baker-Fletcher explains that King got the term and its rich meaning from his mother, Alberta Williams King. Baker-Fletcher, *Somebodyness*, xiv, 23.

nature of somebodyness in King's writings, aside from brief reference to somebodyness as involving a "*sense*" of oneself that emerges from certain sorts of social interactions, he under-appreciates the recognitive dimension of King's picture of the self.[28] All that said, it is important to grasp the recognitive nature of King's conception of the self for understanding his account of the harms of racism and racial injustice, including the denial of mutual recognition. However, as for Du Bois (who traces this point to Frederick Douglass), this does not mean that, on King's picture, persons are thoroughly passive in the development of their selfhood, nor are they powerless in the face of devaluation.[29] Rather, King argues that an important part of developing and maintaining a sense of sombodyness is the self's insistence on its own status and value.

Baker-Fletcher rightly argues that somebodyness and the dignity it entails is, for King, "*something that must be asserted*."[30] In his 1956 article "Our Struggle," King writes about the dynamics of the Montgomery Civil Rights campaign in a similar vein as above: "Gradually the Negro masses in the South began to reevaluate themselves—a process that was to change the nature of the Negro community and doom the social patterns of the South." Continuing, he then explains, "We discovered that we had never really smothered our self-respect and that *we could not be at one with ourselves without asserting it*."[31]

[28] Baker-Fletcher, *Somebodyness*, 188. Emphasis original. On a related note, in his reflections on the influence of Hegel on King's thinking, Baker-Fletcher never really considers their similarities on matters of selfhood. Baker-Fletcher, *Somebodyness*, 86-94.

[29] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, in *Writings: The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade*, *The Souls of Black Folk*, *Dusk of Dawn*, *Essays and Articles*, ed. Nathan Huggins (New York: The Library of America, 1986), 397. For connections between Du Bois's and King's conceptions of dignity, see Robert Gooding-Williams, "The Du Bois-Washington Debate and the Idea of Dignity," in *To Shape a New World: Essays on the Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. Tommie Shelby and Brandon M. Terry (Cambridge: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 2018), 22-23.

[30] Baker-Fletcher, *Somebodyness*, 37. Emphasis original.

[31] Martin Luther King Jr., "Our Struggle," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), 75. Emphasis mine. It is important to note here that the sense of self-imposition ("smothered our [own]") conveyed by King's language seems intended to mean that, on his thinking, a sense of somebodyness can never be entirely extinguished from without.

There are two things to note about this comment. First, King explicitly mentions the importance of asserting one's own dignity or sense of somebodyness, particularly in the face of its denial. As the comment shows, and as is entirely consistent for the conception of the self I laid out above, King maintains that there is an *expressive* aspect to sombodyness. Because somebodyness reflexively involves a person's *self*-regard, a necessary feature of somebodyness is living and acting under the knowledge of one's own possession of it. Especially in the face of its denial from others, this means insisting on one's own status—and therefore regarding oneself—*as somebody*. Without doing so, on King's reasoning, whatever freedom a person might retain can be thwarted by others. King puts this point vividly:

> The Negro will only be truly free when he reaches down to the inner depths of his own being and signs with the pen and ink of assertive selfhood his own emancipation proclamation. With a spirit straining toward true self-esteem, the Negro must boldly throw off the manacles of self-abnegation and say to himself and the world: "I am somebody. I am a person. I am a man with dignity and honor. I have a rich and noble history, however painful and exploited that history has been. I am black *and* comely."[32]

Absent significant social and political affirmation of one's somebodyness, King suggests that (similar to Du Bois) many Black Americans have been bolstered by religious/theological convictions regarding the dignity and value of their personhood.[33] Religious beliefs in these instances can provide a transcendent source of one's value that, though not entirely sufficient without material, social, and political embodiment, remains unspoiled by others. On this point, Rufus Burrow Jr. suggests that King learned about both the need for self-assertion and the importance of its connection to theology and religious life from his father and maternal grandfather. Burrow explains that these two men, both Christian ministers, taught King "the need

[32] King, *Where Do We Go from Here*, 44-45.
[33] King, "Nonviolence and Racial Justice," 6.

for his people to work together cooperatively and with God in order to assert their humanity and dignity and to *demand* that they be treated accordingly."[34]

The second point to note about that comment is King's reference to the experience of "being at one with ourselves," which is a direct reference to what I conceive of as the *un*alienated life—a life *not* burdened by discomforting internal division regarding a person's status and basic capacities. King does not often explicitly reflect on the matter of divided selfhood, but, as the above comment reveals, it is clearly present in his thinking. This point can also be seen in a reflection of King's on his own experience of segregation, where he makes what may be an oblique reference to Du Bois's conception of double-consciousness and metaphor of the veil: "I could never accept my having to sit in the back of a bus or in the segregated section of a train. The first time that I was seated behind a curtain in a dining-car I felt as though the curtain had been dropped on my selfhood."[35]

Having pointed out the recognitive nature of King's conception of the self, as well as his accounting for the importance of self-regard and the necessity of self-assertion for overcoming alienation, I now turn briefly to how King connects these elements to political belonging. Like his conception of the self and the problem of alienation, King's thinking about political belonging is mostly implicit. However, it explicitly emerges most clearly in his 1965 address to the Massachusetts state legislature. There, he draws overt connections between a number of ideal and material themes in his writings, including economic justice, recognition, nobodyness/somebodyness, and political belonging.

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[34] Rufus Burrow, Jr. "Personalism, the Objective Moral Order, and Moral Law in the Work of Martin Luther King, Jr.," in Lewis V. Baldwin, Rufus Burrow, Jr., Barbara A. Holmes, and Susan Holmes Winfield, *The Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Boundaries of Law, Politics, and Religion* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 217.
[35] King, *Strength to Love*, 148-149.

At the peak of this address, King claims that a sense of somebodyness is coincident with a sense of belonging to a person's political community:

> Nothing can be more tragic than to build a nation with a large segment of that nation feeling that they have no stake in this society; feeling that they have nothing to lose, and where thousands of people are jobless. Many live in rat infested housing conditions, and they find themselves frustrated day in and day out, constantly fighting against a nagging sense of "nobodyness"… We have the responsibility to give these people a sense of belonging, a sense of "somebodyness", and a feeling that they do count![36]

Seen here, for King, a sense of "sombodyness" is secured—and "nobodyness" finally overcome—by establishing a sense of belonging to, in this case, one's "nation." To note as well, King's references to political community, economic opportunity, and real living conditions underline the point that he is concerned with the material, embodied conditions of persons.[37] Like the others in this project, King rejects strong dualisms of every kind, and so we should be unsurprised at his concern for realizing ideal ends in the actual, concrete manifestation of a just political community.

King's Moral and Political Thought

In the previous section, I drew attention to the often-implicit conception of the self in King's writings and the way he describes what I term the experience of imposed alienation. I then showed how he explains the importance of self-assertion for maintaining a sense of somebodyness in the face of its denial by others. In this section, I will explain that King's moral and political thought offer a constructive proposal that addresses these themes.

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[36] *Address of Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr. Delivered to a Joint Convention of the Two Houses of the General Court of Massachusetts* (April 22, 1965), House No. 4300, 11.
[37] King refuses to theorize about ideal/experiential and material conditions independently. King, *Where Do We Go from Here*, 92.

In the context of the dissertation project as a whole, my argument in this chapter is that King offers, among the main figures considered in this project, the most constructively promising approach to political life that addresses matters of alienation and political belonging. This claim is complicated by the fact that King offers nothing like a fully worked out treatise or theoretical outline of his political philosophy as such. Because of this, in this section I will identify the trademark elements of his thinking and offer a framework for how to best understand their relations. In full, I will argue that King's moral and political thinking is structurally teleological, anchored in and oriented to the construction of a concrete, inclusive, self-governing community that he calls the Beloved Community. Accordingly, I will show how his account of nonviolence is one of dignified self-assertion that patterns a way of acting toward and treating others that is constitutive of a democratic community that includes *both* the self and other(s) it acts toward as equal, dignified members. Finally, I will argue that such action and the community it aims to build are committed to developing the conditions for overcoming alienation and securing the opportunity for all persons to attain a sense of belonging.

The Key Elements and Teleological Structure of King's Moral and Political Thought

Along with his conception of human dignity and its recognitive dimension captured by his language of "somebodyness" noted above, central to King's moral and political thinking are conceptions of love, justice, and the Beloved Community. Each of these have grounding in theological and metaphysical claims, which relate most prominently to his Christianity and his

personalism. Although I will not attend to all of the details of King's moral and political thought, an outline will suffice for our purposes.[38]

First, love, of the sort he refers to as *agape*, is absolutely central to King's moral and political thinking. On this and related matters, he is influenced especially by prominent Christian ethicists Anders Nygren, Paul Tillich, Reinhold Niebuhr, and others, whose works on love were especially influential at the time.[39] Although he uses the language of love and *agape* in countless articles and sermons, King most fully explains his thinking on the matter in his 1958 article "An Experiment in Love" and some of his sermons collected in *Strength to Love*.

In these texts, King writes that *agape* is the sort of love modeled and counseled by Jesus of Nazareth. Such love, he contends, originates in God and is animated not by any capacity, feature, or intrinsic quality of the person being loved but rather by God's regard for them. He argues that *agape* is a love that values and acts according to the value given by God's love for persons: "we love every man because God loves him."[40] King further explains that "*Agape*…is an overflowing love which is purely spontaneous, unmotivated, groundless, and creative. It is not set in motion by any quality or function of its object. It is the love of God operating in the human heart."[41]

According to King, *agape* is other-regarding by nature, "a love in which the individual seeks not his own good, but the good of his neighbor… It begins by loving others *for their*

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[38] The best full-length studies of King's ethics I have encountered are Ansbro, *Martin Luther King, Jr.*; Burrow, *God and Human Dignity*; Smith, *The Ethics of Martin Luther King, Jr.*; and Smith and Zepp, *Search for the Beloved Community*.

[39] For more regarding these influences on King, see Ansbro, *Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 7-34, Smith, *The Ethics of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 62-64, and Smith and Zepp, *Search for the Beloved Community*, 61-69.

[40] King, *Strength to Love*, 52. There, using language found in Du Bois, King argues that *agape* does not refer to the other's possession of "some type of divine spark." Elsewhere, King argues that, "Every man must be respected because God loves him. The worth of an individual does not lie in the measure of his intellect, his racial origin or his social position. Human worth lies in relatedness to God. An individual has value because he has value to God." King, *Where Do We Go from Here*, 102-103.

[41] King, "An Experiment in Love," 19.

sakes." Yet the impetus for and ground of *agape* are external to both the self *and* the other, even while the other remains its concern; according to King, *agape* is the love of God for the other, on account of God's unconditional regard for the other, expressed in and through persons. As such, *agape* is wholly unmerited yet necessarily personal, concerned with the wellbeing of the other in their particularity. In virtue of the nature and origin of this love (God), *agape* on King's understanding is also universal: "It is an entirely 'neighbor-regarding concern for others,' which discovers the neighbor in every man it meets."[42]

Importantly, King's conception of *agape* is communally oriented.[43] He writes that "*Agape* is love seeking to preserve and create community. It is insistence on community even when one seeks to break it. *Agape* is a willingness to go to any length to restore community."[44] Moreover, its concern with building community is not in tension with the wellbeing of the other as the object of *agape*; King argues that persons are by nature communal beings, and so *agape* involves caring for the person by, among other things, attending to their "need for belonging."[45] Because of its commitment to the unconditional value and to building community with others, for King, *agape* involves the increasing awareness and concrete realization of his aforementioned personalist commitments to the dignity and relatedness of all persons. In other words, King's conception of *agape* is fundamentally about the dispositions and actions necessary to embody or more fully realize what is metaphysically true about persons.[46]

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[42] King, "An Experiment in Love," 19. Emphasis original. This article was published as a stand-alone piece, but it is actually an excerpt from King's book *Stride Toward Freedom*. King also refers to *agape* as "*universal altruism*." King, *Strength to Love*, 31.

[43] King writes that *agape* is essentially "a recognition of the fact that all life is interrelated." King, "An Experiment in Love," 20. See also Ansbro, *Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 34, Smith, *The Ethics of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 65.

[44] King, "An Experiment in Love," 20.

[45] King, "An Experiment in Love," 19.

[46] As Burrow describes it, for King, *agape* "is a social principle that points to the fundamental communality of reality and persons." Burrow, *God and Human Dignity*, 160. With this metaphysically conceived, theologically grounded, and communally oriented conceptualization in mind, I disagree with Vincent Lloyd that "King was fundamentally concerned with what love is *not*, and it is this negation that colors his political vision." And this,

Second, although he uses the term frequently, King is less direct regarding his understanding of justice. However, he seems to adopt something like the classical definition of persons receiving their due.[47] I will explore in more depth below some of the key elements of his thinking about justice, but I will say for now that King regularly stresses that a principle of equality is elemental to it.[48] That said, King often refers to justice as a distributive principle and/or virtue with direct relevance to economic, social, and political life.[49]

Especially in his early writings, King presents the relationship between *agape* love and justice in strongly dialectical terms. In his sermon "A Tough Mind and a Tender Heart," King suggests that justice is commonly held to have something to do with shrewd "toughminded[ness]," whereas love is often taken to be related to sympathy and "tenderhearted[ness]."[50] However, King does not posit a dualism between them like Niebuhr famously did, seeing love and justice as mapping onto the ideal and the real, respectively, and calling for the maintenance of an unresolved, mutually-informed tension between the two.[51] In contrast, King, argues for their synthetic integration in a higher unity that preserves both of these

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while appreciating Lloyd's attention to King's use of the language of love for "naming practices that are meant to cleanse us of our lazy, ultimately idolatrous beliefs and practices about love." Vincent Lloyd, "What Love Is Not: Lessons from Martin Luther King, Jr.," *Modern Theology* 39, no. 1 (January 2020), 109.

[47] "[A]bsolute justice for the Negro simply means, in the Aristotelian sense, that the Negro must 'have his due.'" King, *Where Do We Go from Here*, 95.

[48] For an extended discussion on King and equality, see Greg Moses, *Revolution of Conscience: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Philosophy of Nonviolence* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1997), 23-36.

[49] King, *Where Do We Go from Here*, 3-12.

[50] King, *Strength to Love*, 19.

[51] See, for example, Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Ethic of Jesus and the Social Problem," in *Love and Justice: Selections from the Shorter Writings of Reinhold Niebuhr*, ed. D.B. Robertson (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1957). King wrote a paper in graduate school at Boston University on the individual/social and *agape*/justice relations in Niebuhr's writings, where he draws out and ultimately critiques the dualistic nature of Niebuhr's rendering. There, he writes that Niebuhr fails to consider "how the Immanuel of Agape is to be concretely conceived in human nature and history… He [Niebuhr] fails to see that the availability of the divine Agape is an essential affirmation of the Christian religion." Martin Luther King, Jr., "Reinhold Niebuhr's Ethical Dualism," in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., Volume II: Rediscovering Precious Values, July 1951-November 1955*, eds. Ralph E. Luker, Penny A. Russell, and Peter Holloran (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 150.

connotations, writing on the matter that "Jesus recognized the need for blending opposites" and offering his approach to nonviolence as an example of this.[52]

In his later writing, King explains, "One of the greatest problems of history is that the concepts of love and justice are usually contrasted as polar opposites. Love is identified with a resignation of power and power with a denial of love." However, he continues, "Justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love."[53] Arguing more directly for their integration, he claims, "Love that does not satisfy justice is no love at all. It is merely a sentimental affection, little more than what one would have for a pet. Love at its best is justice concretized."[54] In other words, King maintains that justice, which involves the institutional, social, and material arrangements for all persons to be treated as they deserve, is a necessary component of love. To put it briefly, for King, love must be at least just.

King's understanding of love is thoroughly egalitarian and undiscriminating, in relation to which justice has two basic meanings gestured to previously. First, justice refers to the egalitarian principle fundamental to love. As undiscriminating, love is essentially egalitarian. That is the sense in which I used it previously in saying that King maintains "love must be at least just." Second, the *application* of justice is quite often a remedial or rectifying affair, which seeks to correct for inegalitarian circumstances, which certainly requires discernment or discrimination. This is the sense that King invokes when he speaks about justice "correcting" what opposes love. To be sure, these two meanings are not contradictory, nor do they compete with the definition of love in service to the Beloved Community.

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[52] King, *Strength to Love*, 13, 19. Here, King approvingly references Hegel, who, he reports, "said that truth is found neither in the thesis nor the antithesis, but in an emergent synthesis which reconciles the two." See also Ansbro, *Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 151-158; Smith, *The Ethics of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 64-65; and Smith and Zepp, *Search for the Beloved Community*, 84-95.
[53] King, *Where Do We Go from Here*, 37-38.
[54] King, *Where Do We Go from Here*, 95.

Finally, the Beloved Community is the ideal that anchors King's moral and political thinking.[55] For him, the phrase refers to a relational context characterized by "justice, good will and brotherhood," which are constitutive components of it.[56] Borrowing the phrase from Josiah Royce, King uses it essentially as a synonym for the Christian concept of the Kingdom of God, which signifies a community based on *agape* love.[57] More specifically, King explains that the Beloved Community refers to "a society in which all men will be able to live together as brothers and respect the dignity and worth of all human personality."[58] As Ervin Smith explains, pursuing the Beloved Community involves, for King, "reverence for individual personality, but more importantly the quest for a community where these individual personalities contribute to and find their highest fulfillment in social interaction."[59]

Having briefly explained King's conceptions of *agape* love, justice, and the Beloved Community, it is now necessary to determine how they hang together for him. With his frequent references to the other-regarding nature of *agape* love, his insistence on the importance of justice, and his concern for rights, it is understandable why a reader might perceive King as a deontic thinker. However, although he does not come out and explicitly make the connections in this way, King's moral and political thinking is best understood as structurally teleological, claiming as its *telos* the construction and maintenance of an inclusive community—the Beloved Community—wherein the dignity and interdependence of all persons is acknowledged, affirmed,

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[55] On the background of this concept, see Smith and Zepp, *Search for the Beloved Community*, chapter 6, and Burrow, *God and Human Dignity*, chapter 6.
[56] King, "Nonviolence and Racial Justice," 6.
[57] Burrow, *God and Human Dignity*, 160. See Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity* (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 125, 129-131.
[58] Martin Luther King, Jr. "Address Delivered to the Montgomery Improvement Association's 'Testimonial of Love and Loyalty,'" in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., Volume V: Threshold of a New Decade, January 1959-December 1960*, eds. Tenisha Armstrong, Susan Carson, Adrienne Clay, and Kieran Taylor (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 360.
[59] Smith, *The Ethics of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 64.

and protected.[60] This is evident in King's explanation of *agape*, as shown in the quotes above, which for him is not properly a deontic command from God, Christian scripture, or the dictates of reason, but rather a dignified and communally-oriented way of regarding and acting toward others that is conducive to their wellbeing.[61]

As noted, King's moral and political thinking reposes against his theological and metaphysical commitments about the nature of persons as dignified and interrelated beings, the realization of which in concrete, embodied contexts is a necessary condition of their wellbeing. According to such a teleological structure, right action is defined as that which is internal and conducive to the realization of the Beloved Community.[62] So following, the relation between means and ends in a teleological framework is constitutive rather than instrumental. A constitutive relationship between the two maps directly onto King's consistent rejection of utilitarian thinking and his forceful arguments that, regarding moral and political action, "means must be as pure as the end… we must see that the end represents the means in process and the ideal in the making."[63]

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[60] King refers to the Beloved Community as "The end which we seek." King, "Address Delivered to the Montgomery Improvement Association's 'Testimonial of Love and Loyalty,'" 360. Robert Birt also emphasizes this point, although he does not reference teleology as such, but he presses too hard on a distinction between metaphysics and ethics. Robert E. Birt, "King's Radical Vision of Community," in *The Liberatory Thought of Martin Luther King Jr.: Critical Essays on the Philosopher King*, ed. Robert E. Birt (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 158.

[61] Support for this view can be found in the influence of L. Harold DeWolf's view of *agape* on King, whom Ansbro describes as arguing for "a comprehensive conception of *agape* that provided not only for the value of the person and for the role of self-sacrifice but also for the fulfillment of the self in the creation of community." Ansbro, *Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 18. Ansbro further explains that DeWolf was joined by other personalists at Boston "who also proclaimed community as the goal of *agape*." Ansbro, *Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 25.

[62] A characteristic feature of Aristotle's ethics, the language of means being internally related to their end in a teleological approach is found in Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd edition (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 184.

[63] King calls this the "first principle in the movement," and it is the principal reason he rejects communism. Further, he explains that he draws on Gandhi for this crucial point. Martin Luther King Jr., "Love, Law, and Civil Disobedience," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), 45.

On this picture, actions, construed as means, are morally appropriate insofar as they are internally consistent with and work toward the realization of the Beloved Community. I will show, with this understanding in hand, we are able to make adequate sense of King's embrace of and advocacy for nonviolence as a paradigmatically right sort of action. For this reason, at one point King makes reference to "the nonviolent affirmation that ends and means must cohere."[64] Not only does the theoretical structure I am suggesting make coherent sense of the prominent elements of King's moral and political writings, but its inner workings can also be discerned from a careful examination of his most theoretically robust and constructive writing, his 1963 "Letter from Birmingham Jail," to which I now turn.

Nonviolence and Democracy in the "Letter from Birmingham Jail"

King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail" offers the most complete picture of his moral and political theory and a synthetic account that incorporates the elements and illustrates the structure described above. That said, the ideas and themes therein are certainly not unique to the document and can be readily found in King's other works. In fact, the letter is the most cohesive, wide-ranging, and *representative* of his writings.

Moreover, the moral and political theory on display in the letter abides by a deeply democratic logic, and it offers a constructive account of democracy attuned to the matters of recognition, self-knowledge, self-assertion, and political belonging. At the center of the letter is the practice of nonviolence, both as a kind of moral activity and as a mode of social and political transformation ("nonviolent direct action"), which he justifies in compelling ways. Before attending to the text itself, a brief word about its context and agenda is in order.

[64] Martin Luther King, Jr. "A Christmas Sermon on Peace," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), 254.

In the early 1960s, Birmingham, Alabama, became an increasingly important site for the Civil Rights Movement. Having long been a deeply segregated city, Black Americans had been terrorized by the enforcement of discriminatory policies by Bill Connor, Birmingham's notorious Commissioner for Public Safety. In the spring of 1963, prominent Civil Rights organizations began a Birmingham campaign to confront the city's racist policies and leadership and capture the nation's attention. Organized sit-ins in early April did not result in the mass arrests that its organizers had expected (packing local jails being one of the primary strategic outcomes they had hoped to achieve), and Civil Rights organizations active in the city were forced to regroup. Local public opinion began to turn against the Birmingham campaign, fueled in part by media attention drifting from the Civil Rights Movement in general and an unexpectedly modest police response to the sit-ins, which led many (especially white) residents to discern that the timing was wrong for a Birmingham campaign.[65] Hoping to breathe new life into the campaign, King, Ralph Abernathy, and other leaders led a public march on April 12, 1963, in open defiance of a temporary injunction to prevent public demonstrations that many thought unconstitutional and unjust.[66] While in jail for his participation in the march, King read the newspaper coverage of the demonstration, which included a letter from some white clergy members in the area criticizing the imprudence, impatience, poor timing of the march, not least because the Birmingham police officers had responded to recent sit-ins with what they judged to be proper restraint.[67]

King responded to these public criticisms, something he did not often do, in an open letter of his own penned partially from his jail cell.[68] In his letter, King explains his presence in Birmingham—aside from his ties to organizations that were active in the city, he writes,

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[65] Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 708-711.
[66] Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 725-731.
[67] Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 737-738.
[68] Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 737-740.

"basically, I am here because injustice is here"—and offers a forceful defense of his actions.[69] The letter is firstly an *apologia* for nonviolence and nonviolent direct action as morally and practically appropriate responses to anti-Black racism specifically and to injustice more generally. King makes his case by moving back and forth between addressing the specific problem of racial injustice as a particular instance of democratic disruption and the more general matters of justice and political community. Therefore, although the letter is decidedly not a treatise of political theory, it includes the key ingredients and illustrates the basic structure of King's moral and political thought.

In the letter, King first explains that a public nonviolent campaign like the one being undertaken in Birmingham is comprised of four steps: "collection of the facts to determine whether injustices exist; negotiation; self-purification; and direct action."[70] King patiently walks the reader through each of the steps as they had been taken locally. He begins by noting the obvious racial injustices in the city—segregation, police and civilian brutality, unjust legal treatment—before recounting two specific examples of attempted negotiations. First, in response to the bombing of African American homes and churches in Birmingham, he explains that civil rights leaders "sought to negotiate with the city fathers. But the latter consistently refused to engage in good-faith negotiation." Second, he recalls a deal resulting from "negotiations" between civil rights leaders and the Birmingham's economic community to reduce some of the explicit racial discrimination taking place in the city's businesses. However, he writes that, "As the weeks and months went by, we realized that we were the victims of a broken promise."[71]

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[69] Martin Luther King, Jr., *Why We Can't Wait* (New York: Signet Classics, 2000), 86.
[70] King, *Why We Can't Wait*, 87.
[71] King, *Why We Can't Wait*, 87-88.

King then explains that the breakdowns and failures of negotiations had left him and others with “no alternative except to prepare for direct action.” The next step taken, he continues, was the “process of self-purification.”[72] Reportedly, this involved workshops on nonviolence that cultivated non-retaliatory impulses and a willingness to face the legal consequences (however unjust) of the participants’ actions. Only after this step, King claims, did leaders decide to engage in direct action, which in this case included elements of “economic-withdrawal” (boycott).[73]

King is clear to explain the function of nonviolent direct action as an instrument for social change. According to him, it has a strong performative dimension in that it “seeks to dramatize [an] issue that it can no longer be ignored.” On this point, King explains that nonviolent direct action ultimately aims to create enough pressure, or “tension,” that a community “which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront an issue.”[74] On the face of it, such a direct threat to order might seem extreme and overly disruptive, and this is not lost on King. He rebuts the charge of anarchism by explaining that “the *purpose* of our direct-action is to create a situation so crisis-packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation.”[75]

King clearly argues that matters of injustice, and, by extension, shared problems more generally, are to be addressed by negotiations. All of what King means by negotiations is not clear, but we can discern that he imagines some process of good faith discussion and perhaps even compromise, often involving community or constituent representatives, pertaining to matters of their common life. For him, negotiations are paradigmatic democratic activities that abide by the commitments that ought to govern the community.

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[72] King, *Why We Can’t Wait*, 88.
[73] King, *Why We Can’t Wait*, 88-89.
[74] King, *Why We Can’t Wait*, 89.
[75] King, *Why We Can’t Wait*, 90. Emphasis mine.

Appropriate for this, in the letter, King outlines what can be seen as some basic principles of justice. He does so by claiming that the moral and political causes direct action seeks to advance are not only legal or constitutional but have their origin and legitimacy in God.[76] Common for a natural law thinker and consistent with his personalist commitments, King makes reference to a transcendent moral law according to which the laws of the state are to be measured. Drawing on a long tradition that he connects to Augustine and Aquinas, King claims that a law is just insofar as it is congruent with the moral law and unjust insofar as it is not.[77]

Although King does not derive a robust theory of justice from this basis, he identifies two important principles that I have gestured to already, which are in fact three. King initially mentions the principle of the equal dignity of all persons. Properly understood, as my phrasing indicates, this actually involves two distinct claims, one regarding human dignity and another regarding human equality. First, pertaining to the matter of dignity, King gestures to an inviolable worth and status belonging to persons that a polity's laws ought to protect. About this, he claims, "Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust." Second, regarding the claim to human equality, King argues that segregation is unjust because it denies equality to all people; as he claims, "it gives the segregator a false sense of superiority and the segregated a false sense of inferiority."[78]

The third principle of the moral law that King identifies pertains to the matter of inclusion. According to King, segregation is not only problematic because it denies equal dignity to fellow human beings but also because it excludes them from significant aspects of collective life and identity.[79] Segregation defies what King refers to elsewhere in the letter as our

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[76] King, *Why We Can't Wait*, 94.
[77] King, *Why We Can't Wait*, 93.
[78] King, *Why We Can't Wait*, 94. In the language of his personalism, "personality" is synonymous with dignity.
[79] King, *Why We Can't Wait*, 94-95.

"inescapable…mutuality," which for him references at once a lofty democratic ideal as well as a metaphysical reality.[80] King therefore considers segregation "unjust…morally wrong and sinful" because it both denies equal human dignity to everyone and undermines the inclusive and cooperative possibility of "brotherhood."[81]

These three principles—dignity, equality and inclusion—mark off something like a basic sense of justice in the letter and in King's thought more broadly. Yet, given his consistent reference to the ideal communal vision of "brotherhood," King presents this basic sense of justice as needing to be embodied in human relations. To conceptualize this, I mobilize the metaphor of *dialogue* that King uses in the letter. In describing the situation of injustice in the American South, King writes, "Too long has our beloved Southland been bogged down in a tragic effort to live in monologue rather than dialogue."[82]

I propose that, in stressing this concrete and relational end or purpose for justice, King outlines what we can think of as a *dialogical* pattern of right relating.[83] I find the model of dialogue especially apt because it implies something like the principles of justice and the relational *telos* I have identified in King's writings and, further, it resonates with the rhetoric of the letter itself. A very basic understanding of dialogue implies the presence and participation of another in an engagement of mutual exchange, without whom discourse becomes monologue or soliloquy, an artifact of homogeny or hegemony. In some rudimentary way, then, internal to the concept of dialogue are the principles of inclusion, equality, and respect for the other. I therefore use the term dialogical here not firstly in reference to linguistic exchange, although that sort of

[80] King, *Why We Can't Wait*, 87.
[81] King, *Why We Can't Wait*, 90, 99.
[82] King, *Why We Can't Wait*, 90.
[83] Terrence Johnson also finds dialogicality at work in King's speeches and writings, especially in his use of African American biblical hermeneutics and their extension to his political thought, although Johnson sees dialogue primarily as a mode of interpretation. Johnson, *We Testify with Our Lives*, 93.

interaction is often an important aspect of it, but rather to the more idealized sense of a relation that embodies or abides by the principles mentioned above.[84]

Moving on to King's endorsement of nonviolence, the letter invites, though it does not explicitly answer, the question of what constitutes a nonviolent act. However, considering this specific matter more closely is important for understanding the structure of his moral and political thought. Despite what might seem like an obvious assumption, King does not draw the line at coercion. The methods he and others often used, and the crises they tried to evoke (i.e., economic boycotts) were by any definition coercive. As well, King openly condones and participates in actions that "force" people and communities to act in certain ways.[85]

On the other hand, it might be assumed that physical abuse accounts for the difference between a violent and nonviolent act, but the letter actually complicates this view. Addressing something brought up in the letter to which he is responding, King considers those police officers in Birmingham who had refrained from inflicting physical harm as they patrolled recent protests. Rather than praising their restraint, King refuses to consider their non-physically abusive actions as genuinely nonviolent because they ultimately served to "preserve the evil system of segregation."[86]

Here, King indicates the difference between violence and nonviolence is not reducible to some character or quality belonging solely to an act itself (i.e., physical abuse). Rather, as a

[84] There are obvious similarities between this view and the communicative/discursive ethics offered by Jürgen Habermas, Seyla Benhabib, and others who reference a model of linguistic exchange. However, among the differences between those thinkers and what I identify in King's thought, there is one that is especially worth mentioning. King is interested in such an arrangement for more than purely procedural reasons. That is, King sees such relating as *intrinsically* and not merely instrumentally good, and dialogical community as the *telos* of human community.
[85] King, *Why We Can't Wait*, 89. Elsewhere he writes, "I refuse to be driven to a Machiavellian cynicism with respect to power. Power at its best is the right use of strength… Nonviolence is power, but it is the right and good use of power." King, *Where Do We Go from Here*, 61.
[86] King, *Why We Can't Wait*, 110. King refers to these actions as nonviolent only by putting the word in ironic quotation marks.

teleological thinker, King construes acts as *means*, and so the difference under question has something to do with the relationship between means and ends.[87] Later in the letter, King explicates the proper relation between the two: “nonviolence demands that the means we use must be as pure as the ends we seek.” Despite what the clergy to whom King responds claimed, then, it was not violence that the Birmingham police had avoided but justice and “brotherhood,” which amounted to a form of violence itself. King writes, “I have tried to make clear that it is wrong to use immoral means to attain moral ends. But now I must affirm that it is just as wrong, or perhaps even more so, to use moral means to preserve immoral ends.”[88] We might therefore say that, for King, violence is not simply a matter of the harmfulness of an act; rather, the letter indicates that violence also occurs at the gross misalignment of means and end, not only when an appropriate end is served by unjust means but also when principally just actions effectively (intentionally or not) serve an unjust end.[89]

To complete the teleological picture, King argues in the letter that nonviolent action is a constitutive means to the end of an ideal community of “brotherhood,” what he elsewhere calls the Beloved Community. For King, nonviolence therefore embodies the principles of justice referred to above that characterize the communal end it seeks to realize. Thus, insofar as the end it seeks and is consistent with is dialogical, we can think of nonviolence, too, as dialogical.[90]

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[87] King, *Why We Can’t Wait*, 110. My interpretation of King’s ethical thought and the place of his theory of nonviolence therein differs from, for example, Ervin Smith, who claims that “King based his conclusion of the absolute validity of nonviolence on *a priori* notions or intrinsic deductions from *agape*.” Smith, *The Ethics of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 116.

[88] King, *Why We Can’t Wait*, 110.

[89] This seems related to King’s dispute with the position of the “the white moderate,” who he casts as ostensibly sharing with him and other civil rights advocates an end but not a proper understanding of the means. As well, it can be read as connected to his argument that “Sometimes a law is just on its face and unjust in its application” and to his argument about civil disobedience more generally. See King, *Why We Can’t Wait*, 95-99.

[90] Although they do not reference this internal reasoning, Smith and Zepp rightly claim that “King conceived of nonviolence as the only moral means to achieve the Beloved Community.” Smith and Zepp, *Search for the Beloved Community*, 145. In brief, I think much more needs to be said for why that is the case for him.

This way of thinking about nonviolence and the end it pursues resonates with King's choice of conversational metaphor to describe their nonviolent campaign: "we would present our bodies as a means of laying out our case before the conscience of the local and national community."[91]

Referring to the earlier quotation of King's about the American South living in "monologue rather than dialogue," and in reference to the dialogical model I am offering, we can understand King's view of violence as structurally *monological* because it denies equality and/or inclusion to another in either an act itself or the end it serves. Accordingly, even non-physically abusive acts, then, such as those by the Birmingham police officers noted above, can be understood as violent. By contrast, no matter how radical, disruptive, or even potentially coercive an act may be, it remains nonviolent insofar as it is dialogical—insofar as it commits to and seeks the inclusion of others as equals in the construction of a shared, collaborative common life.[92] Such is the deep democratic logic at work in King's moral and political thought.

Alienation and Political Belonging in King's Thought

It is left now to show how the moral and political framework I have identified in King's thought relates to the matters of alienation and political belonging. Neither of these terms appears in the letter, and, aside from his few references to belonging noted previously, they are not often invoked in his writings more generally. However, these themes underlie his thinking in the letter and elsewhere.

First, to be sure, King's reference in the letter to the experience of nobodiness and the "ominous clouds of inferiority" that often follow from confrontations with anti-Black racism

[91] King, *Why We Can't Wait*, 88.
[92] With this understanding I intend to complement and not necessarily replace other explanations of King's understanding of nonviolence. I am noting a structural feature of King's understanding of nonviolence that emerges in the letter, but this does not provide a complete picture on its own.

pertain to what I term alienation.[93] As I explained above with respect to his concept of somebodyness, a sense of nobodiness in King's writings refers to the experience of internal division between who a person inwardly understands themselves to be (most basically, a person with dignity, capable of self-determination, in equal standing with others) and how the person is regarded by others (a second-class, economic cog who should not have access to the ballot). Nobodiness is the sort of problem it is, King maintains, precisely because the value and standing of persons are *not entirely* socially constructed. Anchoring the basic worth, status, and capacity of persons in God, the sense of nobodiness imposed by racism is so devastating because it runs counter to what persons somehow know to be the case—one feels acutely not simply the misfortune of their second-class status but also the crushing *wrongness* of their devaluation. For King, the violence of racism therefore includes the internal division caused by mis-recognition and the corrosion of the inner sense of one's own inherent dignity.[94] Needless to say, although the language of nobodiness only appears once in the letter, its invocation signals that this sense of inner division, or alienation, is quite present there, as it is throughout his writings.[95]

Second, King's argument in the letter quite clearly suggests that a certain inclusion of and fellow regard for Black persons is necessary to overcome alienation. Moreover, his argument implies that it is a sense of one's own rightful place in community, confirmed and echoed back by one's fellow members and participation in the institutions that govern one's life, that marks the overcoming of alienation. Such a sense is captured well by the language of belonging.

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[93] King, *Why We Can't Wait*, 92.
[94] Gooding-Williams explains that King maintains "each person's dignity finds expression through a pre-reflectively, inwardly felt 'sense of dignity,' a sort of *incipient* self-respect." Gooding-Williams, "The Du Bois-Washington Debate and the Idea of Dignity," 26.
[95] On one occasion, King also mentions the matter of "self-respect and a sense of 'somebodiness'" in the "Letter." King, *Why We Can't Wait*, 100.

Third, insofar as a sense of belonging marks an overcoming of alienation in King's thought, why is it that belonging to one's *political community* is so important? Why is it not enough to achieve a sense of belonging simply to one's social and/or economic contexts? These are indeed important contexts of belonging for King, but he remains most focused elsewhere.

Notably, in the letter, King's refers to "nobodiness" with respect to the effects of anti-Black racism in the context of one's political community. While King refers to instances and effects of racism in interpersonal, economic, and broader social contexts, his focus is primarily on the political.[96] This is perhaps unsurprising, given that King's advocacy is focused on the advancement of civil rights, but he seems to imply that the context of the political community is an especially important because of its enormous influence overall other domains of life. This is why, for example, King moves quickly in the letter from talking about discrimination in amusement parks, lunch counters, and interpersonal interactions to addressing the problem of just and unjust laws.[97] King therefore shares with Rousseau, Hegel, and Du Bois the general view that the political community is a key context for realizing a sense of belonging because of its unique scope and power over other domains of life.

However, this priority of the political for its influence of and governance over other domains of life is only part of the reason for King's focus on the political community. Adding to this is the fact that what I have called King's dialogical conception of community is a democratically constructed one that pervades all domains of life, which necessarily includes the political. More specifically, King insists on the importance of participating in self-governance, of

[96] King begins the section of the letter that mentions nobodiness by talking about "constitutional and God-given rights." King, *Why We Can't Wait*, 91.
[97] King, *Why We Can't Wait*, 92-93.

having a say in the norms and policies that organize one's life.[98] Such participation not only proves the equal standing of persons, but it also amounts to the recognition and expression of the basic capacity for freedom (self-determination) in all persons.

When discussing the effects of discriminatory voting laws in the letter, King explains that, without referencing its content, "A law is unjust if it is inflicted on a minority that, as a result of being denied the right to vote, had not part in enacting or devising the law."[99] In his final book-length writing, he presses on the importance of democratically shared power: "Negroes can never be content without participation in power. America must be a nation in which its multiracial people are partners in power. This is the essence of democracy toward which all Negro struggles have been directed since the distant past when he was transplanted here in chains."[100]

For King, democracy must entail the equal sharing of power required for genuine self-government. This focus on *shared* power and having a "part" in determining laws suggest that King's interest is not simply in a principle like autonomy as such but rather in equitable inclusion in the body politic as that entity which is distinctly (or perhaps even uniquely) able to genuinely practice self-government. Such a political arrangement, it follows, makes possible a way of living that might more fully realize the truth of what King calls our metaphysical relatedness and inescapable mutuality.

Lastly, King maintains that nonviolence is a paradigmatically right form of action. To be sure, King's use of nonviolence is not firstly for pragmatic reasons but for moral ones. As he

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[98] Although her analysis is differently oriented than mine, Danielle Allen helpfully discusses this point and its relation to recognition. Danielle Allen, "Integration, Freedom, and the Affirmation of Life," in *To Shape a New World: Essays on the Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. Tommie Shelby and Brandon M. Terry (Cambridge: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 2018), 154-155.
[99] King, *Why We Can't Wait*, 95.
[100] King, *Where Do We Go from Here*, 55.

writes quite often, “nonviolence in the truest sense is not a strategy that one uses simply because it is expedient at the moment; nonviolence is ultimately a way of life that men live by because of the sheer morality of its claim.”[101] In the context of the Beloved Community *telos* to which it aims, what makes nonviolence morally right for King, I contend, is that it involves dignified self-assertion.[102]

In his 1962 address “The Ethical Demands for Integration,” King directly connects the practice of nonviolence to “a sense of self-respect and human dignity.”[103] He argues that nonviolence is an *active* response to injustice and degradation, the embodiment of which gives its proponents “a new sense of ‘somebodyness.’” He writes, “The impact of the nonviolent discipline has done a great deal toward creating in the mind of the Negro a new image of himself. It has literally exalted the person of the Negro in the South in the face of daily confrontations that scream at him that he is inferior or less than because of the accident of his birth.” Furthermore, according to King, a key aspect of the self-assertion, and crucial for what separates it from violence, is that nonviolence involves maintaining “respect [for] the adversary” such that it “exalts the personality of the *segregator* as well as the *segregated*.”[104] In other words, King insists that regarding oneself as dignified means regarding oneself as an *equal* with others in the construction of a shared common life—as deserving “inclusion in the universal.”[105]

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[101] King, “An Experiment in Love,” 17.

[102] A similar point about the dignifying effect of King’s account of nonviolence is made by Karuna Mantena but, without the teleological structure I am proposing, it is less cohesive regarding the other values to which King is committed. See Karuna Mantena, “Showdown for Nonviolence: The Theory and Practice of Nonviolent Politics,” in *To Shape a New World: Essays on the Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. Tommie Shelby and Brandon M. Terry (Cambridge: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 2018), 86-87.

[103] King, “The Ethical Demands of Integration,” 124.

[104] King, “The Ethical Demands of Integration,” 125. Emphasis original. King continues, arguing that nonviolence attends to “the growing awareness on the part of the respective opponents that mutually they confront the eternality of the basic worth of every member of the human family.”

[105] Ronald R. Sundstrom, “The Prophetic Tension between Race Consciousness and the Ideal of Color-Blindness,” in *To Shape a New World: Essays on the Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. Tommie Shelby and Brandon M. Terry (Cambridge: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 2018), 143.

In a 1965 interview, King extends this line of thinking even further. Carrying forth the reasoning laid out above, he explains that nonviolence is able "to transform and transmute" persons who commit to it. However, here he also explicitly connects it to the experience of locating oneself within a larger context of meaning. King says that committing to nonviolence entails "investing [persons] with a cause that is larger than themselves. They become…*somebody*."[106] On its fullest description, for King, taking oneself as a dignified person involves taking oneself as belonging to a larger context with other persons, to the metaphysical truths of their universal dignity *and* interrelatedness, and to the political community as one important context for their realization in concrete ways.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that King shares an analogous conception of the self and its alienation with Rousseau, Hegel, and Du Bois. All four of these figures, I contend, maintain that the human self is dependent upon recognition of certain basic facts about its existence, namely its basic status and capacity for freedom. What is more, I have argued that King shares with these figures the claim that alienation is finally overcome by achieving a sense of belonging to one's political community. Like Du Bois, I have shown that King describes the alienation experienced by Black Americans as imposed by white supremacy and the forces of anti-Black racism, and that self-assertion is necessary for maintaining a sense of dignity in the face of its denial.

I have also argued that King offers the most constructively promising approach to political life for incorporating the advances and addressing the concerns of Rousseau, Hegel, and

[106] Martin Luther King, Jr., "*Playboy* Interview: Martin Luther King, Jr.," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), 349. Emphasis original.

Du Bois. Piecing together his arguments for and explanations of love, justice, nonviolence, and the Beloved Community, I have argued that King's moral and political thought is teleologically structured. Accordingly, in meta-ethical terms, the good being prior to the right is a structural feature of his thought.

Moreover, I have claimed that the picture of political life that emerges from his writing is one that attends to the problem of alienation and works for the construction of a political community to which all persons can belong as equals. After showing these elements at work in King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail," I have argued that King's account of nonviolence as a paradigmatically right form of moral and political action addresses the need for self-assertion raised by Du Bois within a larger, constructive account of political community that I termed dialogical.

I have further argued that King differs from the other three in important ways owing to his religious commitments. King's theological convictions and embrace of a metaphysical framework undergird and saturate his moral and political thought. I hope to have shown that these commitments allow King to knit together the vision of political community on offer, and that they lead to a civil protest theology that serves to bind persons to an ideal conception of the political community to which all persons can belong.

In closing, there are three features of King's thought to be considered if he is to be taken as providing a live option for theorizing political life. First, King's political thought rests on a thick metaphysical framework and it utilizes theological conceptions of love and the Beloved Community. King does not hide these facts, but it may be that such elements threaten the appropriateness of his political thought for a pluralistic context.

Interestingly, King seems to suggest that these religious connections might not threaten the broad appeal of his political vision. As I mentioned above, he regularly references thinkers and traditions outside of his own Christian one that affirm something like the relational metaphysic outlined above (i.e., Martin Buber and Mohandas Gandhi). When talking about his conception of love, which has deep Christian roots, he talks about it as possibly having broad appeal across religions: "When I speak of love… I am speaking of that force which all of the great religions have seen as the supreme unifying principle of life. Love is somehow the key that unlocks the door which leads to ultimate reality."[107]

Relatedly, King often speaks in intentionally pluralist and even vague, non-tradition-specific ways about what he would more natively call God. He writes at one point about the importance of "believ[ing] in the existence of some creative force that works for togetherness, a creative force in this universe that works to bring the disconnected aspects of reality into a harmonious whole."[108] Elsewhere, King writes about the significance for his account of nonviolence that, "Whether we call it an unconscious process, an impersonal Brahman, or a Personal Being of matchless power and infinite love, there is a creative force in this universe that works to bring the disconnected aspects of reality into a harmonious whole."[109]

Despite King's intentional ecumenism, however, there are undoubtedly many who would find, at minimum, his metaphysical views untenable. Although I maintain that extracting King's account of nonviolence and Beloved Community from his metaphysical views cannot be done without substantially altering them, King would likely respond that every account of ethics and

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[107] Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Time to Break Silence," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), 242. For the sake of argument, I will set aside the debatable veracity of that particular claim.
[108] Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Current Crisis in Race Relations," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), 88.
[109] King, "An Experiment in Love," 20.

politics requires some metaphysical commitments, however implicit. That is, the dispute for him, I wager, would not be *whether* a metaphysical framework is employed but rather *which one(s)*, introducing a larger conversation with relevance to King's political vision but that is certainly not limited to it. King plainly sees the public square as the appropriate domain to argue about both policy and metaphysics, especially given how much he thinks the former depends upon the latter. All that to say, this first feature may hamper the viability of King's political vision for a pluralistic context, but I am not convinced that it sinks it because—for me, at least—questions about how much exactly others need to share his particular convictions, how translatable across traditions they may be, and how much the public square can (or even should) in fact be empty of such things remain unresolved.

Second, it is worth noting the prominent place of dispute in King's account of democracy. For King, democracy is characterized not necessarily by the inevitability of sharp conflict but certainly by a readiness to engage in it. This aligns with his Hegel-inspired view of progress through struggle. As the struggle for civil rights shows, and as King's advocacy for nonviolent direct action campaigns clearly illustrates, King prepared for and theorized about a democratic public square that is often filled with contestation. His moral and political thought entail a willingness to engage in even sharp contestation—extending far beyond verbal debate, when necessary, and including more drastic measures like economic boycotts—while preserving the inclusion of a person's political adversaries as dignified members who equally belong to, and should even remain involved in the construction of, their common life.

Lastly, although King is a holist, which is plainly evident in his conception of the Beloved Community, he remains steadfastly concerned with the dignity of persons. He is a hesitant holist, ever aware of the potential oppressiveness of the "whole," especially when

governed by an unjust majority (or even, perhaps, an empowered minority). Because of this, King is concerned foremost with what I have previously called *just* belonging, and therefore with principles that would ensure all persons might be able to experience a sense of belonging. Such a position, however much it embraces pluralism and an agonistic ethos, necessarily entails that persons whose sense of themselves are deeply wedded to the dehumanization or second-class status of others—to a vision of racial superiority, for example—will not and *ought not* be able to realize a sense of belonging to a just political community. That is, at least not without significant changes to their self-understanding that the political community has interest in encouraging.

In the language he uses, King is therefore committed to a political community in which all persons can experience a sense of somebodyness—can experience their dignity, equality, and relationality honored and protected. Such a sense involves the recognition and affirmation of every person's equal status, basic capacity for freedom, and inclusion in the common life, but it does so according to an account of persons that is necessarily hostile to exclusionary and unequal conceptions of the political community. In other words, King's account of the political community secures the necessary conditions for a sense of belonging by aspiring for every person to realize a sense of somebodyness; but, precisely because of that, it does not and cannot guarantee a sense of belonging for everyone.

Having now seen how King intervenes in and contributes to a loose family of thinkers prominently including Rousseau, Hegel, and Du Bois, and how King's conceptions of somebodyness, nonviolence, and Beloved Community address (or begin to address) the major concerns I leveled against Rousseau and Hegel regarding the need for clarifying the differences between just and unjust political belonging. It is now left to think further about the details of a King-inspired political theory that attends to matters of alienation and belonging. On its fullest

picture, such a view would incorporate key insights from each thinker while sharpening the constructive promise of King's thought. I now turn to developing an outline of such a theory.

Conclusion: Toward a Theory of Dialogical Democracy

This project has been animated by two major questions: what is political belonging and why is it good for people? I have pursued answers by engaging the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, G. W. F. Hegel, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Martin Luther King Jr., and I have shown that these four thinkers share a common approach to these questions, along with a position regarding why belonging is significant. I have examined at length their powerful arguments that a sense of political belonging is good for persons, at least in part, because it involves or is necessary for overcoming alienation. This claim has been the first major argument in this dissertation.

Alienation is a rich and complicated concept, and it plays a major role in each of the figure's works that I have examined. Although the genres, contexts, perspectives, and even aims of their writings vary significantly, I have shown that these figures share an analogous understanding of alienation and an analogous account of the human self. Further, I have shown that they theorize the political community not as one domain among others but rather as an encompassing context of a larger life within which different domains or aspects of life occur. They all posit that citizens should be understood as relating to their political community as parts to a whole, and that this relation that can be best facilitated by the development of a political culture and a civil religion.

In this conclusion chapter, after providing an overview of the ground covered in the previous four, I will take a more concertedly constructive turn by offering the outline of a political theory that takes alienation and political belonging as foremost matters of concern, which I will call *dialogical democracy*. My description and defense of this constructive theory amounts to the second major argument in this dissertation. With the sense of self that has emerged from the previous chapters and the claim that political belonging involves the

overcoming of alienation in hand, I will proceed to develop several major features of this constructive vision. To do so, I will attend to some larger theoretical matters before refining aspects of theory through an engagement with some contemporary thinkers and trends in democratic theory and addressing the matters of ontology and civil religion. Finally, I will provide a summary of dialogical democracy and offer an example of its broad theoretical promise.

The Contributions of Rousseau, Hegel, Du Bois, and King

Before attending to the details of the constructive approach, it is necessary to take stock of key insights from the previous chapters and recognize what each of the four figures has contributed to the theorization of alienation and political belonging. Rousseau is the first modern figure to examine the experience of alienation, which he claims results from the inflammation and exaggeration of acquisitive and esteem-seeking human drives. Rousseau frames the problem of alienation as the experience of internal division that emerges when a person takes on an inauthentic identity for the sake of garnering the regard and approval of others. He claims that, because of increasing dependence on and proximity to others, modern society serves to encourage persons to adopt false personas for the sake of social climbing. On the story he tells, in relentlessly pining after esteem, persons are encouraged to and rewarded for adopting disingenuous or inauthentic identities. This unfortunate trajectory, along with the worsening material and economic inequalities that emerge in its wake, prevent a person from living as their true and "natural" self, impede a person from living according to their own genuine aims and commitments, and ultimately threaten the stability of the social order.

The above description refers to alienation as Rousseau describes it in interpersonal and social spaces. However, he also suggests that alienation occurs in the broader and more encompassing context of political life when the norms, institutions, and broader culture of a polity result in a person experiencing internal division for being held to standards or a way of life that sharply contrast with their own personal aims and commitments. In response, Rousseau introduces an organic conception of the political community as a "body politic," to which members relate as parts to a whole, that establishes conditions of equality and citizen formation and thereby encourages identification with the political community and its organization. In other words, by establishing equality among its members, which helps to cool the flames of competition and desire for esteem, and by searching for an alignment between individual aims and the collective good (what he calls the "general will"), Rousseau theorizes overcoming alienation by securing the conditions for persons to realize a sense of belonging as equals to their political community. Such belonging, he contends, secures the equality *and* freedom of persons. Furthermore, Rousseau is profoundly influenced by Christian concepts and patterns of thinking, which he borrows from to make adequate sense of membership in collective life, and he introduces the notion of "civil religion" to theorize the bonds between persons to their political community as such.

Hegel picks up several of these threads and introduces a much more complex and philosophically rigorous perspective on alienation by grounding it in a rich account of human selfhood. Hegel deepens Rousseau's analysis by offering an account of the origins of the desire for esteem, locating it in the need for stable self-knowledge. Hegel maintains that humans are *selves*, that selfhood is a reflexive and self-interpretive phenomenon, and that a self's knowledge of itself and its capacity for freedom depend on confirmation by others. According to Hegel,

without adequate self-knowledge about their own status and freedom, selves are left to live in a state of indeterminacy regarding their own dignity (or standing) and basic capacity for self-determination. The experience of this indeterminacy is what I identify in Hegel's writings as alienation. In virtue of selves being radically self-interpreting creatures, the lack of satisfactory self-knowledge that characterizes alienation impedes one's ability to actually *be* a dignified and self-determining being. Famously, Hegel terms the confirmation received from others that secures satisfactory self-knowledge as "recognition," and he sets mutual recognition as the ideal form of relating, which goes some distance in overcoming alienation.

Like Rousseau, Hegel sees something similar happening at the level of the political community. Also like Rousseau, he attends to this problem by offering an organic theory of politics. Hegel maintains that membership in a properly organized organic political community is the only way to secure stable relations of mutual recognition between persons. What is more, Hegel also contends that the political community is of the scale, scope, and power sufficient to be that "body" of human participation uniquely capable of being genuinely self-determining. Unlike in their status as individuals, Hegel argues that persons are therefore able to overcome alienation and realize the fullest sense of their natural capacity for self-determination—which, on his account, means being maximally *un*alienated—by being members of and identifying with their political community. For Hegel, identification with and as a part of such a community entails realizing what I call a sense of belonging to it, which in his writings includes having one's basic status and capacity affirmed, but for him it is more fully about being able to see oneself as a legitimate expression or instantiation of one's political community. In such an ideal relation, members relate to the community as a whole in dynamic reciprocation: members manifest, contribute to, and enhance the life of the community, and the life of the community grounds and

makes possible its members' continued existence and satisfactory self-knowledge. To help facilitate this sort of relation, Hegel, too, theorizes the importance of a political culture and offers something like the picture of civil religion that we see in Rousseau.

Du Bois offers an account of human selfhood that is strongly analogous to that offered by Hegel, according to which satisfactory self-knowledge is necessary to be a dignified and free person. However, Du Bois writes about these matters from his own experience and perspective as a Black man in an anti-Black racist context. The alienation he describes, then, is different than that described by Rousseau and Hegel because it is willfully and harmfully *imposed* on him. Despite this difference, Du Bois's accounts of the self, alienation, and what is necessary to overcome it are analogous to what those offered by Rousseau and Hegel.

Du Bois offers a distinct account of the alienation experienced by Black Americans, what he calls "double-consciousness," which emerges when persons are forced to live amidst demeaning portrayals of themselves by their fellow citizens, prominent leaders, and institutions. In such circumstances, persons are denied mutual or equal recognition and the confirmation of self-knowledge that it provides. As a result, Du Bois argues, Black Americans are forced to live amid the indeterminacy that follows from *not* having confirmed and reflected back the fact of one's equal standing among others and acknowledgement of the basic capacity for self-determination that one knows are true about oneself. In other words, among the effects of anti-Black racism is that it can, by denying mutual recognition, impose on Black Americans "a single whirlpool of social entanglement and inner psychological paradox."[1] Du Bois explains that this often results in a condition of "twoness," of an interruption in the coherence of one's sense of self. As he tells it, alienation is a result of anti-Black racist social and economic systems, but it is

[1] Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, 555.

most fully a political problem, considering the enormous influence and scope of political norms, institutions, and culture.

Du Bois explains that double-consciousness (imposed alienation) undermines a person's self-determination and is corrosive of human wellbeing. This, Du Bois explains, is because humans are self-interpreting *and* dependent upon their fellow citizens and shared institutions. On his account, alienation is further perpetuated when mis-recognition is a feature of one's political community, at which point certain groups of people have been defined out of the story that a political community tells about itself. Despite how this account and my portrayal of it might initially seem, Du Bois refuses any strong distinction between ideal (that is, matters of selfhood and self-knowledge) and material (embodied, physical, and economic matters) conditions, insisting that they cannot be kept apart or theorized independently.

Drawing on the example of Frederick Douglass, Du Bois contends that dignified self-assertion, an insistence on one's own equal standing and capacity for self-determination, is crucial for those experiencing double-consciousness in order to maintain a sense of their own humanity in a dehumanizing context. Du Bois imagines the ultimate ideal of belonging as a Black man to the political community of the United States, but, in the radically non-ideal context of white supremacy, he assumes a posture of protest. Part of his famous rebuttal of Booker T. Washington includes this reflection on *resisting* alienation in a virulently anti-Black United States. This line of reasoning sheds light on the nature of double-consciousness and what is necessary to overcome it, as well as alienation more generally. Du Bois then explains how Black Americans have often been shaped and bolstered by religious beliefs, practices, and communities (which, he is clear to point out, have a mixed record on this score) to resist alienation, an important part of which is binding persons to a just and ideal form of their political community.

Given the obvious connections to what Rousseau calls civil religion, I refer to this feature of Du Bois's argument as civil *protest* religion.

Also a Black man in an anti-Black racist context, King extends these insights of Du Bois's in his own analysis of the experience of imposed alienation (which he calls a sense of "nobodyness"), the need for mutual recognition, and the role of dignified self-assertion. King clearly relies on an analogous conception of the self to the one Hegel defends and Du Bois implies, and he shares a similar account of the ideal political community with Rousseau and Hegel, and, like them, King frames the relation between individual citizens and the political community in part/whole terms.

King articulates a clearer and fuller picture of the ideal political community than does Du Bois, and he presents a well-developed account of dignified self-assertion as evident in his theory of nonviolence. On my reading, King's theory of nonviolence abides by a democratic logic in that it insists on one's own dignity and freedom while preserving the place and participation of one's adversaries in the ongoing construction of their common life. Behind King's account of the self and political life is a relational ontology—anchored in his Christian metaphysical convictions—that secures the values of individuals, their relatedness, and their collective wellbeing. The ideal picture of the political community that he presents, which he calls the "Beloved Community," includes the recognition of each person's dignity and capacity for self-determination, which King calls a sense of "somebodyness."

Like each of the previous three figures, for King, religion plays a role in facilitating the relations between persons and their political community. However, similar to Du Bois, King does so by offering a civil protest religion that binds persons to an ideal form of their political community. Yet, because King does so most often in reference to the specific language and

beliefs of a particular religious tradition, I referred to his approach as a form of civil protest *theology*.

Developing Dialogical Democracy

Up to this point, this dissertation has proceeded quite inductively, aiming to glean from some complex accounts of political experience and the political theories that emerge from or alongside them. In this final chapter, I shift to a more overtly constructive approach. The previous chapters have contributed rich accounts of the human self, alienation, and political belonging, and I now turn to begin constructing from their insights a theorization of political life appropriate to them. I intend to follow King's lead, as it were, by building on the constructive development of his thought that I presented at the end of the previous chapter, in particular his theorizations of somebodyness, citizen relations, and the political community itself. In light of King's influence and what I have culled from his writings, I propose here to begin developing what I call *dialogical democracy*.

Dialogical democracy gets its name from King's portrayal of the situation of racial and economic injustice in Birmingham, Alabama, in the early 1960s. In a richly metaphorical description of these circumstances, King offers a diagnosis: "Too long has our beloved Southland been bogged down in a tragic effort to live in monologue rather than dialogue."[2] So following, I have argued that King provides a picture of the political community ordered to what we can think of as a dialogical pattern of right relating because of its commitments to dignity, equality, and inclusivity, which ground his conception of justice. Furthermore, the language maps on to King's theorization of the political community as existing for the sake of building

[2] King, *Why We Can't Wait*, 90.

and maintaining the presence and participation of all persons in relations of mutuality as they engage in the ongoing work of constructing their common life. This led me to argue that, especially in view of his conception of the Beloved Community and his relational ontology, King's ideal conception of the political community 1.) provides a sense of somebodyness for all persons; 2.) persons understand their relations to in part/whole terms; and 3.) strives after the ultimate aim of all of its members realizing a sense of belonging. For reasons I have elaborated on previously, such a political community secures the conditions for both overcoming alienation and realizing the most expansive form of self-determination. I will attend to each of these points below.

Dialogical democracy adopts from King the three core principles of justice and the expressed purpose of the political community. In the remainder of this chapter, I will begin outlining the theory by attending to some formal details pertaining to its structure. I will then bring the theory into conversion with recent democratic theorists Ella Myers, Danielle Allen, and Chantal Mouffe, which will help to locate the theory in relation to contemporary trends and thinkers and to develop some of its core features. In different ways, all three of these thinkers are attentive to matters of disagreement, disappointment, and dispute in democratic life. Dialogical democracy is an ideal theory, but it is also extremely concerned with what sort of relations and actions in *non-ideal* conditions might be constructive for dialogical democratic ends. This imperative is driven by the historical examples of Du Bois and King and by the theoretical concern—expressed most powerfully by King—for an alignment between ends and means. In my engagement with these three contemporary thinkers, I will argue the importance of theorizing an individual's relation to their political community in part/whole terms. Lastly, I will consider the importance of a relational ontology and civil religion for the theory.

Some Theoretical Developments: Structure, Citizenship, and the Ethical Turn

Dialogical democracy is committed to establishing a certain sort of communal life and takes the creation of a particular kind of political community as its fundamental concern. Like King's theorization of the Beloved Community, then, dialogical democracy is structurally teleological, taking as its aim and purpose the construction and maintenance of a political community in which all persons might overcome alienation and realize a sense of belonging. There are two related points here worth pursuing in detail.

The first point has to do with unpacking the structural features of the theory. In meta-ethical terms, dialogical democracy maintains that the good of a certain sort of political community is prior to the right, that is, structurally prior to any standalone principles of justice. Crucially, however, that does not mean dialogical democracy is indifferent to principles of justice. As a teleological theory, dialogical democracy maintains that the good and the right are neither independent, as a deontological theory would have them, nor instrumental, as a consequentialist or utilitarian theory imagines. Recall that, as King articulated about the Beloved Community, the end under consideration is committed to certain defining principles of justice (dignity, equality, and inclusivity). For dialogical democracy, the right is *internal* to the good, necessary for and constitutive of it.

Although dialogical democracy is focused on the political community as such, the theory is by definition concerned with its members. More needs to be said about the justification for this concern, which I will address in some detail below. However, I want to posit at the start that dialogical democracy reposes against an ontology of interrelatedness that grounds its concern for persons, their status as equals, and their relational natures.

As mentioned in the conclusion of the previous chapter, it is not possible even in ideal communal conditions to *guarantee* that a sense of belonging will be realized by all of a political community's members. On my rendering, belonging is bound up with a person's self-interpretation, and insofar as a person's identity or self-understanding is bound up with some elements that conflict with a dialogical community of belonging, the person's sense of belonging will be frustrated. Furthermore, the conditions for belonging require a robust and refined political culture that is difficult to manifest and preserve. Therefore, although dialogical democracy sets a community of belonging as its ultimate aim, its more proximate and realistic goal is cultivating a community that secures a sense of what King calls somebodyness for all of its members; that is, a community that secures for its members the recognition, affirmation, and protection of their status as dignified and free persons.

The second point to address follows from the claim that a certain priority is given to the political community itself, not at the expense of individuals, as the principles of justice would prevent, but as that communal end necessary for persons to overcome alienation. Accordingly, the well-organized political community ideally stands as the good that its members hold in common, which is properly elevated with respect to individual good(s) because the latter require, and take place "within," the former. Aside from the structural, theoretical details, this means that the construction and maintenance of a dialogical political community, along with the virtues and actions of persons necessary to support and sustain it, is a foremost matter of public concern. Such a political community is, according to dialogical democracy, the defining *res* of the *publica*, the cultivation and protection of which is the orienting task of the individual members who comprise it.

These points lead to the matter of citizenship, which invites further refining the theory by bringing it into conversation with some contemporary democratic thinkers. On my rendering, dialogical democracy can be located within what recently has been called the “ethical turn” in democratic theory. The so-called ethical turn refers to recent democratic theories that emphasize the importance of ethical concepts, practices, and commitments for the theory and practice of democracy, in contrast to overly rationalist and/or institutionalist approaches. In her book *Worldly Ethics: Democratic Politics and Care for the World*, Ella Myers summarizes that proponents of the ethical turn present ethics “as an animating supplement to politics, supplying democracy with something it cannot give itself but urgently requires.”[3] Myers further explains that, in the ethical turn, “the concept of democratic ethos emerges as a way of thinking about what can inspire or motivate ordinary citizens’ participation in democratic politics… The challenge is, furthermore, to develop an orientation that can encourage impassioned participation in the difficult, frustrating labor of democratic politics.”[4]

Given that among the necessary conditions for experiencing a sense of belonging is mutual recognition by (in part) the fellow members of one’s political community, dialogical democracy is concerned with cultivating relations of equal regard between persons. Dialogical democracy is also concerned with cultivating an ethos, or culture (replete with normative content; a *Sittlichkeit* of sorts), of political belonging. The theory remains importantly open to the variety of ways that a community of political belonging might emerge, and it requires no specific

[3] Ella Myers, *Worldly Ethics: Democratic Politics and Care for the World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 1.

[4] Myers, *Worldly Ethics*, 3. On her use of the term in question, Myers explains that “Ethics…remains a valuable idiom for thinking and talking about the normative and affective orientations and sensibilities that are inevitably part of a political life… [E]thics continues to provide a useful, albeit imperfect, conceptual vocabulary for investigating those elements of democratic life that are led tout of strictly institutional and rationalist accounts.” Myers, *Worldly Ethics*, 10.

arrangement or tradition for this, yet it maintains as central to its purposes the project of developing certain kinds of citizens.

There is another reason, still, for associating dialogical democracy with the ethical turn. Ingredient in the ethical turn is attention to individual members of a democratic community, their actions, and their dispositions. Theories aligned with the ethical turn therefore tend to be grassroots-oriented, taking the individual as the privileged site of democratic construction, rather than approaching democracy first and foremost as a top-down matter of establishing democratic institutions. Following the lead of Du Bois and King, despite its reliance on an ethos and a community, dialogical democracy is similarly disciplined by a principled concern for individual persons and remains ever mindful of the potentially oppressive power of the "whole." Specifically, what I have called dignified self-assertion in the writings of Du Bois and King can clearly be associated with the ethical turn.

How, then, are dialogical democratic citizens to be cultivated? An important first step is found in Myers's distinct contribution to the ethical turn in democratic theory. In *Worldly Ethics*, Myers critiques "dyadic" forms of democratic theory that navigate the ethical turn by attending primarily or exclusively to self/other relations. On Myers's view, such approaches overlook something important about the nature of democratic life, namely, that fundamental to it is the sharing of a "world," of a domain of objects and relations occupied and held by its members *in common*. Myers compellingly argues that the "third term" of a shared world should be a prominent and explicit feature of democratic theory.[5]

[5] Myers, *Worldly Ethics*, 33. In her book, Myers examines two paradigmatic forms of dyadic ethics, one representing a self-oriented ethics like that offered by Michel Foucault, and another representing an other-oriented ethics like that offered by Emmanuel Levinas. Regarding conceptualization of the "world," Myers ultimately emphasizes concern for the *objects* that make up the democratic world, whereas I stress concern for the democratic world *itself*. I worry that Myers's emphasis on objects leaves the theory to care for the world mostly indirectly, through the objects that comprise it.

Moreover, Myers forcefully argues that this shared world ought to be an object of moral concern for democratic citizens. Specifically, she argues that it ought to be an object of "care," that is, an object of relational "expressions of regard and concern for active tending to." In full, Myers's intervention is to argue that "Care for the world, distinct from concern for oneself or for an Other, is an ethos uniquely fit for democratic life."[6] Care for the world is a powerful and fitting resource for dialogical democracy, given its concern for the construction and maintenance of a dialogical *community* and its teleological structure, and the notion of care is a helpful one for construing the moral relationship appropriately. Dialogical democracy therefore adopts Myers's theorization of care for the world, which I construe as care for the political community.[7] Following Myers, dialogical democracy takes the ethical turn toward individuals and their relations (and away from theorizing institutions as a first step), only to come back around and embrace a teleological approach that affirms the political community itself as democracy's primary object of concern.

Myers's critique of exclusive focus on self/other relations in the civic formation of citizens and her argument for including (what I call) the political community among the objects of moral concern for democratic life is a keen insight. Dialogical democracy depends on a robust and vibrant political community, which must itself become an object of moral concern. That said, such focus on the political community as a whole ought not to overshadow the importance

[6] Myers, *Worldly Ethics*, 86. Myers is clearly influenced by the development of care ethics and its application to political questions, notably spearheaded by feminist moral and political theorists such as Virginia Held and Joan Tronto.

[7] Myers adopts the language of "world" from Hannah Arendt, specifically Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958). Myers, *Worldly Ethics*, 87. My preference for the language of political community refers to roughly the same thing that Myers means by world, but, on my view, "community" better captures its relational nature. To note: I do not maintain that humans are the only relevant members/components/parts of a political community. A key difference between our views, however, is that Myers distances hers from any semblance of holism. Myers, *Worldly Ethics*, 11.

of bonds between citizens that promote dialogical community (a community of belonging), especially amidst profound disagreement and even injustice.

The matter of citizen relations has been a perennial topic in political theory, but I find Danielle Allen's book on political friendship, *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship since* Brown v. Board of Education, to be an incisive and generative intervention on the topic. Attentive to the affective dimension of political life, Allen's work is distinct for honing in on the importance of trust between citizens.[8] She argues that trust sustains democracy through disagreement and the inevitable disappointment and even sacrifice or loss required by some members of a polity in the wake of elections, policy decisions, and/or their implementation.[9] Allen writes that absolute consensus and satisfaction among members of a democracy are almost never possible, and she claims that "The hard truth of democracy is that some citizens are always giving things up for others."[10]

Allen argues that democratic theory must conceive of ways of "responding to loss that make it nonetheless worthwhile or reasonable for citizens who have lost in one particular moment to trust the polity—the government and their fellow citizens—for the future."[11] Allen proposes that durable trust can best be secured via the emergence of political friendships, which she defines as being committed to equity and characterized by reciprocity and mutual

[8] Allen is speaking here specifically about *interpersonal* trust: "Citizens' distrust not of government but of each other leads the way to democratic disintegration." Danielle S. Allen, *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship since* Brown v. Board of Education (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), xvi. For this reason, although she does not identify it as such, Allen's work can also be affiliated with the ethical turn.
[9] Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, 41. Further, she asserts, "The real project of democracy is neither to perfect agreement nor to find some proxy for it, but to *maximize agreement while also attending to its dissonant remainders:* disagreement, disappointment, resentment, and all the other byproducts of political loss. A full democratic politics should seek not only agreement but also the democratic treatment of continued disagreement." Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, 63.
[10] Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, 29.
[11] Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, 47.

obligation.[12] Drawing on Aristotle, she advocates for political friendship because she determines that it uniquely bundles the necessary "*orientation* toward others" with insight into the value of mutuality, certain "*habits*" of acting, and a disposition of goodwill toward others.[13]

Allen's point about the importance of trust is a valuable insight, and I find persuasive her characterization of the ideal bonds between democratic citizens as a form of friendship. Allen fills in her case by explaining that friendship has the distinct potential to transform rivalrous forms of self-interest into relations of equitable exchange patterned through practices of give and take that extend over time. Further strengthening this point, Allen argues the democratic importance of friendship by claiming that it also, by its very nature, encourages an awareness that self-interest includes tending to meaningful and important relationships.[14]

Although Allen's arguments noted here are quite strong, most of which align with the theory I am developing, there is an interesting tension in her work that connects with the earlier discussion of Myers's work and a point at the heart of dialogical democracy. Allen begins her book *Talking to Strangers* by arguing the need for citizens to be able to "imagine themselves part of a 'whole,'" as part of an "imaginary body that is the foundation of democracy," which she refers to as "the people."[15] Allen claims that "Democratic politics cannot take shape until 'the people' is imaginable," understood as an "integrated body to which citizens willingly give their allegiance."[16]

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[12] Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, 111. Allen claims that "Equity is friendship's core" and that "reciprocity" is "friendship's basic act." Allen, *Talking with Strangers*, 129, 131. Further, she argues that a good faith, future-oriented "Sacrifice is friendship's fundamental act." Allen, *Talking with Strangers*, 134.
[13] Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, 137.
[14] Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, 136. On the matter of equitable self-interest, she writes, "The ability to adopt equitable self-interest in one's interactions with strangers [fellow citizens] is the only mark of a truly democratic citizen." Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, 165.
[15] Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, 17.
[16] Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, 69, 87.

For what are now obvious reasons, I affirm Allen's part/whole framing of a citizen's place in a democratic political community, as well as her insistence on the need for that community to be held in the minds of its members as a whole of which they are a part. However, Allen's description of a sense of "the people" as that whole with respect to which citizens stand as parts does not directly align with her advocacy for political friendship, which she offers as the ideal form of democratic citizen relations. There is no contradiction between these two sorts of relations—political friendship, on one hand, and identification with or membership in a democratic "people," on the other—but they are not the same, owing to the fact that they correspond to two very different objects and are thus two different kinds of relations.

On Allen's description, political friendship is a *horizontal* relation, that is, a symmetrical relation between equal parties. It is bilateral. Yet, the relation between a singular person and the larger entity of "the people" (their political community) is a *vertical* one, an asymmetrical relation between an individual part and a larger whole, a point alluded to by Allen's comment that persons might give their "allegiance" to it.[17] Of course, it is quite reasonable to presume that the bonds of political friendship are conducive to the construction of and promote relations with "the people" as such, but any argument for their relation must clarify their differences, and leaving these differences vague or implied occludes key insights for democratic theory.

Affirming Allen's claim that a robust and vibrant democracy relies on persons standing in part/whole relations with their political community, I contend that such vertical relations are especially distinct for what being part of a larger whole means for its members. In contrast to horizontal relations, for vertical, part/whole relations, 1.) the whole *as such* emerges as an object of consideration and concern, different from any of its constituent members as individuals, and

[17] Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, 87.

2.) the whole is a prominent and particular factor in the relations between members. Both of these points seem to escape Allen's attention or awareness. The first point is precisely the one addressed in my engagement with the work of Myers above, regarding care for the political community as such. The second point, however, has been implied in previous chapters without sufficient elaboration, and it remains overlooked in both Myers's and Allen's work.

Before attending to this second point, I want to bring dialogical democracy into generative conversation with one other contemporary democratic theorist, Chantal Mouffe. Responding to rationalist and consensus-based approaches to democratic theory, Mouffe's major intervention is premised on her claim that politics involves ineradicable conflict, owing to what she refers to as the "antagonism that is inherent in human relations."[18] According to Mouffe, identity construction in every form, be it individual or collective, depends upon the construction of a me/you or us/them distinction. She therefore claims that identity construction is conflictual in nature, given that inherent in every sense of an "us" is a sense of a "them," upon whose exclusion the identity depends.[19]

In light of the intractable conflict that ensues, Mouffe posits that the steep challenge facing politics is not the eradication of disagreement, nor is it the prevention of us/them relations within a polity. Rather, she explains, "Politics aims at the creation of unity in a context of conflict and diversity." According to Mouffe, "The novelty of democratic politics is not the overcoming of this us/them opposition – which is an impossibility – but the different way in

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[18] Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (New York: Verso, 2005), 101.
[19] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 21ff. She derives this thinking in part from Carl Schmitt. See, Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 43. Mouffe also provocatively claims that when politics eradicates conflict, something has gone awry: "when democratic confrontation disappears, the political in its antagonistic dimension manifests itself though other channels." Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 114.

which it is established. The crucial issue is to establish this us/them discrimination in a way that is compatible with pluralist democracy."[20]

Mouffe argues that democracies are tasked with transforming rather than renouncing or attempting to overcome oppositional relations between fellow citizens. She contends that, properly understood, "the aim of democratic politics is to construct the 'them' in such a way that it is no longer perceived as an enemy to be destroyed, but as an 'adversary', that is, somebody whose ideas we combat but whose right to defend those ideas we do not put into question." The transformation of seeing the other as "adversary" rather than "enemy" is at the heart of her argument. She clarifies that "An adversary is an enemy, but a legitimate enemy, one with whom we have some common ground because we have a shared adhesion to the ethico-political principles of liberal democracy."[21] At this point, Mouffe introduces a key conceptual difference: "*Antagonism* is struggle between enemies, while *agonism* is struggle between adversaries." With this distinction in hand, she argues that "the aim of democratic politics is to transform *antagonism* into *agonism*."[22]

I have doubts about Mouffe's claim that identity formation necessary creates or plants the seeds for intractable conflict, even if it does in fact require something like an us/them distinction and entails an exercise of power. Nevertheless, I find her account of agonistic democracy compelling for two main reasons. First, it takes very seriously the fact of disagreement and conflict as regular features of democratic politics without wishing or rationalizing them away, and it makes ample room for "collective passions" therein.[23] In an agonistic democracy, a citizen must learn to engage in *ethical* contestation, in a way of disagreeing, even vociferously, that

[20] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 101.
[21] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 101-102.
[22] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 102-103. Emphasis original.
[23] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 103.

nevertheless preserves an adversary's membership and participation in the construction of their common life. By "ethical," I (and Mouffe) mean broadly that citizen interactions embody or are governed by principles and values that conduce to democratic ends. Second, on Mouffe's conception of agonistic democracy, the transformation from antagonism to agonism occurs in virtue of conflicting citizens coming to regard one another as, amid (and not despite) their differences, sharing some important overriding commonality.

Although our reasons for it may differ, I agree with Mouffe that profound disagreement is a regular and often unavoidable occurrence in democratic life. However, as Mouffe rightly insists, if democracy is to be sustained, disagreement and dispute must occur without denying one's adversary their place and participation in the polity. King is an exemplar in this regard, as his account of nonviolence includes a willingness to engage in even sharp contestation—extending far beyond verbal debate, when necessary, and including more drastic measures like economic boycotts—while nevertheless preserving the inclusion of a person's political adversaries as dignified members who equally belong to, and should even remain involved in the construction of, their common life. This phrasing reveals a deep theoretical affinity between Mouffe's conception of agonistic democracy and King's account of nonviolence, even if they depart on many of the details.[24]

There is also a connection here between Mouffe and Du Bois and King, albeit somewhat unstated, in that democratic life requires affirming both the standing and self-determination of one's adversaries *and of one's self*. An agonistic democracy is necessarily a two-party affair; contestation is only possible when a person embodies a posture of dignified self-assertion,

[24] Perhaps their most fundamental point of departure, which has wide-ranging implications, is to be found in King's metaphysical affirmations and Mouffe's avowed anti-essentialism and anti-foundationalism. See especially Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 17-18

insisting on *one's own* equal dignity and freedom, along with those of the other. Mouffe does not elaborate on this point, but it is implicit in her view, and it aligns with what Du Bois and King counsel as the appropriate response to alienation. Tied to an account of *mutual* recognition, on my view, overcoming alienation means belonging to a community in which the self is included in a community of equals. Unless or until that community is fully realized, and nevertheless necessary for its continuation, the proper mode of engagement with others—for Mouffe, Du Bois, and King (Myers and Allen would surely agree)—involves insisting on the dignity and capacity for self-determination of both oneself and one's fellow citizens.

Dialogical democracy affirms Mouffe's claim that the central task of democratic citizenship is to transform contested and even strongly oppositional disagreements among citizens (or factions of citizens) such that they are not destructive of the democratic community, recognizing that vanquishing or preventing these disagreements outright is illegitimate or wrongheaded. This raises a key theoretical distinction between dialogical democracy and Mouffe's proposal. Mouffe theorizes that the way to transform these disagreements from inimical (antagonistic) to adversarial (agonistic), on her terms, is by "multiplying the institutions, the discourses, the forms of life that foster identification with democratic values."[25] I agree that such practices and forms of life are profoundly formative, a point on which Mouffe is especially convincing, but she leaves out any real consideration of the political community *itself* as the formative context that structures and makes sense of these practices. Notice her expressed intention to secure among citizens "allegiance to democratic values."[26] Where Mouffe writes about securing regard for democratic *values*, I suggest that the primary task is to secure regard

[25] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 96. As the language of "forms of life" indicates, Mouffe is informed on this matter by the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein. For more on this, see Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, chapter 3.
[26] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 95.

for a democratic *community*. In other words, dialogical democracy maintains that transforming antagonism into agonism (to use Mouffe's language) happens not merely by shaping citizens according to and embedding their disagreements in certain practices, but rather more globally by *contextualizing* them and the people who have them in a larger, shared life.

I now return to the point about the way in which imagining relations to one's political community in part/whole terms makes a particular sort of difference in the lives and relations of its members. My position on this matter is a site of disagreement with Myers, Allen, and Mouffe, although Allen's work does gesture toward it. Myers's work, despite its distinctive identification of the political community itself as an object of moral concern, resists thinking about democracy as consisting of part/whole relations. As a result, Myers seems to offer a flatly "triadic" picture of citizen relations, according to which the political community ("world") is essentially another comparable object alongside the self and other.[27]

Relations between citizens are quite obviously relations between fellow members of a political community. Yet, on a part/whole picture, citizen-to-citizen relations take place not merely in light of the possession of a shared, abstract or formal status, but more fully between fellow parts of a shared whole. Perpetually unfinished and dynamic as a robust democratic political community inevitably is, it is nevertheless a meaningful "whole" in that it comprises a meaningful context within which life occurs. Relations between persons, *as citizens*, therefore, occur under the auspices of a larger life that is common to them as constitutive members of a context in which they might realize the good(s) associated with attaining a sense of belonging (among other things).

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[27] This may be, in part, a function of Myers attending more to the objects that constitute the world than to the world itself, as mentioned above.

In other words, dialogical democracy maintains that citizenship is not reducible to a status granted and/or underwritten by political institutions; it is more thoroughly the experience of being a full member of one's political community, *within* which and *under* whose authority, influence, and purview lives are lived. This point harkens back to my Introduction, where I argued for theorizing the context of political life not as one domain among others but rather as an encompassing context within which different domains of life unfold.

Having spent the previous four chapters addressing matters relating to the experience of persons *belonging to* their political community, I am talking now about the extended matter of what could be called the experience of citizenship as *belonging with* others to their shared political community. This shared belonging shapes citizen relations for occurring under the umbrella and power of the political community, mediated by the understanding of being fellow parts of that whole, the wellbeing of which is (ideally) a unifying matter of their common concern. The salient point here is that shared belonging to the political community conditions the treatment of and regard for one's fellow members: a citizen's regard for the political community *as such*, as well as one's status therein, becomes the determining factor pertaining to one's regard for and treatment of other citizens. In agreement with Mouffe's insistence on "practices" and Allen's endorsement of "habits," practices and habits need a *context* for their preservation, progressive refinement, and proper deployment. I am insisting on a hermeneutical point with both "ideal" and "real" implications: practices and habits need a larger context and culture that champion and finally *make sense* of these important features, on which their stability depends.[28]

[28] Although Mouffe's Wittgenstinian use of "form of life" surely implies something like what I am calling a culture and even a context for the "practices" of citizenship she recommends, it does not so directly refer to a community like I am proposing, nor a concern for it as such.

Dialogical democracy insists that the task of citizen development is not initially or primarily about building relations of political friendship, as Allen suggests, engaging persons in the practices of citizenship, as Mouffe contends, or including the political community itself (the "world" and/or its constitutive objects) as an item of ethical concern, as Myers proposes. These are all vital elements of the task, but only when properly situated. I maintain that citizen formation and action is best understood as a *coherentist* phenomenon, a dynamic process involving persons making sense of themselves within a "web" of beliefs, practices, and values, the effectiveness and stability of which depend on the coherence of major elements in that web—and, according to dialogical democracy, the justice of which is determined by the ability of citizens to make sense of themselves as dignified and free persons therein. Further, dialogical democracy maintains that this "web" is multi-dimensional, consisting of horizontal relations between citizens as equals and vertical relations between citizens and the web as such.

Ultimately, the proposals made by Allen, Mouffe, and Myers are deficiently two-dimensional for theorizing the domain or locale of citizen formation and political life exclusively within a horizontal frame, constituted entirely by symmetrical (and almost always firstly transactional) relations of equality and/or reciprocity. Dialogical democracy insists on the political community itself being both a community of related parts *and* the larger whole that they dynamically constitute and relate within, the latter of which is made up of persons, institutions, and governing norms that conduce to a culture and an ethos. Necessary for accounting for the experience of belonging, dialogical democracy understands the political community itself as the context of a larger life, a "canopy" of sorts, under which citizen formation and relations occur.

Being Dialogically Democratic: Relational Ontology and Civil Religion

As was suggested in the second chapter on Hegel and made most explicit in the previous chapter on King, the theorizations of political belonging I have been examining repose against a relational ontology of one form or another. I submit that such an ontology is a distinguishing and necessary feature of dialogical democracy and is somewhat distinct for its relationality. A key question facing any such ontology for a democratic community, however, is how exclusive or hospitable it is to different perspectives or ways of thinking.

King certainly has a fully worked out metaphysical framework behind his political thought, which, as I have noted, is a feature of his Christian personalism. However, he nowhere tries to argue people into a Christian personalist perspective. Instead, he regularly advocates more generally for a politics of "brotherhood," according to which persons are individually valuable and whose interdependent wellbeing can be most fully realized in community life. That is to say, even though he makes regular references to Christian sources and doctrines, King appears to invite a variety of reasons, traditions, or background pictures for the relational ontology that supports his political vision.

Undergirding his political thought, King explains in familiar terms, "It really boils down to this: that all life is interrelated. We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied into a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. We are made to live together because of the interrelated structure of reality."[29] Another key part of his relational ontology, as also noted previously, is a conviction regarding "the sacredness of human personality," by which he means their non-quantifiable and non-instrumental value. Furthermore, his guiding aspiration is for all persons "to sit down together at the table of brotherhood."[30]

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[29] King, "A Christmas Sermon on Peace," 254.
[30] King, "A Christmas Sermon on Peace," 255.

These quotations are taken from a sermon to a Christian congregation, where King is presumably speaking to a (mostly) Christian audience. Yet, even there, he is hardly interested in elaborating on and gaining adherents to his full-throated metaphysical framework. Rather, like he does in his more broadly public writings, he is instead content to emphasize three defining features: the dignity (or sacredness) of persons, their interrelation, and a communal vision of wellbeing.[31] It is notable that he also makes frequent reference to these features in the writings of non-Christian thinkers.[32]

An ontology with these three features is critical for dialogical democracy because a community of belonging that strives, at minimum, to secure a sense of "somebodiness" for all of its members must be anchored in valuing these three things: the particularity of individual persons, their dependence on one another (for at least the recognition they need and ought to give), and the community that is ordered to realizing these values *itself*. King intentionally presents only a vague outline of the ontology he thinks necessary for his ideal form of democracy, but he nevertheless insists that such an ontology is necessary to realize what he calls the "Beloved Community," and he openly advocates for it in the public square. Having refined and amended King's view into what I am calling dialogical democracy, I, too, maintain the necessity of an ontology that affirms the three features identified above.

That said, I am insisting on the importance of such an ontology, and I am not interested in defending a particular form or argument for it here. As I take King to suggest, though, dialogical democracy allows for a range of suitable ontologies, the details of which, aside from these three

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[31] For an example of his presentation of these features to a less overtly Christian context, Martin Luther King, Jr. "'Keep Moving from This Mountain,' Address at Spelman College on 10 April 1960," in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.: Volume V, Threshold of a New Decade, January 1959-December 1960*, eds. Tenisha Armstrong, Susan Carson, Adrienne Clay, and Kieran Taylor (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
[32] Martin Buber and his writings on "I-it/I-thou" relations being perhaps the most frequent instance. See, King, "'Keep Moving from This Mountain,'" 414.

key features, can vary, as can the route(s) to and reasons for affirming them. This hospitality to pluralism allows dialogical democracy to remain open to a variety of philosophical and/or religious traditions, and appropriate views might range from full metaphysical and/or theological accounts to social-psychological or purely "political" ones.[33]

I now turn to the matter of religion, some form or aspect(s) of which has played an important role in the works examined in the previous chapters. Despite their very different relationships to established or traditional religions, evident in the writings of Rousseau, Hegel, Du Bois, and King are three points on the matter: 1.) they are all deeply shaped by religions concepts and ways of thinking; 2.) they all borrow concepts from religious traditions in their theorizations political life; and 3.) they all invoke religion or something quite like it to theorize the relations between citizens and their political community. These three points are important for interpretive, comparative, and analytical purposes, but the second and third are especially suggestive for constructive ends.

For my own theoretical purposes, I am interested in religion's connection to facilitating relations between individual persons and the context of a larger life. I have advocated for a conception of the political community as just such a context, and so this point is especially significant. Broadly speaking, religions seem to provide potent resources for facilitating this sort of relation because they so often utilize symbols, stories, practices, and other aspects of tradition (at least in part) for binding persons to a way of seeing the world—often though not always with transcendent referents—to a community, and to a way of life. The obvious connections between

[33] To give just one example of the range permitted by this hospitality, the three key features I have identified as crucial are evident in the social ontology that emerges from Judith Butler's psychoanalytic and poststructuralist framework, which is a decidedly different one than King's. See Judith Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence: An Ethico-Political Bind* (New York: Verso, 2020).

these factors and the development of a robust and stable political community have led to the widespread use of the concept of *civil* religion.

Civil religion has been an especially prominent concept over the last fifty years, ever since sociologist Robert Bellah famously used it to analyze "the religious dimension for the whole fabric of American life, including the political sphere." Bellah argued that "This public religious dimension is expressed in a set of beliefs, symbols, and rituals" that resemble and even occasionally invoke the language of religious tradition. Connecting this sort of analysis to Rousseau, he called this religious dimension "civil religion."[34] Important for Bellah's use of the term is its reference to include what we might call political theological matters pertaining to the legitimation of sovereign authority, the principles that undergird the political community, and "a transcendent [read: divine] goal for the political process."[35]

More recently, academics as different as Martha Nussbaum and Philip Gorski have utilized the concept to think through experiential—affective, emotional, and/or psychological—aspects of political life. Both Nussbaum and Gorski trace the concept back to Rousseau, but, like Bellah, neither of them attend to what I have identified as its core function in Rousseau's writings, which is facilitating *vertical* relations to a person's political community, properly understood; otherwise put, none of these prominent developers of civil religion registers its central purpose for Rousseau of facilitating a sense of belonging for persons with respect to their political community as the context of a larger life. Instead, Gorski suggests that civil religion is generally about the "founding myths" that locate a polity in or in relation to a "transcendent reality" *beyond* itself, or, more specifically, the matter of "how to coordinate the spiritual and

[34] Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus* 96, no. 1 (Winter 1967), 3-4.
[35] He further explains this as, in the context of the United States, "a theme that lies very deep in the American tradition, namely the obligation, both collective and individual, to carry out God's will on earth." Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," 4.

secular kingdoms."[36] Writing as a liberal political theorist, Nussbaum's work on the topic is primarily about shoring up emotional attachments that enhance political stability and motivation.[37] Disconnecting Bellah's, Nussbaum's, and Gorski's use of civil religion from Rousseau's is this point about political belonging and the part/whole relation for it.[38]

I therefore suggest, remaining in closer proximity to Rousseau's use of the term, that civil religion be more specifically understood as referring to those symbols, rituals, language, practices, etc., that facilitate the experience of a person belonging to their political community as a constitutive part of that larger whole. To be sure, the term "religion" in the phrase "civil religion" is a clear reference to the most immediate or intuitive context of similarity regarding the form, character, and possibly even content of the language, symbols, and practices under consideration. The word "religion" seems appropriate because we recognize these symbols, rituals, language, practices, etc., as resembling (if not also originating as) phenomena that are often identified with religious life. Moreover, the power that these phenomena have for binding persons to their community and/or a way of life seems "borrowed" from their use in explicitly religious contexts, perhaps especially to the ways in which persons hold religious beliefs as existentially significant *because* they bind persons to and locate them within larger life. Recognizing the importance of the existential point, I suggest moving away from closely tying civil religion to recognizably religious-like phenomena. I am pushing here to define the concept more according to what I identify as its *function*, which pertains to binding persons to their

[36] Philip Gorski, *American Covenant: A History of Civil Religion from the Puritans to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 16, 13.
[37] Martha Nussbaum, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* (Cambridge: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 2013), 5, 16, 44-46.
[38] Some recent writings on civil religion do mention belonging, but not in any theoretically complex manner. See, for example, Joseph Gerteis, "Civil Religion and the Politics of Belonging," in *Political Power and Social Theory*, 22 (2001); and Leroy S. Rouner, "To Be at Home: Civil Religion as Common Bond," in *Civil Religion and Political Theology*, ed. Leroy S. Rouner (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986).

political community and facilitating vertical relations to it as such, even if doing so includes things that do not obviously resemble traditional aspect of religious life and practice. In short, civil religion is about political belonging.

The use of the word “religion” here is still resonant, though, because religion has long played this facilitating role in political communities, especially in pre-modern times when it was harder to draw clean lines of distinction between “religion” on the one hand and “politics” on the other. The definitional move I am making is not about locating in “civil” spaces what resembles or seems to have its proper home in identifiably “religious” spaces, but rather it is to track a specific role in the life of a political community that has historically quite often been played by religion. In modern, “secular” times, that task has been reassigned to the political community itself as a context distinct from, although not necessarily unrelated to, religious life.

In the previous two chapters on Du Bois and King, I have noted the development of an important strand of what I identify as civil *protest* religion. By this I have meant that these two figures invoke something recognizably similar to civil religion in their writings, but with a key distinction. Whereas civil religion as found in Rousseau and Hegel facilitates political belonging to a person’s political community as it actually is, Du Bois and King theorize binding persons to a principally just and ideal form of their political community, anchored in an account of human dignity, to which unjustly excluded members might also experience a sense of belonging. This of course changes the function of civil religion from facilitating a person’s belonging to their *actual* political community to binding persons to an *ideal* form of their political community, but this transformation is nevertheless in the service of political belonging.

Insofar as an existing regime is unjust, the civil religion of Du Bois and King stands in a posture of protest toward it. To risk a theological metaphor, we might say that Du Bois and King

present a stoutly non-idolatrous civil religion in that theirs is ever mindful of the inevitable gap between the ideal and the real forms of their political community, and they remain aware of the harm involved with presuming that gap has been (or even could ever be) entirely overcome. In their use of religious or religious-like language, referents, and symbols for the establishment of a principally just form of their political community, we could say that Du Bois and King renovate the concept of civil religion so that it better serves the larger project of political belonging.

I affirm that civil religion—language, symbols, and rituals that bind persons to their political community as an encompassing context of a larger life—is important for the formation of citizens and the stability of the political community as a whole. In fact, such a thing is necessary in order to develop proper regard for the political community as such, which is a key aspect of dialogical democracy. With Du Bois and King, I also affirm that civil religion ought to bind persons to a principally just and ideal form of their political community, which is to be constrained or disciplined by the relational ontology noted above.

As these comments indicate, civil religion is essentially about crafting a political *culture* that supports belonging. Dialogical democracy depends on and ought to promote some sort of civil religion, given its part/whole rendering of the citizen to political community relation, by investing in the development of a political culture that promotes the political community as both an object of moral concern itself and as the context of a larger life. This completes the picture of citizen formation attended to previously. As part of its task, the civil religion in a dialogical democracy should produce cultural artifacts that promote the relational ontology outlined above in its broadest and most hospitable form. Furthermore, a suitable civil religion must also strive to imbue its citizens with the critical mindset that comes from remaining aware of the important distinction between the community in its ideal and real forms. Even still, prophets may

nevertheless be required, from time to time, to remind the community about the dangers and real human costs of idolatry.[39]

Conclusion

Over the course of this project, I have attempted to come to terms with the experience and significance of political belonging by exploring one way of thinking about the matter. There are surely other ways of addressing political belonging, but I have found this one to be the most compelling and theoretically acute. Regardless, I maintain that we need a concept like belonging in order to properly grasp and theorize about some of the most pressing matters in our current political world, including anti-Black racism and exclusion, and the health of pluralist democracies more generally. As belonging has become an increasingly prominent concept of analysis in the academy and a common term in popular level cultural critique, it demands more careful theoretical consideration than it has yet received, and I contend that this requires the combined resources of philosophy, political theory, and religious studies. I hope that this project can contribute in some way to meeting that need.

A thorough account of political belonging must pay careful attention to the experience of its lack and provide an argument for why it is good for people. This must include the different ways that its absence might be experienced. On my view, this means that some conception of human nature or selfhood is unavoidable. Further, it seems to me that attending to belonging requires making some theoretical adjustments to our reigning theories of political life. In full, an account of political belonging needs to be analytical and descriptive as well as constructive.

[39] Similarly, it is enormously helpful to a dialogical democracy for prominent religious leaders to publicly reason through the connection between their own tradition's values and worldview and the polity's civil religion or political culture. King is an exemplar on this score, and his proximity to a particular tradition (Protestant Christianity) is why I referred in the previous chapter to his form of civil religion as civil *theology*.

I have attempted to address these matters by offering a careful and complex account of selfhood, alienation, and political belonging, including an argument for why belonging is good for people, that I have gleaned from the writings of Rousseau, Hegel, Du Bois, and King. I have also taken some initial steps toward developing a distinct political theory that I call dialogical democracy. In sum, dialogical democracy takes as its ultimate aim the establishment of a political community to which all of its members can experience a sense of belonging. Elemental to that part/whole rendering, I suggest, is that all of a community's members would be able to see themselves as legitimate manifestations or expressions of that community, and that the members and the community relate in dynamic reciprocation: members manifest, contribute to, and enhance the life of the community, and the life of the community grounds and makes possible its members' continued existence and satisfactory self-knowledge. According to its foundational account of selfhood, dialogical democracy maintains that political belonging is good for people because it involves overcoming alienation and offers the most expansive sense of freedom or self-determination. Striving toward this goal, dialogical democracy invests in the cultivation of a civil religion to facilitate the relation of persons to their community as parts to a whole, which ideally affects the way citizens come to regard and treat one another.

However, I have noted that several factors might prevent the realization of this admittedly elusive ideal end. The theory's more realistic and proximate aim is therefore to secure a sense of somebodyness for all of its members, which is necessary for overcoming the harmful effects of alienation and is a necessary condition for political belonging. Dialogical democracy holds that securing a sense of somebodyness for oneself and others—by affirming and protecting the dignity and capacity for self-determination of each person—should be both the immediate aim

for the political community itself and a guiding commitment for individual persons in the construction of a political community of belonging.

I want to close by suggesting that the sort of intervention into political theory that I am recommending might helpfully address, in virtue of its attention to political belonging, some other thorny problems in political theory. I will attend to one such problem here, which is the tension that often emerges between the principles of liberty and equality.

Akeel Bilgrami recounts that almost as soon as liberty and equality emerged as the defining political ideals of the modern European and North American world, they were developed in a way that "put them in a seemingly irresoluble tension with one another."[40] As a result, he explains, we often think of these ideals as standing in a "zero-sum relation" to one another such that "the very idea of an increase in the one being seen as only possible if one were to admit a proportionate decrease in the other." He argues that this is largely due to the way in which the North Atlantic world tied the notion of liberty to the possession of property and to a sense of the deserts of merit, which set liberty at odds with equality.[41]

Without diving into the history and specifics of this claim, I find Bilgrami's depiction of this theoretical tension basically right. I also agree with him that overcoming this tension requires a "new conceptual framework," and that attempting to mediate or balance their relation with a third ideal like "fraternity" will not suffice.[42] Bilgrami argues that their tension can be best overcome by positing a different overriding goal of politics that "no longer see[s] them as something to be *directly* approached, but rather as indirectly approached by the construction of something quite else, the ideal of an unalienated life."[43] In terms that I used above, I would say

[40] Bilgrami, *Secularism, Identity, and Enchantment*, 125.
[41] Bilgrami, *Secularism, Identity, and Enchantment*, 126-127.
[42] Bilgrami, *Secularism, Identity, and Enchantment*, 129, 166.
[43] Bilgrami, *Secularism, Identity, and Enchantment*, 171-172. Italics original.

that liberty and equality need a larger context within which their relation can be non-competitively rendered.

Bilgrami is by my sights a leading theorist of alienation, and in the Introduction chapter I clarified some key differences between his account of alienation and my own. Despite these differences, however, I contend that he is correct to argue that the best theoretical way through this impasse is to transform what has become an *individualized* conception of liberty into a "*collective* or non-individualistic" one that "requires individuals to exercise *liberty* from the point of view of a more *collective orientation* to the world" while refusing to sacrifice the importance of individual equality. He rightly claims that such an account could understand equality not "as something *extra*, but as an outcome likely to be *built-into* the deliverances of the exercise of liberty."[44]

Given the affinities between our approaches, Bilgrami's characterization of this problem facing contemporary theory and the direction of a solution to it indicate the theoretical promise of an approach like the one I have offered here. What is more, dialogical democracy better attends to the problem and solution, even on Bilgrami's own description, than the one he outlines.[45]

Bilgrami frames his solution as involving conceptual transformation and a change in "mentality," but this suggestion is both admittedly unfinished and finally unsatisfactory.[46] Over the course of his argument, Bilgrami appears to resist thinking about the relation between persons and their political community in part/whole terms and, further, he never suggests construing that relation as a vertical one. Only such an identification with the community *as a*

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[44] Bilgrami, *Secularism, Identity, and Enchantment*, 172-173. Italics original.
[45] For another example of Bilgrami's thinking on this matter, which is in line with what I have presented here and offered with a few illustrative examples, see Bilgrami, et al., "Belonging," 787-790.
[46] Bilgrami, *Secularism, Identity, and Enchantment*, 173-174.

whole, it seems, which is underwritten by a sense of belonging as I have defined it, might deliver what he rightly describes as a non-individualistic conception of liberty. For reasons I have defended above, such a move requires something implied by Bilgrami's analysis but never explicitly mentioned. Namely, it requires prioritizing the development of a political culture, rather than thinking only or mostly about abstract principles, and a civil religion appropriate for it.

This brief consideration of the tension between liberty and equality and a possible way through it demonstrates the benefits to theorizing political belonging and the wide-ranging contributions of a theory like dialogical democracy. On the strength of this example, I contend that theories of political life that take political belonging as a matter of fundamental concern offer promising ways through some of the thorniest practical and theoretical problems that ail our democracy. This much needed work is necessary for more adequate understanding of and therefore more effective interventions into some of the most pressing concerns of political life, including matters of injustice, human wellbeing, and collective flourishing. To echo King, for too long we have lived in monologue rather than dialogue.

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