

“Inflamed by Daily Practices”:
John Cassian and Ethical Formation

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CURRICULUM VITAE

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ABBREVIATIONS

Texts and Translations

- Conf.* Iohannes Cassianus, *Conlationes Patrum in Scithico Eremo*, *Library of Latin Texts*, CPL 0512 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2013), English trans., Boniface Ramsey, *Conferences* (New Jersey: Newman Press, 1997).
- Inst.* Iohannes Cassianus, *De institutis coenobiorum et de octo principalium uitiorum remediis*, *Library of Latin Texts*, CPL 0513 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2013), English trans., Boniface Ramsey, *Institutes* (New Jersey: Newman Press, 2000).

INTRODUCTION

In the closing decade of the fourth century in the district of Palestine near the village of Tekoa, near Bethlehem, raiding Saracen bandits massacred a group of Christian ascetics. On the report by John Cassian (c.360-c.433 CE), grief and lament over this massacre resounded through the lands of Palestine to the Egyptian desert. Cassian himself was living in the Egyptian desert at the time, learning the ways of ascetic perfection under the tutelage of desert elders. This thirty-year-old Cassian and his friend Germanus were devastated by this event. How, they asked, could God allow for his “holy ones” to be subjected to such evil?¹

Thirty years later, writing for burgeoning Christian monastic communities in southern Gaul, Cassian uses this historical event to frame the sixth book of his Latin masterwork *Conlationes Patrum in Scithico Eremo* (*Conferences*). He writes this work containing twenty-four books between 420 and 425 CE, as a dramatization of a set of conversations he had with exemplary Christian ascetics in the Egyptian desert during his earlier sojourn. Cassian writes only infrequently about historical events in his texts, so the framing of *Conference* 6 in relation to the historical massacre and the poignancy of responses is notable; in short, a “considerably disturbed” young Cassian and Germanus

¹ *Conf.*6.27.3.

go to Abba Theodore for advice on how to grieve and cope with the harsh reality of suffering in this world.²

Cassian's contemporary, Augustine of Hippo beautifully pens treatments on the question of evil and human suffering in works like *Confessions* (*Confessiones*) and *City of God* (*De Civitate Dei*), philosophically arguing that "evil has no positive nature" but instead is a privation of the good.³ Cassian's *Conference* 6 begins with similar questions of why "God...suffered men of such worth to be killed in this way."⁴ While Abba Theodore—as the host of the conference through whom Cassian speaks as author—agrees that evil does not exist, he takes a different approach to the issue than Augustine, quickly focusing on how adversity (just like prosperity) is an occasion for ethical formation. God alone, he reminds the reader, "possesses goodness not because of laborious effort but by nature"—it is the lot of humans to have to work *really* hard to shape themselves for the better.⁵

In this text, Cassian employs the voice of Abba Theodore to turn away from a metaphysical discussion concerning evil in order to exhort individuals to shape their own lives. This move captures the spirit of Cassian's work as a whole, where lived experience takes priority over theoretical distinctions, and the focus is not on *why* things are the way they are, but *what can humans do from here*. This focus on ethical formation contrasts with other Gallic hagiographies of the time, such as Sulpitius Severus's "Life of Martin

² *Conf.*6.1.1.

³ Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (New York, NY: Modern Library, 2000), 11.9.

⁴ *Conf.*6.1.1.

⁵ *Conf.*6.16.3.

of Tours” and the “Dialogues” that emphasize miraculous feats and shows of wonder by figures like Martin of Tours.⁶ Cassian expresses suspicion towards such texts, preparing instead works that are “not about the marvelous works of God but about the improvement of our behavior and the attainment of the perfect life, in keeping with what we have learned from our elders.”⁷ Even *Conference* 15, on “Divine Gifts,” is both the shortest of all those in the *Conferences* and it exhorts the reader to beware the lure of divine gifts. As Columba Stewart points out, Cassian expresses central concern for the “dangers of emphasizing miraculous powers over goodness of life.”⁸ Shaping one’s life towards the proximate goal of “purity of heart” and the ultimate end of eternal life does not come easily, Cassian recognizes, and is markedly less glamorous than the show of miraculous powers. Not divine miracles but everyday ethical cultivation through rigorous practical training (what I will refer to as *askēsis*) is the expression of human agency in Cassian’s texts.⁹

⁶ Sulpitius Severus, “Life of Martin of Tours,” in *Early Christian Lives*, trans. Carolinne White (New York, NY: Penguin Classics, 1998). Sulpitius Severus, “Dialogues,” in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series*, ed. Philip Schaff, LL.D. (Buffalo, NY: The Christian Literature Co., 1886).

⁷ *Inst.*Pref.8.

⁸ Stewart, *Cassian the Monk* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998), 17.

⁹ Susan Ashbrook Harvey defines asceticism as “the practice of a disciplined life in pursuit of a spiritual condition. In late antiquity this discipline was exercised through a physical and mental process of ordering the self in relation to the divine.”(Susan Ashbrook Harvey, “Asceticism,” in *Late Antiquity: Guide to the Postclassical World*, ed. G. W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999], 317-18, 17.)

Harvey also notes how “asceticism was present to greater or lesser degrees in every religious tradition of the Roman empire, pagan, Jewish, Christian, and Manichaean.”(Ibid.) Such training in other religious traditions has been treated by scholars such as Jonathan Schofer and Michael L. Satlow, writing on rabbinic *askēsis*. Jonathan Wyn Schofer, *Confronting Vulnerability* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010); *The Making of a Sage: A Study in Rabbinic Ethics* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005). Michael L. Satlow, ““And on the

It is this focus on human agency in the midst of other influences—social, geographical, political, and physiological—that permeates Cassian’s works. Cassian writes in order to respond to real human anxieties and to suggest a way of life based on the *ethos* of desert *askēsis* and the *abbas*, its exemplars.¹⁰ His work is centrally concerned with the possibilities of human agency and ethical formation, which—as I will discuss in this dissertation—crucially depends on his view of the practices shaping human embodiment, affectivity, and motivation.

*

Cassian has been an extremely important figure for monastic practice, and his doctrinal and historical marginalization for his views on human agency invites rigorous engagement with his works. This fifth century ascetic brought his experiential knowledge of Egyptian desert asceticism to southern Gaul (via Constantinople and Rome). Said by fifth-century historian Gennadius of Marseilles to have established monasteries for both

Earth You Shall Sleep’: ‘Talmud Torah’ and Rabbinic Asceticism,” *The Journal of Religion* 83.2 (April 2003): 204-225.

¹⁰ A note on gender is necessary up front. Cassian is an ascetic male writing primarily for other ascetic males—the many injunctions against even thinking about a woman reflect how Cassian is writing to mostly male monastic communities, like that of Lérins. I maintain the masculine pronoun Cassian uses in his texts.

However, this is not to say that he only has male ascetics in mind. He is said to have established two monasteries in Massilia, one for men and one for women. He mentions a sister in *Inst.* 11.18 who possibly joined the female monastery (Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 2). As much of his treatment of ethical formation is not gender specific, I think that his ethical prescriptions could have largely included women as well.

Historically, in any case, his works were applied to female monasteries. The first four books of Cassian’s *Institutes* would provide the opening for Caesarius of Arles’s *Rule for Nuns* (*Regula virginum*) in 512 (*The Rule for Nuns of St. Caesarius of Arles: A Translation with a Critical Introduction*, trans. Maria Caritas McCarthy [Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1960]). Caesaria, Caesarius’s sister, was said to have trained in Massilia in Cassian’s female monastery and went on to become abbess of Saint Jean of Arles. (Jo Ann McNamara & John E. Halborg with E. Gordon Whatley, ed. and trans., *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992], 112-113.)

men and women near Massilia, modern-day Marseilles, Cassian penned twin works, the *Institutes* and the *Conferences*, at the request of local bishops between 419 and 425.¹¹ These texts were passed down at Benedict of Nursia's recommendation in his foundational *Regula Benedicti* (known as the *Rule*) of 612, noted as required reading alongside only the Bible, the *Rule* of Basil the Great, and the other “Lives of the Fathers.”¹² As William Harmless notes: “John Cassian thus became required reading for Western monks. If Benedict created the institutional frame of Latin monasticism, then Cassian helped define its inner life, its mystical aspirations.”¹³ Cassian's texts, accordingly, exercised significant influence on Latin monasticism. His influence was muted, however, in part due to charges that his view of human ethical agency was considered heretical and too generous (a charge of semi-Pelagianism) and his contemporary, Augustine of Hippo, posthumously won the doctrinally orthodox view, which promoted divine agency and emphasized the dependent nature of human ethical agency.¹⁴ Note, for instance, that Benedict does not refer to Cassian by name in his *Rule*, but only to the titles of his works, despite endorsing the daily reading of his works.¹⁵

¹¹ Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 1.

¹² Benedict of Nursia, *RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict in Latin and English with Notes*, ed. Timothy Fry, O.S.B. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1981), Section 73. This passage reads: “Then, besides the *Conferences* of the Fathers, their *Institutes* and their *Lives*, there is also the rule of our holy father Basil. For observant and obedient monks, all these are nothing less than tools for the cultivation of virtues; but as for us, they make us blush for shame at being so slothful, so unobservant, so negligent.”

¹³ William Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 373.

¹⁴ We will turn to this issue in more depth at the end of this chapter and in Chapter 2.

¹⁵ Benedict suggests the *Conferences* as appropriate reading during daily communal meals, as well as on fast days between the services of Vespers and Compline, where he recommends: “Then let four or five pages be read, or as many as time permits.”(Benedict, *Rule*, Section 42.)

The texts of Cassian exerted not only influence on medieval monasticism, but continued to link late antiquity and philosophical and religious modern formations, where major practices bear subtle marks of Cassian's influence. Cassian brings to western Christianity the tradition of eight demons from his teacher, Evagrius of Pontus' eight dangerous thoughts (or *logismoi*).¹⁶ Through Cassian's influence on Pope Gregory I, this list becomes the seven deadly sins.¹⁷ Cassian also establishes a four-fold hermeneutic for reading scriptural texts—with historical, allegorical, moral, and anagogical levels of reading—that would become normative in medieval exegesis and contribute to modern philosophical hermeneutics.¹⁸ Cassian's writings on the relationship of discernment, where junior ascetics both seek out advice and confess their difficulties and indiscretions to their spiritual elder, intimates the relationship between analysand and analyst in modern psychoanalysis. Cassian is thus relevant and notable for many reasons, primarily as a crucial founder of Latin monasticism.

Despite his historical importance for Christianity, especially Catholic, monastic practice, Cassian is fascinating, in part, because he remains a marginal figure in the history of Catholic thought and doctrine. This marginalization has to do with his generous view of human agency that rendered him suspicious to early doctrinal councils of the

¹⁶ Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 357.

¹⁷ Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 25.

¹⁸ Henri DeLubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, trans. Mark Sebanc (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998). Harry Caplan, *Of Eloquence: Studies in Ancient and Medieval Rhetoric*, eds. Anne King and Helen North (New York, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970).

church. It is this same generous view, however, that I argue renders his texts a particularly compelling resource for thinking about human agency today.

Cassian has also played an important role in recent attempts to genealogize modern western subjectivity. Michel Foucault, and scholars in religious studies through his influence, have argued that Cassian inaugurates “interiority” in the western discourse, by defining the “self” as primarily self-interpreting and self-renunciatory and evincing a hollow form of obedience. In Foucault's understanding of confession in Cassian, a monk internalizes the forms of social control that he submits to “externally,” which involve the renunciation of the individual self and its desires.¹⁹ Foucault contrasts Cassian's Christian views notably with ancient Greek and Greco-Roman forms of *askēsis* as its precursors. In Foucault's view of Cassian, which I think is a misreading, an *askēsis* of Greco-Roman agential self-fashioning gives way to Christian compulsory obedience, and Greco-Roman self-examination gives way to Christian self-renunciation. Foucault overplays his interpretation, however. Elizabeth Clark argues that Foucault does not adequately recognize the similarity between the self-stylizing goals of sexual self-cultivation of the Greeks and those of early Christian asceticism. I both agree with Clark's reading and extend it further, arguing that Foucault does not recognize the similarities between

¹⁹ Foucault reads Cassian primarily in relation to confession which entails the verbalization of internal thoughts and desires; in this verbalization, one shapes one's self as a confessing subject. Elizabeth Clark notes: “How, Foucault asks, did sexual practices become transmuted into discourse about sex, most fully realized in psychoanalysis? ... Denying that Freud represented a cataclysmic break with all past thinking and writing on sexuality, Foucault asked his readers to examine with him ‘the machinery of confession, within which in fact psychoanalysis and Freud figure as episodes.’”(Elizabeth A. Clark, “Foucault, the Fathers, and Sex,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 56 [1988]: 620.)

Greco-Roman and Christianity on self-cultivation more broadly.²⁰ To tease apart Foucault's imputed emphasis on self-renunciation and interiority from Cassian's own emphasis on self-transformation and the whole human being, then, it is necessary to critique readings of Cassian that are overly-influenced by modern conceptual categories, not only that of Foucault but also those of scholars of religious studies.

Ethical Agency in Religious Studies

Engaging these questions of human agency, ethics, and subjectivity, my dissertation is part of a larger project thinking about human agency in the history of Christianity, philosophy of religion, and religious ethics. This project participates in conversations within religious studies, drawing upon accounts of agency in modern western philosophy and theory, on a spectrum between the affirmation of human freedom and the recognition of cultural determinism. Negotiating the tension between freedom and determinism results in theorists tending towards different ends of this spectrum.

Immanuel Kant, for instance, recognizes how the human is constituted in relation to the world, and yet understands morality in terms of the free exercise of human reason and the autonomy of the will. In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant states that the central feature of the will is its ability to act autonomously and be its own lawgiver: "Autonomy of the will is the property of the will by which it is a law to

²⁰ "More striking, perhaps, are the ways in which the goals Foucault ascribed to the Greeks' sexual self-cultivation (e.g., 'a stylization of attitudes and an aesthetics of existence' [1985a:92]) reappear, transmuted, in early Christian asceticism." (Clark, "Foucault, the Fathers, and Sex," 622.)

itself.”²¹ This will is autonomous only when determined by reason alone, without individual inclinations or senses influencing it. Kant thus understands human agency to be a function of reason alone and safeguards human freedom as the capacity for self-determination.

Pierre Bourdieu, in contrast, describes human agency dialectically in relation to social structures without a significant account of rational deliberation. Instead, he refocuses the agency debate on the *habitus*, “a spontaneity without consciousness or will,” “inscribed in bodies,” and “[e]nacted belief...that treats the body as a living memory pad.”²² While his theorization of *habitus* productively signals the ways that individuals are both shaped by and shaping of social fields, his account emphasizes the body to the exclusion of rational deliberation or conscious intention: “The *habitus* makes questions of intention superfluous, not only in the production but also in the deciphering of practices and works.”²³ Instead of looking at how the individual produces herself, Bourdieu’s primary concern is with how society reproduces itself. He makes clear that one participates in a social field “only by birth or by a slow process of co-option and initiation,” and yet he does not account for the possible role of deliberation in this very initiation.²⁴

²¹ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor and Jens Timmermann (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 89. This view is similar to Augustine’s own view of the will as singular for its self-determining capacity, as we will see in Chapter 2 (Augustine of Hippo, *On the Free Choice of the Will, On Grace and Free Choice, and Other Writings*, trans. Peter King [New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010]).

²² Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 56, 59, 68. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

²³ Ibid., 58.

²⁴ Ibid., 68.

Both Kant and Bourdieu's versions of human agency depend too significantly on *either* social determination *or* conscious rationality as their source. What happens, however, if the extremes of this spectrum are not presupposed as *tertium non datur*? Judith Butler attempts to negotiate these poles, rendering the social and cultural embeddedness of subjects as primary and describing agency "as a reiterative or rearticulatory practice."²⁵ Instead of the "human subject, the individual, as the metaphysical locus of agency," Butler understands human agency to be a function of socially and linguistically produced bodies doing something new and so contesting old norms. While she rejects the understanding of agency "figured as the capacity for reflexive mediation" alone, she aims for a more subtle account that recognizes how human agency is tied to discursive bodies.²⁶ Butler also theorizes the reflexive life that attends them in *Giving an Account of Oneself*, *Psychic Life of Power*, and "What is Critique?" aiming to close the theoretical gap between the iterative subject and the person capable of critique.²⁷

Amy Hollywood makes a critical intervention into Butler's account of performative agency, extending Butler's insight that subjectivity is constituted through the "linguistic citation of norms" by emphasizing how subjectivity is also constituted through "the bodily subject's encounters with other bodies in the world and by its

²⁵ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993).

²⁶ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007), 182.

²⁷ Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2005). Judith Butler, *Psychic Life of Power* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997).

practical or bodily citations.”²⁸ Hollywood critiques Butler’s over-emphasis on linguistic performativity, shifting attention to how bodily practices constitute subjectivity. While Butler is interested in the “movement between psychic and material bodies,” Hollywood notes that something critical is missing from not foregrounding the materiality of the body, and its constitution of practical reason.²⁹

In a recent article on Benedictine prayer practices, Hollywood’s theorization of the connection between bodily and cognitive constitution includes a third dimension, the affective. Here, she treats Cassian’s account of fiery prayer and the nature of mystical experience in his texts as exceeding the everyday, noting: “What begins as a physical, affective, and cognitive experience leads to an inner transformation Cassian calls fiery prayer; the monk passes beyond the body and lets forth in his spirit ‘unutterable groans and sighs’; he feels ‘an unspeakable ecstasy of heart’ and ‘an insatiable gladness of spirit.’”³⁰ Hollywood refers to these forms of human subjectivity, indicating that self-constitution occurs in physical, affective, *and* cognitive ways.³¹

My own reading of Cassian emphasizes these multiple forms of awareness and understands their integration as central to human agency. I proceed by looking at the *means* by which physical, affective, and cognitive forms of awareness are sources of

²⁸ Amy Hollywood, “Performativity, Citationality, Ritualization,” *History of Religions* 42.2 (2002): 95.

²⁹ Hollywood, “Performativity, Citationality, Ritualization,” 96.

³⁰ Amy Hollywood, “Song, Experience, and the Book in Benedictine Monasticism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism*, eds. Amy Hollywood and Patricia Z. Beckman (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 68.

³¹ Ibid. Wittgenstein’s formulation of “forms of life” is also relevant to how I conceive “way of life.” Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, trans. Denis Paul and G.E.M. Anscombe (New York, NY: Harper Torchbooks, 1969).

knowledge enabling constitution. On the everyday level of lived experience, Cassian gives a compelling sense of what this process of constitution through habituation *looks* like.³² My turn to the sites of everyday practice situate my own inquiry within religious ethics, considering an emphasis on embodiment, emotions, and social formations.³³ With a focus on “the full complexity of ethical life,” as Jonathan Schofer describes it, and mindful of establishing a “thicker account of what human beings are,” as Thomas Lewis puts it, this dissertation will consider Cassian’s broader project to prescribe the basic daily activities that frame one’s way of life while careful to emphasize the degree of self-stylization required.³⁴ Following Aaron Stalnaker’s description, I will analyze how ethical cultivation occurs, to form a thicker description and more integrated account of how ethical subjectivities are formed.³⁵ With attention to both Bourdieu’s *habitus* and Hadot’s “spiritual exercises,” both bodily dispositions and conscious attention characterize loci of critical attention on the part of religious ethics scholarship.

I will argue, through the course of this dissertation, for a view of human agency that considers the human person as necessarily culturally embedded, shaped by social mores and in relation to other people, and also capable of willfully shaping one’s own life

³² Hollywood does address some means in “Practice, Belief, and Feminist Philosophy of Religion,” in *Thinking Through Rituals: Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. Kevin Schilbrack (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004).

³³ Thomas A. Lewis, Jonathan Wyn Schofer, Aaron Stalnaker, and Mark Berkson, “Anthropos and Ethics: Categories of Inquiry and Procedures of Comparison,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 33.2 (2005).

³⁴ Jonathan Wyn Schofer, “Embodiment and Virtue in a Comparative Perspective,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 35.4 (2007). Thomas A. Lewis, “Ethnography, Anthropology, and Comparative Religious Ethics,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 38.3 (2010): 397.

³⁵ Aaron Stalnaker, “Comparative Religious Ethics and the Problem of ‘Human Nature,’” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 33.2 (2005).

in concert with these other influences. Human agency need not be merely a function of social formation, nor does it require autonomous self-determination. There is no necessary opposition between human reason and socially inscribed bodies. And yet, a more robust understanding of the individual's human agency requires an expanded understanding of the human person and the means of ethical formation.³⁶

I therefore frame this dissertation both with the paradigm of the human person that recognizes the trifold nature of self-constitution and with the sets of practices by which one becomes habituated in certain dispositions. I want to argue for recognizing alternate epistemic regimes of the body and the emotions that do not fully conform to the logic of cognitive epistemes. To theorize the practices and bodies that shape, reproduce, and change them follows Butler's account in *Excitable Speech* concerning bodily agency and addresses how social practices can change without the forceful intention of individual agents. Agents do not need conscious engagement to effect social, structural change.³⁷ However, I theorize a more detailed account of the discrete mechanisms enabling the ethical formation of the individual that makes central the co-constitutive role of rational deliberation, affectivity, and embodiment. Ethical agency, in my estimation, necessarily takes into account how agencies shape each other both *without* deliberative reasoning and *with* it.

³⁶ The agency of the individual should also not preclude the influence of a vast network of agencies, some human, some social, some textual, some environmental. I follow Theodore Schatzki's terminology concerning "agencies." Theodore Schatzki, *The Site of the Social: A Philosophical Account of the Constitution of Social Life and Change* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 2002); *The Timespace of Human Activity: On Performance, Society, and History as Indeterminate Teleological Events* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010).

³⁷ Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1993).

In addition to these mechanisms of ethical formation focused on the daily level of practice, Cassian's texts will help us rethink the nature of ethical transformation and the formation of stable dispositions. I rethink Hollywood's distinction between "inner transformation" and "physical, affective, and cognitive experience" in Cassian's texts, arguing for how these experiences constitute the transformation of the whole person. Transformation, we will see, occurs as the physical, affective, and cognitive forms of attention together constitute the self through the cultivation of dispositions to act, feel, and think in ways that enable "an unspeakable ecstasy of heart" to occur as a function of their integrated attention. This involves a transformation of the person as an integrated whole—and there is no coherent separation between the inner and the outer. Fiery prayer, understood as the state achieved in these ecstatic moments, is only possible through the transformation of the person, as one works to habituate oneself in stable dispositions achieved through a network of influences—bodily, affective, cognitive, and inter-relational. Such bodily practices will include physical and consumptive practices, affective reading and meditating, and liturgical and inter-social practices.

Rereading Cassian's Texts

Cassian has been treated by scholars in a variety of ways: as a theologian (A.M.C. Casiday),³⁸ as a monastic speaking theologically to monastics (Columba Stewart),³⁹ as a

³⁸ A.M.C. Casiday's *Tradition and Theology in St John Cassian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) argues for the doctrinal orthodoxy of Cassian, redressing claims of Semi-Pelagianism in order to emphasize relevance to contemporary Christian theology.

³⁹ As a work of historical theology addressed to scholars and contemporary Christian monks alike, Columba Stewart's *Cassian the Monk* elegantly communicates the issues Cassian himself would have found important and which may have continued relevance. Cassian effects his "own synthesis of monastic theology." (Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 7)

scriptural exegete (Christopher Kelly),⁴⁰ as a political player in Gaul (Richard Goodrich),⁴¹ and as an inheritor of Egyptian asceticism (William Harmless; Philip Rousseau).⁴² However, scholars have by and large overlooked Cassian's ethical thought, especially the daily practices that constitute ethical formation. My dissertation will look at Cassian primarily as an ethicist, noting as central the themes and questions most concerned with the human person and ethical practice.⁴³ I will pursue this task through three inter-connected readings of Cassian's texts: a historical-textual reading of Cassian's texts that situates his view on ascetic practices and view of the human person within broader cultural, societal, and political currents of late antiquity; a critical reading with attention to how modern interpreters read Cassian with categories ill-suited for Cassian's own texts and time; and a constructive reading with attention to how Cassian treats issues relevant for contemporary ethical inquiry. Cassian provides important resources for

⁴⁰ Christopher Kelly, *Cassian's Conferences: Scriptural Interpretation and the Monastic Ideal* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012).

⁴¹ Richard Goodrich, *Contextualizing Cassian: Aristocrats, Asceticism, and Reformation in Fifth-Century Gaul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁴² Historical work on asceticism situates Cassian also in terms of his geographical, political, and social contexts; the works of Philip Rousseau (*Ascetics, Authority, and the Church in the Age of Jerome and Cassian* [New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1978]) and William Harmless (*Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* [New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004]) are particularly notable.

⁴³ Marcia Colish treats Cassian in a limited but insightful way noting that Cassian monasticized Stoicism in the west "more than any other single figure" and that his concern for ethics is connected to his understanding of anthropology: "As an ethicist Cassian preserves a lively concern for the connections between ethics and anthropology that mark the original Stoic position. He is interested in the genesis and dynamics of the vices, the virtues, and the passions as well as in practical guidelines for applying ethical principles in daily life. Cassian has learned much from Stoic psychology and casuistry alike." (Marcia Colish, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages* [Boston, MA: Brill Academic Publishers, 1985], 115.)

understanding the ascetic self and human agency, but in ways that deviate from how he has been interpreted over the last thirty years.

My constructive reading of Cassian thus offers to the field of religious ethics a way of reconceptualizing the ethical agency of the human person. Cassian's work presents ethics as a way of life, as Bernard Williams and Pierre Hadot have argued was characteristic of classical Greek and Roman sources.⁴⁴ Even relative to this context, Cassian pays even more attention to bodily practices, affective struggle, and interpersonal formation. I will develop over this dissertation how Cassian promotes a view of everyday practice as the arena for human agency, thereby treating questions of agency and ethics from an embodied, affective, and lived perspective. He promotes both an integrated view of the human person and a concrete ethical program that shows how one can help effect this integration.

This constructive aspiration, however, relies on the critical reassessment of readings of Cassian—apprehending when readings are overdetermined by categories foreign to Cassian's milieu. The critical move of my project will be to assess these charges concerning Cassian. The fundamental category of "interiority" on which Foucault's critique relies is not, I argue, native to Cassian's thought and practice.

⁴⁴ Bernard Williams, for example, turns to antiquity to consider ethics as a way of life: "The idea is certainly not that the demands of the modern world on ethical thought are no different from those of the ancient world. On the contrary, my conclusion is that the demands of the modern world on ethical thought are unprecedented, and the ideas of rationality embodied in most contemporary moral philosophy cannot meet them; but some extension of ancient thought, greatly modified, might be able to do so." (Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985], vii.)

Williams proceeds to open *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* positing Socrates' question concerning how one should live as the "best place for moral philosophy to start" (Ibid., 4), an ethical question concerning "a manner of life" (Ibid.), "disposition or custom" (Ibid., 6). See also Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1985).

Imposing this modern category unnecessarily limits not only our understanding of what Cassian's texts describe, but also the lessons we can draw from a close examination of his ethics.

This critical project requires a historical-textual reading to glean more accurately Cassian's common language usage and cultural norms—notably when they differ from contemporary expectations. Even in Hollywood's account, there is a distinct difference between “inner” transformation as a state achieved, and my focus on the formation of disposition as a trait, looking at the everyday transformations of the self effected through these practices. Philip Rousseau notes a similar point in Cassian, stating: “The important distinction here is not that between ‘outer’ and ‘inner,’ but between ‘way of life’ and ‘cast of mind’ (*cultus* and *habitus*). Cassian could certainly separate a seriously minded and carefully regulated adherence to a pattern of life on the one hand, and the intense cultivation of new attitudes, the increasing strength of will that might belong with it, on the other.”⁴⁵ My historical-textual rereading of Cassian suggests a view of ethical agency focused on the integration of the way of life (*cultus*) from the reflective, affective, and bodily attitudes needed to engage it (*habitus*); a view that does not presume that “interiority” is the privileged locus of the self in the sense Foucault details, nor does it exclusively emphasize renunciatory practices at the expense of ethical accountability. Instead, Cassian's texts reflect the influence of Greco-Roman medicine and physiology, as well as ethical practices, on the understanding of the human person. There is an important role for interiority—understood as conscious reflexivity here—but the entire self cannot be associated with it, for this view does not account for how embodiment,

⁴⁵ Philip Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority, and the Church in the Age of Jerome and Cassian* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2nd edition, 2010), 179.

emotions, and inter-relationality all constitute the self in addition to the conscious dimensions of judgment and choice. The entire person is to be transformed, no part of the person can be renounced. To argue this view of Cassian I will show how his texts on late antique asceticism emphasize transformative, as opposed to renunciatory, ethical practices.

Cassian's Vita

Some background on Cassian and his texts needs to be understood before launching into the particulars of his ethical program. This is not necessarily an easy task, however, because Cassian's biography is obscure.⁴⁶ His *Institutes* and *Conferences* include him both as the author writing to other Christian authorities in Gaul in the 420s and as a literary figure as his younger self in the Egyptian desert. The contrast between his literary authorship and character, on the one hand, and his own biography, on the other, then presents something of an enigma. The paucity of Cassian's autobiographical details versus the richness of Augustine's, for example, is notable, yet as I will argue in Chapter 4 can be read as having ethical objectives.

⁴⁶ This view of Cassian has been softened by Stewart who sees more resources in Cassian's texts than most scholars: "Close study reveals that there is more autobiographical and historical data to be gleaned from his writings than has sometimes been allowed." (Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 8) More notably, I think, is how Stewart describes Cassian's reticence to talk about himself "explained only by his own sense that he was a monk with a mission. His mission was simply this to provide the best foundation for the emerging monasticism of southern Gaul." (Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 4.) I will complicate this reading of Cassian's reticence in Chapter 4.

William Harmless also offers his own take on the relative obscurity of Cassian-on-young-Cassian: "And for all of Cassian's interest in the interior life, he remained an intensely private man and only gave the rarest glimpses of his own interior motives. In this, he is utterly unlike his contemporary, Augustine of Hippo. Cassian was both a victim and survivor of the Origenist controversy and saw at close range how it ruined friends' lives and blackened their reputations." (William Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* [New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004], 374.)

It is therefore both challenging and necessary to sketch what we do know about Cassian.⁴⁷ Likely born in modern day Romania around 360 CE, Cassian was classically educated and from a family of some wealth.⁴⁸ This birthplace would readily accommodate Cassian's bilingualism in both Latin and Greek—he would go on to use Greek for at least twenty-five years in Palestine, Egypt, and Constantinople, although he would write his works in Latin when he went to Gaul.⁴⁹ He went to Palestine in his twenties and underwent “initial training in the cenobium at Bethlehem.”⁵⁰ He traveled, at this time, with his companion Germanus, and the two continued to be close friends and lifelong travel partners.⁵¹ At this cenobium, the two friends roomed with an elder from

⁴⁷ His contemporaries called him “Cassianus,” but Cassian refers to himself twice as “Iohannes.” (*Inst.*5.35; *Conf.*14.9.4.)

⁴⁸ Cassian refers to his family's land as wooden (*Conf.*24.1.3.) with cold weather (*Conf.*24.8.5.), with not many monks in the area (*Conf.*24.18.). Cassian had at least one sister, whom he refers to in his *Institutes* (*Inst.*11.18.), and he himself learned literature and was well-educated (*Conf.*14.12.).

Scholars debate where he was from, but most likely locations are either Gaul or a region known as Dobrudja (in modern day Romania), between the Danube and the Black Sea, called Scythia Minor in antiquity (Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 4.). Gennadius notes that Cassian is “of the Scythian people” (*natione Scythia*).

⁴⁹ Cassian is bilingual, fluent in Latin and Greek, suggesting an elite education and enabling mobility between eastern and western terrains across the Mediterranean, a bilingualism of which Stewart says “his entire achievement was built on that simple fact.” (Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 5.) William Harmless notes that Cassian has mastery of Latin that his ancient commentators also referred to positively, writing in a “long-lined sinewy Latin.” (Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism*, 374.)

⁵⁰ *Conf.*11.5. Cassian is said to have gone to Palestine around 380, where he settled in Bethlehem, a small town near the Cave of the Nativity of Jesus, although his motivations for doing so are not certain: “We do not know why Cassian settled in Bethlehem, a small town dominated by the Constantinian basilica built over the Cave of the Nativity of Jesus. He and Germanus came to the Holy Land at a time when both pilgrimage and the monastic life were booming, and their intentions surely pertained to both.” (Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 6.)

⁵¹ Cassian is younger than Germanus (*Conf.*14.9.4.) and, in the voice of Abba Moses, describes them as “one heart and soul in two bodies” (*Conf.*1.1.), clearly reminiscent of Aristotle's view of true friendship. I will develop this in more depth in Chapter 5.

the Egyptian desert, Abba Pinufius, who captivated the young friends with stories of the ascetics living in the Nile Delta.⁵²

This prompted the young Cassian and Germanus to embark for the Egyptian desert, probably in the mid-380s. There, luminaries such as Evagrius of Pontus and disciples of Macarius the Great trained Cassian.⁵³ In this context, ethical struggle and spiritual warfare required that the ascetic exert significant agency synergistically with God's help, to progress towards "purity of heart" (*puritas cordis*)—a goal that Cassian bases on a fusion of Evagrius' *apatheia* (being unperturbed by the passions) and Macarius' emphasis on the centrality of the heart.⁵⁴ Cassian and Germanus most likely fled Egypt in 399 CE in a purge of ascetics provoked by Theophilus, the Archbishop of

⁵² Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 7.

⁵³ Cassian has highest praise for Abba Moses, a Nubian reformed murderer-turned-ascetic, who was a disciple of Macarius the Great (*Conf*.7.27.). Distinguished in virtue, Moses had, according to Cassian, the "sweetest fragrance among the distinguished flowers" of Scetis (*Conf*.1.1). He also praises Abba Paphnutius, nicknamed "the Buffalo," who was famous for his humility (*Conf*.18.15.2-7) and became the "Father of Scetis" after Macarius the Great; Abba Paphnutius was the leader of the Origenist minority in Scetis when Theophilus of Alexandria turned against the Origenists, having defeated the Anthropomorphites. Other mention is made of Macarius the Great in *Conf*.19.9.1. Stewart notes that Macarius was probably still alive when Cassian and Germanus were in Scetis, but Cassian does not mention meeting them. (Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 10.)

⁵⁴ This language of synergism—to indicate the confluent participation of two agencies—will be very important to how I understand the constitution of agencies in Cassian's texts. I am indebted to Marcia Colish's characterization of human and divine agencies working together: "What Cassian proposes is the synergistic interaction between God and man typical of the Byzantine Church Fathers and the eastern orthodox tradition as a whole. Stoicism provides him with a way of conceptualizing the human contribution to this ethical enterprise." (Colish, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, 116.)

"Evagrius, as we saw, described *apatheia* as a state of psychic integrity and deep calm achieved after long years of ascetic practice, a state that both makes possible selfless love (*agape*) and opens the door to mystical knowledge (*gnosis*). Cassian agreed, in the main. In the *Institutes*, he says that purity of heart comes only after one uproots vices and lets virtues blossom; this purity, in turn, makes 'the perfection of apostolic charity' possible. The deep interior tranquility wrought by purity of heart always remains (in this life) a less-than-perfect state, ever capable of lapse and certainly unsustainable without God's grace." (Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 391.) Note here, however, that Harmless separates the "interior" from the "exterior."

Alexandria, who turned against people following the doctrines by the anathematized Origen of Alexandria, foremost amongst them, Evagrius of Pontus.⁵⁵ They would eventually go to Constantinople around 402 CE and befriend John Chrysostom, then Patriarch of Constantinople.⁵⁶ When Chrysostom faced expulsion, Cassian would travel to Rome to plead for his friend. Once in Rome, Pope Innocent I commissioned Cassian to “bring the wisdom of the East” to the west, bringing his practical, experiential knowledge of Egyptian desert asceticism to southern Gaul.

In Massilia, modern-day Marseilles, around 415 CE, Cassian likely established monasteries for both men and women, and tradition associates the male monastery with the Abbey of St. Victor and the female with Saint Salvator.⁵⁷ At the request of local

⁵⁵ This Origenist purge was said to have included “300” Origenists (Elizabeth Clark, *The Origenist Controversy* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992].). Theophilus’s condemnation of Origenism and success with promoting an anti-Origenist cause made it imprudent for Cassian to connect himself to Evagrius, “the great theoretician of monastic Origenism.” (Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 11.) Cassian, accordingly, never refers to Evagrius, even though his teacher’s views permeate his asceticism. As Stewart notes, Cassian negotiates this by “changing controversial terminology (e.g. *apatheia* becomes ‘purity of heart’).” (Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 12.) Conference 10.2 refers to Theophilus’s written attack on Anthropomorphism dated to 399, but Cassian does not include how Theophilus would then turn against the Origenists with whom he was allied during the Anthropomorphite fight.

⁵⁶ “The Origenist exodus, noted by Theophilus himself, brought many monks to Palestine and to Constantinople. We know that Cassian and Germanus found their way to Constantinople, and that they must have been there well before 403-4. By that time they had become trusted clergy of John Chrysostom, who had welcomed many Egyptian monastic refugees.” (Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 12.)

Lawrence Johnson notes that soon thereafter, Chrysostom ordained Cassian deacon around 404 (Lawrence J. Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church: An Anthology of Historical Sources*, Volume 3 [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010], 159).

⁵⁷ Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church*, 159. Massilia was a city with sea trade and Greek roots; its bishop during Cassian’s time there was Proclus (Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 6). This fact has made Richard Goodrich recently hypothesize that Cassian did not live in Massilia at all, and was actually writing to ascetics from Apta Julia—why would he neglect to honor his own bishop, Proclus, in his prefaces if he were indeed Massilian (Goodrich, *Contextualizing Cassian*, Appendix)? The common scholarly consensus, however, stands in assuming that Cassian lived out his last years in Massilia.

bishops hoping for an ascetic program, Cassian penned twin works, the *Institutes* and the *Conferences*, between 420 and 425 that were distributed to monastic communities around southern Gaul. Cassian would die around 430, having completed his third and final work, *On the Incarnation of the Lord* in 430/1.⁵⁸

Cassian thus distinguishes himself with his geographically and culturally diverse experiences, living as an ascetic in the deserts of Egypt, as advisor to John Chrysostom the patriarch of Constantinople, and as the resident sage for a monastery in southern Gaul.⁵⁹ He lived through a time when the Roman Empire was falling to the Visigoths and Vandals and, in tandem, Christianity was fortifying its institutions and doctrines, coming into its own as a political power. This tension between the decaying imperial and the burgeoning Christian social structures contributes to the social context for Cassian's writings, which both affirm the authority of tradition and promote a comprehensive (and adapted) way of life.

⁵⁸ Cassian was not only embroiled in the Origenist controversy, he was also involved in both the Pelagian (which we will go into in more depth presently) and the Nestorian controversy. During the Nestorian controversy, Cassian writes his third and final work, *On the Incarnation of the Lord*, around 430 at the behest of Archdeacon Leo (who Cassian likely befriended during his time in Rome, and who would later become Pope Leo I). Cassian writes this doctrinal treatise explaining the issues with Nestorius's understanding of Christology, in preparation for what would become the Third Ecumenical Council.

⁵⁹ Cassian thus follows the prototypical development that Claudia Rapp articulates: "For most Christians outside Egypt who belonged to the educated elite of Late Antiquity, the desert experience was one of three stages of life. First came secular education, then spiritual formation in the desert, and finally a return to service in society by holding ecclesiastical office and by composing religious treatises. This pattern continued well into the fifth century. Many of those who later became bishops or religious scholars had exposed themselves to the personal experience of monasticism, either in the desert or in a community." (Claudia Rapp, "Desert, City, and Countryside," in *The Encroaching Desert: Egyptian Hagiography and the Medieval West*, eds. Jitse Dijkstra and Mathilde Van Dijk [Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 2006], 110.)

From his history, we see how Cassian was a translator between eastern and western Christianities—he bridged geographies, languages, politics, and friends.⁶⁰ He was an important figure engaged in conversations with many of the most important figures of Christian late antiquity.⁶¹ At an early stage, he was embraced by eastern Christianity where his Latin texts were even translated into Greek—he is also the only Latin author included in the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (*Apophthegmata Patrum*). There is, then, historical benefit to putting the spotlight on Cassian’s role in the shaping of western Christianity’s history, practice, and thought, of whom Boniface Ramsey says: “no other figure was as influential on the early development of monasticism in the west as Cassian.”⁶²

Conflict and Cassian’s Legacy

Cassian’s immediate legacy is noted as vital to medieval monasticism and theology alike, influencing Pope Gregory I, Cassiodorus, Alcuin, Rupert of Deutz, and

⁶⁰ “Sorting out Cassian’s memories of Egypt from local Gallic politics or disentangling inherited traditions of Egyptian spirituality from Cassian’s own spiritual agenda is nearly impossible. One cannot take Cassian’s pose as neutral expert at face value. Cassian was not neutral. He transformed the legacy he received and in the process instituted—in a new language—a monasticism made for the harsher climate of the West. Cassian ended up sowing tough and hardy seeds that would endure, even prosper, in the harsh winter of barbarian invasion and Roman collapse.”(Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 403.)

⁶¹ Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 5, 25. “Cassian’s monastic spirituality came to dominate the community of Lérins. Names no less distinguished than Hillary of Arles, Maximus of Riez, Faustus of Riez, Vincent of Lérins, and Caesarius of Arles all fell under Cassian’s influence. Dozens of monks were selected from Lérins and appointed to sees throughout Gaul. Cassian’s thought and practice went with them.”(Kelly, *Cassian’s Conferences*, 9.)

⁶² Ramsey, *Conferences*, 7. Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 373.

Thomas Aquinas.⁶³ In terms of historical influence, then, John Cassian is also important to study in depth both for his fame *and* notoriety. While Cassian scholarship has become much more popular in the last couple decades, there is still a relative dearth of Cassian scholarship—this lacuna is notable given his large influence on the shape of monastic Christianity and yet partially explained by the early conciliar rejection of his work.⁶⁴

During the last decade of his life, Cassian weighed in on a couple controversies, but his status in the Pelagian controversy would be the one to shape the historical reception of his name most directly. Pelagius, a British monk, was formally condemned at the Council of Carthage in 418, in part through the efforts of Augustine who critiqued his too generous view of human free-will. Stewart describes how Augustine then turns his attack against all Christians whose “traditional theological anthropology, essentially eastern Christian in inspiration, was more open to natural possibility than Augustine’s. Thus the issue was not really Pelagianism but Augustinianism.”⁶⁵ In other words, these monks did not share Pelagius’s anthropology, but their own traditional form of possibility concerning human effort when enabled by divine will. In this historical context, Cassian’s *Conference* 13 is read by scholars as a direct response to Augustine and his followers on

⁶³ Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 24-25; Chadwick, *John Cassian*, 148-162; Ramsey, *Conferences*, 7.

⁶⁴ This was not just a matter of rejecting Cassian, but of affirming Augustine’s theology through many different figures around the Mediterranean: “Pope Hormisdas, through his recommendation, however restrained, of Augustine’s teaching over that of Faustus, had effectively enhanced the authority of Augustine over the monastic theology of Cassian and Faustus. Augustinianism was gradually becoming the Western tradition.”(Rebecca Weaver, *Divine Grace and Human Agency* [Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1996], 198.)

⁶⁵ Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 19.

this question.⁶⁶ Augustine would then level his treatises, *Grace and Free Will* and *Rebuke and Grace* (426-27), against the monks at Hadrumentum (in modern-day Tunisia). Prosper of Aquitaine, a lay follower of Augustine, proceeded to attack Cassian in his work, *Against the Conferencer* (a reference to Cassian's authoring of the *Conferences*). In 425, southern Gallic bishops were forced to profess their rejection of Pelagian views to Patroclus, then bishop of Arles.⁶⁷ Augustinian anxiety over divine doctrine thus rendered Cassian—and other eastern monks—doctrinally suspect.

This controversy (designated in the seventeenth-century as the Semi-Pelagian controversy) continued until the Council of Orange in 529, where Cassian would be associated with unorthodox doctrine on the status of human agency and Augustine's emphasis on divine grace would prevail.⁶⁸ Cassian, the ascetic affirming human accountability, was found suspect as a semi-Pelagian who ascribed too much agency to humans.⁶⁹ Cassian therefore stood at the crossroads of two damning controversies: Origenism and Pelagianism, both of which reflected optimism concerning the transformative capacity of humans and human ethical action. Cassian's eastern-

⁶⁶ *Conf.*13.

⁶⁷ Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 20.

⁶⁸ "At the same time, Cassian and other monks thought that Augustine's denial of any *initium fidei* ('initiative of faith') to human beings and his concomitant doctrine of predestination effectively excluded human responsibility from the process of salvation. This made little sense in a monastic context where the interplay of ascetical discipline, prayer and the support of other human beings created the context for growth toward Christian perfection." (Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 19.)

⁶⁹ On predestination, Cassian protests against the fatalistic tendency of Augustine, as Smith pithily puts it: "St. Augustine regards man in his natural state as dead, Pelagius as sound and well, Cassian as sick." (William George Smith, Henry Wace, John Murray, eds. *A Dictionary of Christian Biography, Literature, Sects and Doctrines* [Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2004], 416.)

influenced perspective would be in large part obscured in the western development of hyper-Augustinianism that focused on Augustine's view of human fallenness and human inability to work towards one's own transformation.⁷⁰

Even when not been referenced directly, Cassian would continue to exert powerful influence over western monasticism. His greatest impact comes through his influence on Latin monastic rules, where by the sixth century, his influence shows in Caesarius of Arles's monastic legislation (the first section of the *Rule for Nuns* depends on Book 4 of the *Institutes*), other noted authors from Lérins, and "[e]ven more significant for the Middle Ages and beyond was Cassian's influence on the anonymous legislator known as the Master and his wise heir, Benedict of Nursia."⁷¹ Cassian's texts influenced Benedict of Nursia's *Rule*, where Cassian's works are required reading as noted above.⁷² Pope Gregory I, known as Gregory the Great, would be extremely influenced by Cassian, calling him "sanctus." Due to his doctrine on human agency,

⁷⁰ Stewart is careful to point out how polemics might have resulted in skewed views not actually practiced: "in terms of the practice of the Christian life, Augustine and Cassian may scarcely have differed: Augustine, after all, was a monastic founder himself. But in theological reflection on experience (and in controversy) Augustine and the monks of Gaul moved in opposite directions." (Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 19.)

At the same time, Peter Brown forcefully points out how diametrically opposed the two authors were: "It is seldom that two Latin writers, each as gifted in their differing ways with such powers of introspection and each capable of such magnetic literary expression as Augustine and John Cassian, have reached such diametrically opposite conclusions as to what precisely they had seen in their own hearts." (Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* [New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1988], 423.)

For the variety of Augustinianisms, see Thomas L. Humphries, *Ascetic Pneumatology from John Cassian to Gregory the Great* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁷¹ Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 25.

⁷² For Cassian's reception by Benedict see: Benedict, *Rule*, 73 and Adalbert de Vogüé, "Les mentions des oeuvres de Cassien chez Benoît et ses contemporains," *Studia Monastica* 20 (1978): 275-85.

though, Cassian “hardly enjoys the title of saint in the West, despite his vast influence.”⁷³

Cassian has been read by western monastics throughout the ages (especially through Benedict’s *Rule*) and yet not much scholarship has been dedicated to him, notably in comparison with the countless treatments on Augustine.

Cassian’s Hermeneutics

Cassian continued to be read, however, and his hermeneutical procedures in *Conference* 14 proved exceedingly popular. His four-fold method of scriptural interpretation was codified in the middle ages, and Nicholas of Lyra (1265-1349) references a mnemonic device, citing Cassian as its originator:

Littera gesta docet,
Quid credas allegoria,
Moralis quid agas,
Quo tendas anagogia⁷⁴

The literal gives the deeds
Allegory tells what to believe
The moral tells how to act
Anagogical, the direction one tends

The literal level describes the historical account of the events as they purportedly occurred. The allegorical level provides a narrative understanding of such historical accounts, oftentimes inter-textually with other scriptural stories. The tropological reading helps one learn how to act and respond ethically to the literal history and allegorical account through imitation of scriptural figures. The anagogical orients the person towards

⁷³ Ramsey, *Conferences*, 459.

⁷⁴ Henri deLubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 1-2.

the Christian's ultimate end and soteriology. These four levels of interpretation are not separate, but enfolded into each other. While the last three levels are deemed the "spiritual" levels, such levels are incoherent without the "literal" level of the account in tandem. Just as the active and contemplative dimensions of ascetic experience are both needed in Cassian's texts, so too do the literal and spiritual levels require each other for coherence.⁷⁵

Cassian describes these four modes of interpretation of scripture as opening up with the advance of practice.⁷⁶ Scripture, through its constant meditative recitation, shapes ascetics as we will see in Chapter 4.⁷⁷ However, in order to read scripture properly, one needs to be first shaped ethically, as Cassian points out: "The fact is that it is impossible for an unclean soul to acquire spiritual knowledge, no matter how hard it labors at the reading of the Scriptures."⁷⁸ Cassian shows the necessary connection between physical practices (discussed in Chapter 3), reading practices (discussed in Chapter 4) and spiritual knowledge and the forging of "purity of heart."⁷⁹ As one

⁷⁵ Columba Stewart states that, for Cassian, tropological knowledge is inseparable from the anagogical knowledge that shapes the backdrop of prayer and orients the ultimate end (*telos*) of the ascetic.

⁷⁶ Such methods of scriptural interpretation were not new to the fifth century—Philo in the first, Origen in the second centuries were hugely influential for Jewish and Christian forms alike—but at this time, it becomes central to how authority, tradition, and textuality are negotiated by Cassian and Augustine as well. In *City of God*, Augustine's attention to interpretation focuses on justifying the superiority of Christianity and on abrogating accusations that Christianity weakened the Roman Empire.

⁷⁷ "A constant prayer, as demanded by Cassian, this peculiar form of silent reading of the Scriptures is meditative in essence (*melete, meditatio, ruminatio*)."(Gedaliahu G. Stroumsa, "The Scriptural Movement of Late Antiquity and Christian Monasticism," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16.1 [Spring 2008]: 70.)

⁷⁸ *Conf.*14.14.

⁷⁹ *Conf.*14.15.

transforms one's self ethically in relation to other monastic subjects, one gains deeper understanding of the scriptural narratives and can better participate in the Christian community, both scriptural and living, as we will discuss in Chapter 5. Only those who practice assiduously and who have made progress in the ascetic life can "enter into the heart of Scripture or the hidden depths of spiritual meanings."⁸⁰

Through his emphasis on hermeneutical strategies for approaching scripture, we get a richer sense of how important ethics are to Cassian. Just as the four levels necessitate each other—the "spiritual" interpretations have no meaning apart from the "literal" events—the theory and practice of the ascetic require each other. Cassian's scriptural hermeneutics inherits much from earlier figures like Origen and Evagrius, but he develops it in his own way—a way that renders central the ethical dimensions of physical practices, scriptural reading, and communal relations. Cassian's texts continuously emphasize ethical strategies, covering what people are eating, how they are praying, how they engage with scripture, and how they relate to one another.⁸¹ I take up Stewart's reading of Cassian as "a visionary and a pragmatist," and read Cassian's central texts from the pragmatic perspective, making central his concern for tropology and "how to act."⁸² While other readings of Cassian's texts—above all Columba Stewart's—have been excellently done, reading his texts through the tropological lens gives us particular

⁸⁰ *Conf.*14.16.

⁸¹ "At base this quest is not an intellectual one, though the intelligence must guide. He is also conscious that truth is not won in a moment. It is given in meditation or digestion or rumination. ... It needs moral growth, or at least a desire for moral growth, to understand the way of moral growth." (Owen Chadwick, intr., John Cassian, *Conferences* [New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1985], 3.)

⁸² Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 40.

insight into the complex dynamics of ethical formation. The ethical is central to Cassian's method of reading scripture and so to, I argue, for how we can read his own texts.

Cassian's Paraenetic Genre

Through stories told by and about desert ascetics, then, Cassian's texts paint the *ethos* that enables the pursuit and actualization of the monastic way of life. Cassian's *Institutes* and *Conferences* are not just good reading, they present exemplars for imitation in an age and locale where they are few. In both his texts, Cassian features dramatic encounters with these desert "elders" (*abbas*) from the "golden age" of Egyptian monasticism, an age quickly receding since the Origenist purge of 399 when Cassian likely left the desert himself.⁸³ Cassian's dialogue format or *erotapokriseis* has a two-fold effect: it dramatizes the way monastic instruction took place and it allows Gaulish readers to connect with the temporally and geographically distant *abbas*. As Christopher Kelly states, "The *Conferences* was to stand as an authoritative text, a guide and corrective. As such, Cassian utilized archetypes after whom novices ought to model their behavior, attitude and orientation."⁸⁴ Cassian brings to monastics in Gaul the *abbas* "in their own voice" through the dialogue format, both prescribing superior instruction to this Gaulish audience and presenting the *abbas* as models to imitate. Cassian's texts function similarly

⁸³ Derwas James Chitty, *The Desert a City: An Introduction to the Study of Egyptian and Palestian Monasticism Under the Christian Empire* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1977). "[T]his expansion was accompanied by the golden age of the expansion of Egyptian monasticism and by the growing prominence of the Egyptian church under the leadership of Athanasius. The fourth century represents, by all accounts, the zenith of Egyptian Christianity." (Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* [New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993], 36.)

⁸⁴ Kelly, *Cassian's Conferences*, 14.

to how Derek Kruger describes Leontius whose “text functions in the stead of a living saint, much as pilgrim narratives function for those unable to travel. Moreover he substitutes this narrative for his own body as a place from which to illustrate virtuous deeds.”⁸⁵ Cassian’s *Conferences* brings the *abbas*’ wisdom, stories, and examples to the Gaulish audience, providing ideal models of ascetic exemplarity and dispensing sage advice to monastics struggling with issues well-trod by Cassian. The literary features of Cassian’s texts show the *Conferences* to be primarily ethical, with *paraenesis* as a technical way of describing the text’s genre.⁸⁶

A hermeneutic of moral praxis plays out in Cassian’s paraentic genre—here, elders act as exemplars to be followed in Cassian’s *Conferences*, a point importantly made by a number of scholars. Scholars have not noted, however, that Cassian’s works themselves enact ascetic practice and living, where day-to-day activities populate the passage from one conference to another so that the reader can see these ascetics “in action.” In addition to the *abbas*, the young Cassian and Germanus also prove to be exemplary figures whose appropriate attitudes and assiduous work-ethic are to be imitated by Gaulish readers. Precisely because the young companions have not attained the ascetic ideal, Cassian’s narrative presentation of them can speak to the day-to-day trials and exultations faced by monastics trying assiduously to progress. The friends enact

⁸⁵ Kruger, *Writing and Holiness*, 219-220.

⁸⁶ Samuel Rubenson, “Wisdom, Paraenesis, and the Roots of Monasticism,” in *Early Christian Paraenesis in Context*, eds. James Starr and Troels Engberg-Pedersen [Boston, MA: Walter de Gruyter, 2005], 521. Stanley Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, Reprint edition, 1997). Stanley Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster John Knox Press, 1986).

the training that the Gaulish monastic can engage even at a temporal and geographical distance from the elders in order to effectively progress.

The *Conferences* further narrativizes this training, where in addition to the ideas discussed and the emotions experienced, the daily practices that constitute the ascetic life are included. We will see how Cassian frames his conferences with narratives on what the young Cassian and Germanus ate with the *abbas*, how long they slept, and how many times a day they gathered for liturgy. The *Conferences* not only talks about how to live the ascetic life, it enacts it on the narrative level as the young friends engage in dialogue with esteemed elders and participate in their day-to-day way of life. Even if Gaulish monastics could not experience the *abbas* and the desert directly, they received through this reading, a sense of what the *abbas*' days looked like, what their anxieties were, and how they concretely strategized their progress towards the ascetic ideal.

Cassian thereby masterfully merges direct prescriptions by the *abbas* in the text and indirect descriptions of the *abbas* engaging the very activities prescribed. Cassian's narrative shows the *Conferences* to be primarily ethical, with *paraenesis* as a technical way of describing the text's genre. This is thus interesting from both an ethical and a literary perspective, whereby we see the inextricability of word and deed, theory and practice, for Cassian and we see the enactment of ethical agency. Not only does Cassian prescribe in his texts an ethics as a whole way of life—he also uses his texts to enact ethics as a way of life in day-to-day practice. It is to these practices, then, that I will look to argue for Cassian's account of ethical agency.

Cassian's Ethics

Cassian poses a particularly compelling figure for analysis precisely because he describes in his texts an ethics as a whole way of life, concerning all domains of practical action and motivation, and not just the domain of rational intellection. Cassian's ethical subject is not characterized by negation and passivity as Foucault suggests. Both his main texts, instead, schematize the means to transform one's self and one's community, so that both the individual and the community may thrive. Cassian's formulation of late antique Christian *askēsis* involves a broad theorization of a transformative ethics with a program inclusive of manual labor, physical fasting, scriptural attention, and unceasing prayer. The practical and contemplative dimensions of ascetic ethical formation are continuous, and this coextensivity also characterizes how Cassian sees body, heart, and mind relating. Analyzing his texts with attention to these emphases, I read Cassian as distributing his attention across the range of human experience in order to provide a comprehensive text for how to live.

Cassian's focus on the integrity of everyday decision making emphasizes the conscious, motivating role of beliefs and emotions in galvanizing transformations in one's way of life, while stressing that such transformation requires the slow work of habituation in practices of labor and scriptural reading. Agency requires effort and it involves cultivating virtue and mitigating susceptibility to vice, as Cassian reflects: "[t]herefore no virtue can be possessed unwaveringly by a human being, but for it to be firmly maintained once it has been acquired it must always be preserved with the same concern and effort with which it was obtained."⁸⁷ Integral to Cassian's way of life is an understanding of practices as at once bodily habits of action, and habits that can be either

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*Conf.*6.16.3.

fortified or compromised by conscious and affectively motivated choice. Community and tradition are also vital for Cassian and help constitute the crucial network of influences shaping the human agent.

Reading Cassian's ethical texts assuming that he mainly treats intellectual issues concerning the "inner life" misses the very point of his descriptions and prescriptions alike. Cassian's texts are ethical in focus, and are not primarily concerned with systematic development of abstract theoretical ideas concerning theology, soteriology, or ecclesiology. Cassian's interest in theorizing the ascetic life is for monastics in Gaul *to practice it*. From Cassian's practical perspective, there is no separation between practice and theory—his texts are meant to help monks think through how they should act in community and as individuals. Even one's ability to attain divine contemplation depends on every practice, as Cassian figures contemplation as "depending on the quality of our living and purity of our hearts."⁸⁸ Cassian thus poses important practically-oriented ascetic complements to the theoretically-oriented doctrinal views that were to become canonical for the Catholic church. Cassian's account of ethical formation can thus contribute to the reappraisal of the ethics articulated in the history of Christianity.

Introducing the *Institutes* and the *Conferences*

Cassian's two major works, the *Institutes* and the *Conferences*, are intended for an audience of monks in southern Gaul during a time when people were still working out the contours of monasticism. His epistolary exchange starts with Bishop Castor of Apt (north of Marseilles), whose apparent request for guidance results in Cassian's dedication

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*Conf.*1.15.

of the *Institutes* in 419 to him.⁸⁹ As Harmless notes: “Instead of miracles, Cassian sets out ‘institutes’ (*instituti*). He chose his vocabulary with care. The word means ‘rules,’ but more broadly, the sense is closer to ‘foundational principles.’”⁹⁰

In mid-420, Cassian addresses the first part of the *Conferences*, including Books 1-10, to Leontius, brother of Castor and bishop of Fréjus (the diocese for the monastic island center of Lérins), and the “holy brother” Helladius.⁹¹ Cassian dedicates his second set of the *Conferences*, Books 11-17, to Honoratus (superior of the cenobium at Lérins) and to Eucherius, a monk of Lérins, purportedly so that they do not have to make the perilous journey to Egypt themselves.⁹² The third set of *Conferences*, Books 18-24, then, are addressed to four monks living on the Isles d'Hyères, which Stewart calls the Stoechadic islands, off the coast of modern-day Marseilles: Jovinian, Minervius, and Leontius (who are unknown outside of Cassian) are praised for their encouragement of cenobitic and anchoritic ways of life, and Theodore, who would succeed Leontius as the bishop of Fréjus, is also applauded by Cassian.⁹³

Dedicating works to such a “broad network of bishops and monks,” Stewart suggests, indicates that Cassian has a level of authority and clout in both monastic and ecclesial circles, perhaps stemming from his association with John Chrysostom.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ *Inst.*Pref.1-2. Although Castor’s diocese lacked cenobia, there were other monasteries in Gaul and Marseilles (such as Proculus’ community). Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 17.

⁹⁰ Harmless, *Desert Harmless*, 379.

⁹¹ *Conf.*Pref.1 2-3; *Conf.*9.1. See also, Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 18.

⁹² *Conf.*Pref.2.1-2.

⁹³ Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 13.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* “This array of contacts, both impressive and quickly established, suggests that he must have arrived in Gaul as something of a recognized authority on monastic and ecclesiastical

Cassian's ecclesial and monastic goals, like the figures he addresses, are firmly intertwined, and it is a mistake to separate his texts into "for" cenobites (monastics living in highly regulated communities) or "for" anchorites (ascetics living alone yet in proximity to other anchorites). His texts reflect a fascinating tension between tradition and innovation—he affirms the need for traditional rules not individual preference, establishing a set order for the liturgy and system of psalmody, while also urging ascetics to make the practices their own and moderate their *askēsis* to their geographical, physical, and psychological abilities.⁹⁵ Neither purely cenobitic nor anchoritic, neither purely traditionalist nor revolutionary, Cassian's texts present a complex set of issues and remedies for complex contexts.

Nevertheless, Cassian's advice is simple in a way: follow the wisdom of the east, notably Egypt.⁹⁶ Both works address the life of the ascetic in monastic community, prescribing features as basic as what to wear and as complex as ideals on unceasing prayer. From the literal and mundane to the spiritual and complex, Cassian thereby presents in his two works a comprehensive framing for the Christian monastic way of life.⁹⁷ While the two texts differ in emphasis—the *Institutes* address the core components of monasticism and the *Conferences* teases out the more challenging ascetic practices—

matters. Much of this stature can be explained by his association with a great hero of the early fifth-century, the bishop of Constantinople, John Chrysostom.”(Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 13.)

⁹⁵ *Inst.*2.3.4-5, 4.16.3; *Inst.*2.1-3.1.

⁹⁶ *Inst.*Pref.3. Claudia Rapp argues that the desert of Egypt was understood in three primary ways: as a geographical setting, as a “state of mind,” and as a “typological landscape.”(Rapp, “Desert, City, and Countryside,” 111.)

⁹⁷ As Christopher Kelly describes, “The prefaces to his works indicate an active engagement with the developing monastic movement and its leaders in the West.”(Kelly, *Cassian's Conferences*, 9.)

they form a necessary unity. Together, they can be seen as addressing the monastic as a whole.

In the *Institutes* and the *Conferences*, Cassian addresses the myriad concerns that the male monk may encounter while pursuing such ways of life. He gives a rich sense of how the monks' everyday lives are constituted, from the proper dress to the proper food, from the relations between fellow monks to the relation to God, from the reading of scripture to the contemplative practices of unceasing prayer. Taking these many dimensions of one's life into account, and frankly addressing the anxieties of fellow monks, Cassian schematizes a rich way of life for Christian (primarily male) monastics, using the desert elders to illustrate ideal ways of living, while addressing the struggles of cultivating virtues and mitigating vices. Consider, for example, Cassian's description of Egyptian desert elders who contrast with the relatively undisciplined monastics in Gaul and Palestine alike:

For, among [the Egyptian elders], the offices that we are obliged to render to the Lord at different hours and at intervals of time, at the call of the summoner, are celebrated continuously and spontaneously throughout the course of the whole day, in tandem with their work. For they are constantly doing manual labor alone in their cells in such a way that they almost never omit meditating on the psalms and on other parts of Scripture, and to this they add entreaties and prayers at every moment, taking up the whole day in offices that we celebrate at fixed times. ... For what is unceasingly offered is greater than what is rendered at particular moments, and a voluntary service is more pleasing than functions that are carried out by canonical obligation.

Apud illos etenim haec officia, quae domino soluere per distinctiones horarum et temporis interualla cum admonitione compulsoris adigimur, per totum diei spatium iugiter cum operis adiectione spontanee celebrantur. ita namque ab eis incessanter operatio manuum priuatim per cellulas exercetur, ut psalmorum quoque uel ceterarum scripturarum meditatio numquam penitus omittatur, cui preces et orationes per singula

*momenta miscentes in his officiis, quae nos statuto tempore celebramus, totum diei tempus absumunt. ... plus enim est id quod incessanter offertur quam quod per temporis interualla persoluitur, et gratius uoluntarium munus quam functiones quae canonica compulsionem redduntur.*⁹⁸

Cassian extols the Egyptian ascetics for habituating themselves in practices so that their lives become a continual prayer—in contrast with the Palestinian and Mesopotamian monastics who need to have set hours for prayer to mark the sacred moments of the day. This passage is fascinating for the centrality Cassian gives to bodily practices (“constantly doing manual labor” [*incessanter operatio manuum*]) and continuous ritualized prayer (“celebrated continuously and spontaneously” [*adiectio spontanea celebrantur*]), in tandem with scriptural reading practices (“meditating on the psalms and on other parts of Scripture” [*psalmorum quoque uel ceterarum scripturarum meditation*]), all within an organized but not merely routinized community. It is not canonical obligation that inspires good behavior in the Egyptian ascetics—such ethical formation through manual labor, meditation on the scriptures, and continual prayer itself constitutes the profession of the ascetic and one needs no other enticement. My dissertation will focus on these notable practices that constitute ethical formation and the ascetic profession alike.

- Structural Overview of Texts

The first text, the *Institutes*, was probably written over five years. The first four books on the basics of the cenobia were distributed as a free-standing *Rule*, concerned as they are with monastic dress (book 1), prayer and psalmody at night (book 2), prayer and psalmody during the day (book 3), and the heart of the *Institutes* where the cenobitic life

⁹⁸ *Inst.*3.2.

is described in short (book 4). The following eight books detail the eight principal demons or temptations to which all people are subject, but that ascetics feel even more keenly as they engage the practices of ethical formation. A book each is dedicated to the eight temptations and their remedies, including gluttony, fornication, avarice, anger, sadness, acedia, vainglory, and pride.⁹⁹

The second text, the *Conferences*, is composed of three different parts, each of which is prefaced with a letter by Cassian addressed to different Gallic authorities. In the *Conferences*, Cassian as author speaks in the voice of fifteen different *abbas* who are the literary hosts of at least one conference each, employing a kind of ventriloquism similar to that which Derek Kruger notes as common to hagiographers in late antiquity.¹⁰⁰ In his study of Cassian's scriptural exegetical style, Christopher Kelly states that the *Conferences* would fill this absence, bringing the desert figures to Gaul.¹⁰¹ Cassian performs this transportation through dialogue in the question and answer format known in antiquity as *erotapokriseis*, in Greek, or *quaestiones*, in Latin.¹⁰² Germanus, as the elder

⁹⁹ *Inst.* 5-12.

¹⁰⁰ Derek Kruger, *Writing and Holiness: The Practice of Authorship in the Early Christian East* (University Park, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 102.

¹⁰¹ "Additionally, though, the *Conferences* itself could take the place of the Desert Fathers; it could embody the wisdom and discipline of the holiest men of renown in literary form. Constant engagement with the *Conferences*' mimetic exegesis of scripture would then, in time, create new *abbas* as they began to embody the texts in the same way as their desert counterparts." (Kelly, *Cassian's Conferences*, 6-7.)

¹⁰² "In terms of literary style, the *Conferences* draw on (and Christianize) the classical genre known as *erotapokriseis*, or question-and-answer section." (Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 386.)

"«Erotapokriseis»-literature has thus far been neglected by most scholars. ... «Erotapokriseis» - or «quaestiones», as they were called in Latin - occur in various types of literature, but these all have in common that they use the form of questions and answers in one way or another." (Annelie Volgers and Claudio Zamagni, eds. *Erotapokriseis: Early Christian Question-and-Answer Literature in Context* [Leuven: Peeters, 2004].) Kelly, *Cassian's Conferences*, 14.

of the two companions, asks the *abbas* various questions—oftentimes asking for clarification on an earlier point or raising questions that are particularly embarrassing or troublesome.

The first set of *Conferences* presents the basic complement to what Cassian writes in the *Institutes*, with the entire ascetic progression schematized through ten books. These books cover the goal and end of the monk (book 1), the practice of discretion (book 2), the three renunciations (book 3), the relationship between the flesh and the spirit (book 4), the eight temptations (book 5, as a synthesis of the last eight books of the *Institutes*), the question of theodicy (book 6), the relationship between demons and humans (book 7), demonology in its cosmic origins (book 8), the Lord's prayer (book 9), and fiery prayer as the apex of the ascetic life (book 10). The second set of books provides an addendum that Cassian claims as necessary for the first part. These cover the notion of perfection (book 11), chastity (book 12), divine agency (book 13), scriptural interpretation (book 14), divine gifts (book 15), friendship (book 16), and promise-making (book 17). The final set of books addresses additional issues that likely came up as Cassian was dispensing wisdom to Gaulish communities. These include treatments of the three kinds of monastics (book 18), the goal of the anchoritic life and the cenobitic life (book 19), the mark of repentance and the beginning of reparation (book 20), Pentecost (book 21), nocturnal illusions (book 22), sinfulness (book 23), and mortification (book 24).

Within each of these conferences, Cassian has the *abbas* treat an expansive set of concerns and ideas, at times seemingly unconnected to its central theme. His book on friendship, for example, focuses on how to negotiate anger while living in monastic

communities.¹⁰³ His book on nocturnal illusions has the most extended treatment on Christology in his works. His book on divine agency is actually a book exploring human agency.¹⁰⁴ However disconnected these treatments might seem, however, Cassian always keeps the space open for his readers to glean the deeper connections between these ideas. As part of his very practice, then, Cassian's works ought to be read through his own hermeneutic.

Outline of Dissertation

To develop Cassian's view of ethical agency, this dissertation will unfold in two parts. Part I focuses on two central theoretical issues: the paradigm for the human person and the understanding of human agency. Chapter 1 first treats three promising revisions to recent notions of subjectivity and the human person by scholars in religious studies. Chapter 1 then turns to Foucault as influential for each of these three critical moves—notably in his latest work on ethics—who yet incorrectly locates in early Christianity, and notably Cassian, a rejection of these three constructive possibilities. Chapter 2 then looks at these theoretical issues in Cassian's account of ethical formation, which imbricates the paradigm for the human person and the understanding of human agency. Analyzing Cassian's view of human nature, divine agency, and demonic threats brings into focus how ethical agency—understood as the enacted ability to cultivate a desired disposition that integrates multiple forms of bodily, affective, and intellectual awareness—works

¹⁰³ We will see in Chapter 5 the connection between these foci.

¹⁰⁴ We will consider this more in Chapter 2.

synergistically with other agencies. Cassian's anthropology, we will see, not only *enables* but *requires* such a robust view of ethical agency.

Part II turns to the practices that constitute ethical formation on the every-day level and the literary effects Cassian uses to render his *Conferences* part of this ethical formation. Chapter 3 explores how Cassian's physical practices—consumptive and manual labor—highlight the work of the body, but always as shaped by emotions and beliefs. Chapter 4 considers Cassian's reading practices to see how the emotions are central to the cultivation of dispositions modeled off of exemplary figures (in scripture and the Egyptian desert alike), a cultivation requiring rich embodied and inter-social engagement. Chapter 5 analyzes social inter-relationality—through friendship, liturgical communities, and the spiritual advisor relationship—as central to ethical formation, through the social constitution of beliefs and practices, and the motivating deployment of affect.

Analyzing these practices shows how Cassian's integrated view of the human person entails a view of ethical agency that requires not only reason, but also the other aspects constituting the human person: the bodily (Chapter 3), the emotional (Chapter 4), and the inter-relational (Chapter 5). Each chapter correlates with a specific theoretical emphasis in the first half of Chapter 1 and reconsiders Foucault's characterization of Cassian as subordinating body to mind, affirming a highly intellectualive "will," and disavowing the social shaping of subjects. Foucault's misreading of Cassian acts as a foil for this dissertation's theorization of ethical agency, although I still follow much of his methodology and constructive aspirations.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 focus on discrete ethical practices that illustrate the potential for transformation (as opposed to renunciation) of the human person theorized as a possibility in Chapter 2. To understand the possibilities for human agency requires understanding the human as rational, embodied, affective, *and* inter-relational. With this integrated paradigm in mind, we see in Part II how ethical formation necessarily engages all of these dimensions of the person and we note how Cassian's texts themselves model exemplarity. Through these literary strategies, we will gain additional insight into the mechanisms by which one becomes habituated in daily practices, rendering second nature and spontaneous actions and reactions, through intentionally cultivated dispositions. Such practices are structured, as Cassian shows through his narrative portrayal of the young Cassian and Germanus, but open to self-stylization and modification. The ethos with which one engages the practices, and the ethos fostered through their engagement, show how engaging ethics as a way of life requires transforming them by making them your own.

The three chapters in Part II thus develop the daily practices needed to enable the theoretical paradigm established in Part I. Approaches to theorizing the human person that emphasize the bodily, affective, and inter-relational are brought together, as I analyze how Cassian's texts approach the person as integrated and capable of ethical formation. Cassian's texts, I will show, enable us to think about what people *can* do in a world where other forces—social, political, geopolitical, and physiological—so heavily influence one's ability to act. Considering how these features mutually inform each other gives insight into the effectiveness of Cassian's ethical program and can help scholars think through questions of ethics today.

PART I

Theorizing the Human Person and Agency

CHAPTER 1

Theorizing the Human Person and Ethical Agency in Religious Studies

The 2011-2012 cycle in U.S. politics featured striking usage of terminology that at first glance seems mundane and everyday, that of the “person.” In the contested yet upheld Citizens United ruling, “corporate personhood” was introduced as a way to extend rights held by individual persons to corporations, thereby enabling corporate donations to heavily influence political elections. In another controversial example, the pro-life organization PersonhoodUSA promoted legislation that would define “personhood” at the moment of conception, opening up fury over the compromising of women’s reproductive rights.¹⁰⁵ The term “personhood” in these two examples has two features: it is both ambiguous and incredibly important for upholding human rights. These examples are singular in many ways, but I call attention to them to illustrate how contested the definition of the person is in contemporary debate.

Such contestation is not just a contemporary phenomenon. The category of the “human person” is not a straightforward and natural one. As Michel Foucault develops

¹⁰⁵ Amy Goodman, “Citizens United,” *Democracy Now*, September 5, 2012, accessed July 12, 2013, http://www.democracynow.org/topics/citizens_united/2; “Mississippi Rejects Bill to Grant Pre-Embryonic ‘Personhood,’ Outlaw Fertility Aid, Birth Control,” *Democracy Now*, September 11, 2011, accessed July 12, 2013, http://www.democracynow.org/2011/11/9/mississippi_rejects_bill_to_grant_pre; Erik Eckholm, “Push for ‘Personhood’ Amendment Represents New Tack in Abortion Fight,” *New York Times*, October 25, 2011, accessed July 12, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/26/us/politics/personhood-amendments-would-ban-nearly-all-abortions.html?pagewanted=all>.

from an insight of Friedrich Nietzsche, such categories are historically and culturally shaped.¹⁰⁶ If we want to understand our contemporary discourse, then, we have to understand the genealogy of its cultural production. Contrary to many claims about modern secularization, philosophical, political, and cultural discourses still reflect the influence of Christian theory and practice on its production in the early modern period. It is therefore important to consider the contingency of the category of “person”—amongst others that this dissertation takes up, such as “ethics” and “agency”—in the history of Christian thought, in part due to how western philosophical and critical thought since late antiquity has been heavily influenced by Christian political and theological concerns.¹⁰⁷ In order to look at how understandings of the human person are framed today, a genealogical investigation into how categories have developed over time, both in continuities of influence and divergences of socio-cultural context is necessary. Studying the history of the concept of “person” and how it is deployed in specific contexts requires consideration of social and power structures and entails thinking about human agency.

In his multi-volume work on the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault has attempted just this, advancing a compelling genealogy of the human subject by looking back to the ancient world for resources to rethink the contemporary human subject and ethical formation.¹⁰⁸ While the ancient Greek context, and to a different degree the Greco-

¹⁰⁶ Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York, NY: Penguin, 1986). Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Vintage, 1989).

¹⁰⁷ Michael Carrithers, Steven Collins, and Steven Lukes, eds., *The Category of the Person: Anthropology, Philosophy, History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

¹⁰⁸ Michel Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress, Interview with Paul Rabinow,” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York, NY: Penguin, 1986).

Roman context, affirmed the ability of the subject to form oneself (really, himself) through an aesthetics of existence, this ethical care of the self is undermined in early Christianity in his reading.¹⁰⁹ For Foucault, disciplinary practices increasingly involve renunciation, as opposed to self-stylization, of the body and desires. In early Christianity, the tight connection between sexuality and religious practice focuses his attention on the ways in which agency is increasingly undermined, just as individual interiority is burgeoning.

Foucault makes Cassian central to this transition away from classical ethical sensibilities and towards modern disciplinary subjectivity.¹¹⁰ Cassian, in Foucault's reading, inaugurates modern interiority as an outcome of his monastic obsession with renouncing one's sexuality, and by extension, one's self. In this narrative, one's interiority is to be evacuated of the influence of any bodily and affective desire. One's interiority, then, stands in as the primary marker for one's self, since this self is dissociated from concerns of the body and emotions. Foucault sees in Cassian's texts roots of the modern split affirming beliefs and interiority, on the one hand, and renouncing the body and exteriority, on the other hand. This "inward-turn" involves a host of disciplinary practices, by which the person cedes his own will to that of a superior who diagnoses the degree of one's disavowal of bodily and affective influence. This

¹⁰⁹ Michel Foucault, *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, Vol. 1. Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, NY: New Press, 2000), 204; *History of Sexuality. Vol. 2: The Use of Pleasure* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1990); *History of Sexuality. Vol. 3: The Care of the Self* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1990); *Philosophie Anthologie* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 2004).

¹¹⁰ Michel Foucault, "The Battle for Chastity," in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, Vol. 1. Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, NY: New Press, 2000).

diagnostic exercise—which occurs for Foucault in the act of confession—subordinates the novice to the elder, and posits the goal of full transparency of one’s self to the elder. Such a view of transparency elides one’s “self” with one’s “interiority,” which must be rendered visible.

Foucault’s reading of Cassian, however, so narrowly focuses on two phenomena—sexuality and confession—that he does not adequately grasp Cassian’s project and misreads even these two phenomena in crucial ways. At the same time, I find interesting the *ways* that Foucault misreads Cassian, because of how Foucault reads modern concerns with interiority back into Cassian. In the following chapters of the dissertation, I will argue how Foucault’s selective reading of Cassian significantly differs from Cassian’s texts read from a historical-critical perspective. In this chapter, I will analyze Foucault’s reading of Cassian to set up my counter-readings of Cassian in the following chapters. Re-reading Cassian is not only helpful for advancing a *critique* of Foucault—for my historical-critical reading of Cassian’s texts *also* yields *constructive* resources for thinking about human agency and ethical formation. To situate this constructive project, then, I turn first to theories of the human person in contemporary scholarship in religious studies. Cassian’s texts importantly understand the human person as co-constituting bodies, emotions, beliefs, and inter-relationality in a way that resonates with contemporary discussions in religious studies, particularly in religious ethics, that shift theoretical emphasis away from prioritizing belief, interiority, and the cognitive when discussing human agency. Cassian’s texts provide an exemplary occasion to consider these discourses not piecemeal (as typically done) but as integrated in the human person. However, each of these accounts do not give an adequate account of the person

from an integrated and lived perspective—where cognitive, affective, bodily, and inter-relational aspects all inform the person’s agency and ethical formation. Are there, I ask, alternative ways of looking at the person and agency that start from a unified and integrated person and a richer sense of ethical formation through practices, emotions, *and* beliefs?

The Subject, Subjectivity, and the Human Person in Religious Studies

- *Bodies that Matter*

In the last thirty years in religious studies, scholars have turned to discuss the body, embodiment, and practices when thinking about the agency of the human person as a subject. These emphases have felicitously moved theories beyond singular attention to beliefs, rationality, and intention. Constance Furey, in her 2012 article “Body, Society, and Subjectivity in Religious Studies,” analyzes the methodological developments in religious studies as a field, noting in particular the disjunction between belief and body in the human person, stemming from its Protestant background.¹¹¹ As religious studies has been transformed over the last thirty years by work on the body and social power, Furey summarizes, “This attention to body and society corrected the Protestant-style tendency to equate religion with interiority and belief, and encouraged religionists to think about

¹¹¹ Constance M. Furey, “Body, Society, and Subjectivity in Religious Studies,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80.1 (2012): 7-33. Central to this discussion is the methodological shift towards seeing practices as primary to beliefs. With theorists like Catherine Bell, bodily and ritual practices generate the beliefs that then serve as ideological support for the set of practices established. Bell asks: “If ritual is not merely a mask for power, how does ritual do what we keep saying it does: How does it actually inculcate cultural or political values, converting beliefs about another world into facts about this one and vice versa, and ‘inventing’ traditions even as it purports to be transmitting them?”(Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992], 194.)

materiality, sex, and gender as theoretical categories rather than facts on the ground.”¹¹² While the human person as a religious subject was elided with “interiority” and “belief” in the Protestant influenced philosophical discourses, recent work in religious studies (amongst other disciplines) has sought to undermine this emphasis. Instead, attention to “the body, gender, emotions, or praxis” and the theoretical categories of “materiality, sex, and gender” reverses the equation of religious subjectivity with “interiority and belief.”

The shift in emphasis, while coherent and laudatory as an alternative paradigm and mood of inquiry, frequently lacks rich conceptual clarity about what exactly is being theorized when talking about the subject, the body, and subjectivity, an obscurantism reflecting a fundamental difficulty in approaches to understanding the human person and the religious subject. What, then, do we mean when we discuss the body? Sarah Coakley’s 1997 volume, *Religion and The Body*, provides context for the continuing problem of how exactly to define “the body” across humanistic disciplines, notably in relation to the “religious subject.” Coakley points out that despite the voguish turn to “the body,” practice theory, and *habitus* (as embodied habits of action) since the 1970s, what is meant by “the body” has remained obscure. It has, in a sense, become a holding vessel for everything left over after stripping away the centuries-long primacy given to reason, theory, and belief. “The body” is “what is left” when attempts to overcome Cartesian mind/body dualisms chucked the mind entirely.¹¹³ Ironically, this overcorrection has recapitulated similar disjunctions, setting up “the body” as a site to be passively

¹¹² Furey, “Body, Society, and Subjectivity in Religious Studies,” 9.

¹¹³ Sarah Coakley, “Introduction: Religion and the Body,” in *Religion and the Body*, ed. Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 3.

manipulated.¹¹⁴ The language of our “having the body,” as Coakley describes, reveals a basic problem: “the body” is seen as an object that the subject “I” has (“we *have*”).¹¹⁵ The subject-position of the “I” relates purely to an internal form of “consciousness”; the subject then has the “body” as its object. The “I”-subject thus becomes the privileged locus of the person that then uses the body-object to pursue “its” needs. The rational and autonomous subject of action with its zealous affirmation of agency was untenable.¹¹⁶ However, the body as fully determined by social formations swings too far the other way, undermining human agency.

This language indicates that complexities exist with this view of the body since the status of the body as socially determined calls into question the role of human agency. Influenced by both Marcel Mauss’ and Pierre Bourdieu’s accounts of the *habitus* as socially formed techniques of the body, Talal Asad emphasizes how there is no “natural” and biological “given” way that human beings act, prior to engagement with culture.¹¹⁷ Asad emphasizes how the body is not brute physicality unshaped by culture and therefore “natural” to the human being. Bodily practices are themselves culturally informed and developed via imitation of those deemed desirable and interdiction against those undesirable. The body is not a neutral ground upon which cultural symbols are overlaid; a

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 4. Coakley cites Mary Douglas’ view of “the body” as a procrustean bed of cultural obsessions, agreeing that “[j]ust as it is true that everything symbolizes the body, so it is equally true that the body symbolizes everything else.”(Coakley, “Introduction: Religion and the Body,” 3.)

¹¹⁵ Coakley, “Introduction: Religion and the Body,” 3.

¹¹⁶ Coakley, “Introduction: Religion and the Body,” 4.

¹¹⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990); *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977). Marcel Mauss, «Les techniques du corps» *Journal de Psychologie*, XXXII, ne, 3-4 (15 mars - 15 avril 1936).

point that Coakley calls a “naïve approach” to the body, taking it as “a ‘natural’ datum of uncontentious physicality upon which religious traditions have then spun their various interpretations.”¹¹⁸ Asad makes the even stronger claim that “‘the body’ is socially constructed” in the anthropological view he describes in Mauss and that he himself (amongst so many theorists) adopts.¹¹⁹ While he valuably emphasizes how culture shapes bodily practices, a robust view of human agency is undermined.

- Emotions and Affect

Furey, for example, points to a huge omission in the treatment of the religious subject: inter-personal relationships necessarily shape people’s interests and fidelities. However, this view of the inter-relational human subject also requires a robust account of the bodily and affective aspects of the person. Other efforts to theorize how subjects are socially shaped take a similar turn in affect studies, decentering the primacy of rational cognition, opening up how the subject is affectively shaped in response to stimuli or influences. Kant, in his *Metaphysics of Morals*, for instance, refers to the German *Affekten* as an emotional and unreflective response.¹²⁰ William James uses this German notion of *Affect* to define his own view of emotion as “a general seizure of excitement.”¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Coakley, “Introduction: Religion and the Body,” 3.

¹¹⁹ Talal Asad, “Remarks on the Anthropology of the Body,” in *Religion and the Body*, ed. Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 49.

¹²⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 166.

¹²¹ William James, “The Physical Basis of Emotion,” in *Essays in Psychology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 307.

In the later part of the twentieth century, affect acquires a technical usage where subjects are affected by other influences in a net field of distributed forces indicated as affects. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari further complicate the understanding of affect, theorizing that “Affects are no longer feelings or affections; they go beyond the strength of those who undergo them.”¹²² Deleuze proceeds to use affect, in a lecture on Baruch Spinoza, to refer to “every mode of thought insofar as it is non-representational.”¹²³

This view of affect has motivated a variety of theorists associated with the burgeoning field of affect theory. Brian Massumi, the translator for Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*, characterizes affect as both embodied and pre-cognitive, inhabiting the interval between biological action and psychological reaction in the human subject. Affect theory, thus like practice theory and the turn to the body, helpfully displaces the centrality of cognition and language, giving insight into the biological and non-representational dimensions of subject formation. I think affect theory helpfully illustrates how social formations can produce certain kinds of subjects through non-conscious habituation.

However, while affect theory corrects for the over-emphases on cognition and language, it tends to take flight away from it altogether. Ruth Leys incisively critiques this theory for trying to render affect “independent of signification and meaning.”¹²⁴ Affect cannot be completely separated from meaning, however, and taking an “anti-

¹²² Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, “Percept, Affect, Concept,” in *The Continental Aesthetics Reader* (Florence, KY: Psychology Press, 2000), 465.

¹²³ Charles Stivale, *Gilles Deleuze: Key Concepts* (Quebec: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005), 161.

¹²⁴ Ruth Leys, “The Turn to Affect: A Critique,” *Critical Inquiry*, 37.3 (2011): 434-472, 443.

intentionalist” stance leaves little room for intellectual processing and for deliberative agency. I am especially concerned with how affect theorists tend to emphasize the ways in which people are affected, but do not adequately theorize how people can affect themselves in ethically salient ways—moves that preclude a robust view of human agency. By considering the role of affect in contemporary affect theory in relation to Cassian’s etymologically linked term *affectus*—that I will understand as a disposition to action, emotion, and belief—I will show in Chapter 4 (in particular) how Cassian’s notion of *affectus* enables richer ways of thinking about human agency and ethical praxis than affect in affect theory.

- Inter-relationality

Theorists of the body and affect, then, theorize the social formation of the subject from multiple angles. Foucault plays a central role in the post-structuralist emphasis on the social formation of subjects, and I will go into his account in more depth in the next half of the chapter. To frame its role in religious studies, however, I want to turn to how Asad focuses on social formations and the way that structural disparities end up taking a normalized “face” through this process. Following Foucault, Asad does not assume that intention is central to the status of agents, in part because he wants to avoid the emphasis on beliefs and mental concepts characteristic of “traditional” philosophy in the western tradition. Asad does not think that mental content can explain how discourses shape practices, and more broadly, how power relations shape behavior. Discursive formations shape individuals in ways totally beyond their conscious and intentional grasp and consent.

I ask how, *exactly*, Asad sees power shaping behavior, if not through conscious consent. To do this, he turns to the body, stressing it as the surface upon which social discourses are marked. The “body,” then, becomes the locus of the individual whose practices and behaviors are formed by the social practices that surround her. However, Asad’s emphasis on “body” over and against mental content unnecessarily renders the body the docile plaything of state formations. Asad’s focus on the “body” renders ethical agency merely a function of taught bodies without allowing for the force of the deliberative and affective in the individual’s actions. Asad elides the body with the human subject in a way that leaves him scrambling to locate the source of agency in the human person; a problem with which theorists like Judith Butler and Saba Mahmood also contend.¹²⁵

Giving an exemplary critique of the religious studies discourse, Furey helpfully identifies the theoretical problem with emphasizing the “body” as just discursively formed: theoretical questions about subjectivity ironically fuel *both* the turn to the body *and* what the turn was meant to reject. She argues that attempts to understand subjectivity better have ironically recapitulated problems with viewing the subject in isolation and autonomous abstraction. Rejecting the perpetuation of “an individualist notion of the religious subject,” Furey calls for a more robust and inter-relational understanding of the religious subject.¹²⁶ While scholars have made the necessary move to study ‘bodies’ always in relation to the social forces that shape them, she argues, “the religious subject

¹²⁵ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993); *Excitable Speech* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1997); *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York, NY: Fordham, 2005); *Precarious Life* (New York, NY: Verso, 2006); Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

¹²⁶ Furey, “Body, Society, and Subjectivity in Religious Studies,” 7.

stands alone in a crowd, participating in communal rituals, subject to religious authorities and disciplinary practices, but oddly detached from intimate relationships.”¹²⁷ Her principal objection is that the religious subject is understood as discursively constituted without recognizing how she or he is shaped by more intimate relationships.

In order to realize the potential of Furey’s emphasis on inter-relationality, however, I argue that a fuller account of the person requires recognition of not just the body *or* belief *or* affects as constitutive of the religious subject. Neither, too, is the social formation of body and psyche the sum of the human subject. There is no need to exclude the role of consciousness and reflexivity in this process.¹²⁸ Rather, I take these set of discourses as an invitation to consider multiple epistemic sites constituting the human person shaped by disciplinary practices requiring both discursive social formations and the individual’s particular deliberative, affective, and bodily engagement.

- Religious Ethics

I situate my own constructive project following what Thomas Lewis terms the “anthropological turn in ethics,” involving “the close relationship between accounts of what human beings are and ethical ideals for what humans should do and become.”¹²⁹ Characterized by a focus on practices, bodies, and emotions as an alternative to a focus

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Here, I follow Amy Hungerford’s observation that too much emphasis on practice has excluded the importance of belief in religious studies. Amy Hungerford, *Postmodern Belief: American Literature and Religion since 1960* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

¹²⁹ Thomas A. Lewis, “Ethnography, Anthropology, and Comparative Religious Ethics,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 38.3 (2010): 398. Thomas A. Lewis, Jonathan Wyn Schofer, Aaron Stalnaker, and Mark Berkson. “Anthropos and Ethics: Categories of Inquiry and Procedures of Comparison,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 33.2 (2005): 177. See also: Lewis, “Frames of Comparison: Anthropology and Inheriting Traditional Practices,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 33.2 (2005): 225–53; *Freedom and Tradition in Hegel: Reconsidering Anthropology, Ethics, and Religion* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005).

on reason and deliberative judgment, the scholarly approach in religious ethics involves an expanded set of questions and foci involving the means of cultivating virtue: the role of emotions in relation to choice, the materiality of the body, and transformative ethical practices. Influenced by the scholarship of Alasdair MacIntyre, Martha Nussbaum, Charles Taylor and Lee Yearley, scholars in religious ethics like Elizabeth Bucar, Thomas Lewis, Jonathan Schofer, and Aaron Stalnaker have emphasized concerns relevant to this embodied agent, such as emotions, embodiment, and social practices.¹³⁰

Schofer, for example, looks at “virtue and ethical formation” in three respects through a) conceptions of the self, b) ideal traits and behaviors, and c) practices for attaining this ideal.¹³¹ Stalnaker calls attention to the tendency of neo-Aristotelians to privilege intellectualist virtues over more embodied forms of skilled practice. He argues that skills need to be evaluated as important in moral development and that the cultivation of certain dispositions is needed in order to form oneself as a particular kind of virtuous subject.¹³² I follow, too, Lewis’ emphasis on the practices of everyday life.¹³³

¹³⁰ Lee Yearley, *Mencius and Aquinas: Theories of Virtue and Conceptions of Courage* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990).

¹³¹ Jonathan Wyn Schofer, “Embodiment and Virtue in a Comparative Perspective,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 35.4 (2007): 715-728; *The Making of a Sage: A Study in Rabbinic Ethics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005); “Self, Subject, and Chosen Subjection: Rabbinic Ethics and Comparative Possibilities,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 33.2 (2005): 255–91.

¹³² Aaron Stalnaker, “Virtue as Mastery in Early Confucianism,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 38.3 (2010): 407. Stalnaker, “Comparative Religious Ethics and the Problem of ‘Human Nature,’” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 33.2 (2005): 187–224; *Overcoming Our Evil: Human Nature and Spiritual Exercises in Xunzi and Augustine* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2006); Stalnaker, “Judging Others: History, Ethics, and the Purposes of Comparison,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 36.3 (2008): 425-444.

¹³³ Thomas A. Lewis, “Ethical Formation and Ordinary Life in the Modern West: The Case of Work,” in *Religious Ethics in a Time of Globalism*, eds. Elizabeth M. Bucar and Aaron Stalnaker (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

Although my line of inquiry is theoretically motivated, and makes reference to Foucault's interpretive agenda, my analysis is always driven by Cassian's texts.¹³⁴ Methodologically, my constructive *use* of the text, then, is grounded in faithful *description* of the text. Reading Cassian's work with sensitivity to interpretive challenges—in a dialectical encounter between modern categories and what the texts suggest were central to Cassian (and his interlocutors)—involves a continual negotiation of how to define the human being.¹³⁵ Emphasizing historical and descriptive accuracy becomes a way of ensuring that one does not unreflectively impose one's own categories of analysis on one's subject matter. Imposing modern categories of "interiority," I argue, limits the interpretation of Cassian's texts to the self-renunciatory and obedient dimensions of human activity. Reading the texts with more attention to their other foci opens new ways of conceiving of the human person and her ethical capacities. Focusing particularly on the relationship between emotions, beliefs, communities, and bodily practices as central factors in human ethical activity, Cassian's texts bring into focus the possibilities of human action and accountability.

Possibilities for an Integrated Paradigm for the Person

¹³⁴ "Most importantly, the textual analyses have conditioned my approach to vulnerability and ethics, so the formulations emerged through and anticipate the studies that follow." (Jonathan Wyn Schofer, *Confronting Vulnerability* [Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010], 6.)

¹³⁵ Twiss outlines the first category of comparative religious ethics, where inquiry into selfhood and moral agency acts as the umbrella for considering various types of ethical formation. Twiss uses Yearley as representative of this "thicker description" approach where "robust comparison" is engaged between two thinkers or normative concepts. (Sumner B. Twiss, "Comparison in Religious Ethics," in *The Blackwell Companion to Religious Ethics*, ed. William Schweiker [Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2005], 147-155.)

Accepting these concerns as central, I argue that a third way of viewing the human being incorporates strengths from the views of human agency as fully discursive and socially produced or fully rational and individual; this third way offers a means of dissolving the *tertium non datur* between structure-as-determinative and agency-as-autonomy divide. Cassian's texts present a fascinating complex of concerns that cover the practical and theoretical aspects of life in an integrated fashion, offering an ethics that recognizes the reciprocal engagement between beliefs and bodily practices in tandem. I read his texts as allowing for a view of ethical agency that integrates the transformative mechanisms of social formation and deliberate choice.

We need, then, to theorize the human person who has affect, intention, beliefs, and desires, which develop in and through inter-personal relations. This view sees the person as a complex system constituted socially and through the mechanisms of the body, emotions, and deliberation. For this, we need an account of the religious subject that explains the mechanisms by which social, bodily, affective, and deliberative constitution take place. We need an account of what happens to individual agents as they go through this process of formation. What does the network of influences look like? How does this process not reduce to the "will" as self-determining, but bodily, affective, and inter-social supports that are constitutive of the person's self, integrated with reflexive beliefs and orientation? We can best understand what the agency of the individual looks like—not as autonomous nor as socially determined (or "just" an effect of communal practices)—when we look at the mechanisms by which the individual shapes herself in concert with a network of other agencies. By looking at how this process works on a daily basis, Cassian's texts brings together the reflective, bodily, affective, and social epistemes at the

same time. There is not just one source of knowledge—the intellective—but other epistemic regimes of the body, the affective, and the inter-social that cannot be reduced to the “meanings” known in advance in the discursive register.

What we require is an account, then, of the lived person; an account of the human person that we can recognize as ourselves, where we are thinking and agential to a limited but vital degree. Merging the concerns of existential phenomenology, exemplified by Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Simone de Beauvoir, with a post-structuralist recognition of social plurality and power formations, Iris Marion Young presents the feminist paradigm of the “lived body.” She recognizes the critiques from both sides, careful to synthesize the most theoretically productive dimensions in her own constructive account of the always-already-situated “lived body.” Young lucidly points out the central problems with phenomenology with its unitary understanding of consciousness and its lack of attention to social situatedness. Describing the critique of French social theorists, she states of the existential phenomenology: “Its concept of consciousness, even when embodied, assumes the subject as unitary and original to experience.”¹³⁶ The promise of situatedness that phenomenology brought was muted by its assumption that consciousness itself relies on a subject as unitary, a reliance which recapitulates the universalist aspirations of earlier accounts of the sovereign subject, rejected since at least Nietzsche’s later work.

This critique of the unitary subject stems from the second problem, which is insufficient recognition of how social power shapes the subject. Young states: “After reading Lacan, Foucault, Derrida, Kristeva, Deleuze, Irigaray, and Bourdieu, we cannot

¹³⁶ Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience: “Throwing Like a Girl” and Other Essays* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 7.

be so innocent as to believe that phenomenology can discover a ‘pure’ embodied experience prior to ideology and science.”¹³⁷ Indeed, there is no “universal datum” of “pure” biological body that is not interpreted and shaped through state mechanisms and ideologies of philosophy, science, and social power. Categorizations and perceptions of the world fully shape our experience of the world, so even “embodied experience” of the “lived body” is shaped through our concepts. Young’s emphasis on “lived bodies” shows how we can account for the individual experience shaped in and through the social bodies and formations, especially for ethical agency.¹³⁸

If we attend to how agency is only partially theorized in each of these discourses, we open space to think through agency from multiple different perspectives, including the lived perspective by which we can recognize ourselves as agents. This, I think is the precondition for not eliding human subjectivity with either “interior reason” or the discursive body. My position, which I will develop through the course of this dissertation, engages these different aspects of the person as a way of understanding the possibilities for ethical agency. In what ways can people be self-fashioning? What are the various influences that constitute the subject and in which ways—however minimal—can the subject constitute herself? How do we refocus the inquiry on the ways in which bodily, affective, cognitive, and inter-relational aspects constitute the person? How do we best understand the mechanisms, on a day-to-day level, by which one participates in self-

¹³⁷ Ibid., 8.

¹³⁸ Anthropologist Thomas Csordas submits a similar view, stating that “the body is a productive starting point for analyzing culture and self.”(Thomas J. Csordas, “Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology,” *Ethos* 18.1 (1990): 39.) The paradigm could then more readily shift to make central the human person as an integrated set of embodied dispositions (including thinking, acting, judging, and desiring).

formation? To address these questions, I look to history for alternative accounts of ethical agency and what “constitutes” the sphere of action for the individual agent in concert with a host of social and biological forces.

Foucault on Ethical Inquiry into Antiquity

Contestation over how to frame human agency—and what I see as the over-emphasis on one part of the person (as opposed to viewing these parts as a unity) in most theoretical discussions—precipitated my turn back to pre-modern texts and their approach to the human person. In this respect, Foucault is a foil for this dissertation as he does not declare a normative project but has confessed to being interested in history for constructive reasons. David Halperin cites one of Foucault’s last determinations on this questions of ethics, months before his death, by describing his interest in antiquity:

‘[I]f I was interested in Antiquity,’ Foucault remarked two months before his death, ‘it was because, for a whole series of reasons, the idea of a morality as obedience to a code of rules is now disappearing, has already disappeared. And to this absence of morality corresponds, must correspond, the search for an aesthetics of existence.’¹³⁹

Foucault’s declaration that obedience to a prescriptive code is weakening in the contemporary moment reveals his reasons for returning to classical Greece—thereby indicating an oblique connection between the reasons why he analyzes the ethical practices of the Greeks and the possibilities present for subject formation today.

This shift in focus, then, also assumes very different pictures of “the self.” During a lecture at Dartmouth College in 1980, Foucault describes this broadly Greco-Roman conception of “the self” through the act of confession where “the self is not something

¹³⁹ David Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), 68.

that has to be discovered or deciphered as a very obscure part of our selves. The self has, on the contrary, not to be discovered but to be constituted through the force of truth.”¹⁴⁰ “The self,” in this understanding, is not secreted away “inside” the person awaiting its discovery and production through confessional discourse. Foucault’s turn to antiquity and his development of Nietzsche’s genealogical method thus fuels my own project, as I analyze historical texts in order to understand the constructedness and contingency of modern categorizations, notably categories of “the self,” “subjectivity,” and “agency.” This method opens space for rethinking how the “human person” can be understood, as well as alternative versions of ethical formation.

While I methodologically follow Foucault’s return to antiquity for resources for rethinking ethics, I am critical of his resultant reading of these historical texts, notably his treatment of Cassian. I noted philosophical issues with Foucault’s treatment of the late antique Christian texts in particular, especially on questions of ethical formation. Because his reading is influential on contemporary readings of Cassian and so reflective of modern assumptions about “interiority,” it is crucial to critically assess his reading of Cassian.

The texts of Cassian are an exemplary resource to reconceive the paradigm of the human person, in part because of how Foucault figures him as the genealogical intimator of the modern split subject. The distance is notable from Foucault’s reading of Cassian to a rereading of Cassian with attention to his broader textual concerns, as well as social, philosophical, and political context. In the following treatment, I will thus consider how Foucault reads Cassian’s texts, suggesting how modern binary categories of analysis

¹⁴⁰ Michel Foucault, “About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self: Two Lectures at Dartmouth,” *Political Theory* 21.2 (May 1993): 198-227, 198.

concerning the human person have influenced Foucault's readings of Cassian's late antique texts.

- Ethics and Subject Formation as Foucault's Third Axis

Foucault's work after *History of Sexuality: Volume I* can be characterized as the third axis in his thought, operating alongside his axes concerning knowledge and power: an axis concerned with ethics.¹⁴¹ This shift in focus—from power to ethics—was largely occasioned by his recognition that ancient ethics of self-fashioning pose compelling alternatives to modern subject formation. The Stoic philosopher Seneca, Foucault realizes, focuses on how to “transform pure knowledge and simple consciousness in a real way of living.”¹⁴² The emphasis is not on how subjects are controlled by social power but on how the individual can transform one's way of life. This distinction is a good way of articulating the shift between the first two volumes of Foucault's *History of Sexuality*: from a fixation on power to an investment in ways of life.¹⁴³

In *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault outlines a methodology that can determine the features of an ethics that goes beyond the prescribed morality imposed on individuals by a legal code. Foucault views ethics more as a “supplement, a “luxury” in relation to the commonly accepted morality.”¹⁴⁴ Analyzing the “arts of existence” [*techne tou biou*]

¹⁴¹ That the axis of ethics in Foucault's work must be understood in relation to the other components of his theoretical corpus as a whole is a conclusion cogently drawn and articulated by Arnold Davidson and Jonathan Schofer, amongst others. Jonathan Wyn Schofer, *The Making of a Sage* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 17.

¹⁴² Foucault, “About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self,” 167.

¹⁴³ This shift parallels that articulated by Bernard Williams who turns to antiquity to consider ethics as a way of life, as noted in the Introduction. Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).

¹⁴⁴ Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 21.

developed by Greeks in antiquity and juxtaposing them with the Christian code-based morality that followed it, Foucault articulates the several “styles” or guidelines for developing one’s life as an aesthetico-ethical being.¹⁴⁵ The expressed goal of these guidelines is to establish an ethical disposition that goes beyond the strictures of commonly accepted morality.

In line with his expressed methodological interest in genealogy, Foucault works to undercut an understanding of “morality” as a “set of values and rules of action,” giving emphasis instead to the practices or “real behavior” in which an individual engages.¹⁴⁶ By differentiating between the “code elements of a morality and the elements of asceticism,” Foucault opens the conceptual space for individuals to transform their modes of conduct or the ways in which they relate to ethical activity above and beyond mere adherence to a societally-prescribed code.¹⁴⁷ This dynamic element characterizing ethical work is “sought in the forms of subjectivation and the practices of the self.”¹⁴⁸ As the framing principle for ethical considerations beyond conduct that adheres to this rule, the goal is to establish a disposition towards ethical action which cannot be codified and which is open to personalized-forms that the individual establishes.¹⁴⁹ The forms that an “art of existence” may take are determined and differentiated by four “forms of self-activity,”

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 21.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 21, 25.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 31.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 30.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 26.

which Foucault takes to be standard in his figuration of ethics.¹⁵⁰ As the locus for self-determinacy, Foucault describes four “points of consideration” measured and determined through the forms of self-activity that an individual engages:¹⁵¹

Of course all moral action involves a relationship with the reality in which it is carried out, and a relationship with the self. The latter is not simply ‘self-awareness’ but self-formation as an ‘ethical subject,’ a process in which the individual delimits that part of himself that will form the object of his moral practice, defines his position relative to the precept he will follow, and decides on a certain mode of being that will serve as his moral goal.¹⁵²

First, the “object of moral practice” is what Foucault calls the “ethical substance” or the object focused on in *askēsis*; second, the “mode of subjection” determines one’s relation to the precept; third, the *askēsis* helps the individual cultivate oneself through certain disciplinary practices; fourth, the *telos* orients and gives direction to the individual. The work of self-formation thus involves the fluid inter-determination of these four aspects.

Foucault opens his descriptive analysis of the “ethical subject” in the *Use of Pleasure* by considering the “forms and modalities of the relation to self by which the individual constitutes and recognizes himself *qua* subject.”¹⁵³ In this passage, Foucault highlights two crucial reflexive activities: “constitution” and “recognition.” As the epistemological criterion of “re-cognition” defines the subject according to its perception of self, or its self-legibility, this self-recognition requires an active relation of the self to the self through its own ethical practices. What, however, can be made of this notion of

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 28.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 26, 28.

¹⁵² Ibid., 28.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 6.

“constitution”? How does Foucault account for the perdurance of power dynamics involved in self-constitution? Foucault’s articulation of “constitution” assigns it a central importance in his determination of the self-forming activity of the ethical subject, but what is being “constituted” and what is the “material” involved in this “constitution”?¹⁵⁴ More generally, what is changed in the “self” when it constitutes itself as “subject”? While I will return to the implications for this figuration of the subject, some preliminary notes on this notion of “constitution” will help clarify how Foucault conceives of the self’s relation to itself *qua* subject.

While Foucault does not directly articulate what he means by “constitution,” considering his usage of this term when discussing other thinkers is helpful for discerning the points of confluence or contrast. Foucault addresses the revolution that Descartes wrought by “substituting a subject as founder of practices of knowledge, for a subject constituted through practices of the self.”¹⁵⁵ Knowledge is grounded in self-reflexive action for Descartes, so in a sense, the Cartesian subject could be said to substitute a “knowing” subject for the “acting” subject (established through practices typified by the classical Greeks).

Foucault’s comments on Kant are even more descriptively provocative, as he describes Kant’s exhortation to recognize oneself as a subject through actions that

¹⁵⁴ Foucault seems to use “formation” in a similar sense. He uses the term to describe similar relations of the self to the self at the outset of his consideration of the “history of desiring man”: “I felt obliged to study the games of truth in the relationship of self with self and the forming of oneself as a subject.” (Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 6.) What, therefore, does it mean to “form oneself as a subject” and in what ways, if any, does this differ from “constituting oneself *qua* subject”?

¹⁵⁵ Michel Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress, Interview with Paul Rabinow,” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York, NY: Penguin, 1986), 371.

conform to universal rules. Foucault offers a further nexus of questions for the consideration of self “constitution”:

The old questions were reinterpreted: How can I constitute myself as a subject of ethics? Recognize myself as such? Are ascetic exercises needed? Or simply this Kantian relationship to the universal which makes me ethical by conformity to practical reason? Thus Kant introduces one more way in our tradition whereby the self is not merely given but is constituted in relationship to itself as subject.¹⁵⁶

Foucault here makes the contrast—via Kant—between the self as “given” and the self as “constituted in relationship to itself as subject.” In other words, the subject is a subject because it is the subject of the self’s activity. For Kant, the subject is constituted in relation to itself, but this constitution is done against the backdrop of the standard of practical reason. By rejecting such a standard, Foucault distances himself from these deontological concerns.

For Foucault the subject “is constituted in real practices--historically analyzable practices.”¹⁵⁷ Foucault clearly does not accept the Enlightenment configuration of an autonomous being, unconditioned and unrestrained by social structures. As Foucault considers the subject through the actual and material conditions established in power relations, so too does his conception of “constitution” stem from actual practices which are not restricted to fulfilling the moral obligations of deontology, but rather, aim at establishing an ethical disposition for the practice of individuated action that is thus engaged. Foucault thereby disengages ethics from epistemological concerns with the objectivity of a moral order, thus considering “constitution” as occurring in and through actual practices, which are expressive of the prerogative of the self-forming subject.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 372.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 369.

According to Foucault's account, how does this process actually work? When discussing "constitution," what is he describing in relation to the practices that are specific to it? I will examine Foucault's figuration of "constitution" in three historical groupings, roughly following his "case studies" of the ancient Greeks and the Greco-Roman authors of the first two centuries of the Common Era, in order to set up his reading of Cassian and Christianity.

- Case Studies: Ancient Greeks

Foucault's task in *The Use of Pleasure* is considering the "aesthetics of existence" [*technē tou biou*] of the ancient Greeks by focusing on ethical work within an economy of pleasure [*epithumia*].¹⁵⁸ These "aesthetics of existence" were related to a "stylization of attitudes," or the ways in which individuals gave individualized form to their ethical practice.¹⁵⁹ Aesthetics was intimately linked to ethics and in sharp contrast to later considerations of their relation, there was no diremption between the two in the classical perspective. Furthermore, the ethical work, or *askēsis*, for the ancient Greeks focused on two defining principles: the relationship to truth and the goal of moderation [*sophrosune*]. *Askēsis* involved "a moral value that was also an aesthetic value and a truth value."¹⁶⁰ This conjunction between the ethical, aesthetic and epistemological sets a secure relation to truth as the precondition for an ethical existence. However, Foucault sees it as also prompting an inverse relation: "Even if it is true that Greek philosophy founded rationality, it always held that a subject could not have access to the truth if he

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 12, 92.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 92.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 93.

did not first operate upon himself a certain work which would make him susceptible to knowing the truth.”¹⁶¹ There is, then, preliminary *askēsis* that develops the individual’s receptivity to truth. The reception to truth is then productive of a more refined understanding of how to proceed in ethical *askēsis*.¹⁶² Moderation [*sophrosune*] is the goal of this ethical activity and could be established only in relation to truth as a universal standard of proportionality and geometrical soundness.¹⁶³

This functional application of the work of truth, in turn, allowed the individual to commit himself to the practices of self and of knowledge through which he constituted himself as an ethical subject. As Foucault states: “One could not form oneself as an ethical subject in the use of pleasures without forming oneself at the same time as a subject of knowledge.”¹⁶⁴ This, in turn, required the careful “‘use’ of those pleasures that were based on need.”¹⁶⁵ As pleasures are not rejected but redirected and moderated,

¹⁶¹ Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics,” 371.

¹⁶² Despite the focus on Delphic dictum to “know thyself” [*gnōthi seauton*] was “technical advice, a rule to be observed for the consultation of the oracle.” This technical advice, like most features of classical Greek ethics, is simultaneously an epistemological chastening to know that one is not a god, and a means of prompting self-recognition in the cosmic order of things to know yourself in order to be able to both decipher the answer and to establish the requisite ethical conduct.

The dictum did not, Foucault stresses, have an epistemological emphasis, sacrificing the notion of “taking care of oneself.” (Michel Foucault, “Technologies of the Self,” in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, Vol. 1 Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley [New York, NY: New Press, 2000], 226.) Instead, it was yet another way of helping the individual locate himself within a cosmic whole in order to better know how to act in light of this recognition of cosmic order.

¹⁶³ Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 89. “The relation to truth was a structural, instrumental, and ontological condition for establishing the individual as a moderate subject leading a life of moderation.”

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 86.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 57.

ethical conduct is figured in terms of a “battle for power.”¹⁶⁶ The ideal of moderation was attended by the dynamic of domination—where unruly desires need to be chastened through subjection to the rational principle. Foucault emphasizes of sexual practices that “[o]ne should keep in mind that this ‘asceticism’ was not a means of disqualifying the love of boys; on the contrary, it was a means of stylizing it and hence, by giving it shape and form, of valorizing it.”¹⁶⁷ Sexual relations, homosexual and heterosexual alike, were not negatively viewed. Rather, the focus of concern was on controlling desire and its tendency towards insatiability. In sum, the “constitution” of the subject in relation to truth and moderation is theorized primarily in relation to desire, rendering ethical work primarily a mental activity since only by training the mind and its desire could proper control be exercised over the body.

- Case Studies: Greco-Romans

Foucault turns to Greco-Roman authors of the first two centuries in his third volume of *The History of Sexuality, The Care of the Self* (1984), where the self-fashioning of the subject was connected to the ways in which the individual related to sexual practices. Foucault investigates the ways in which these Greco-Roman authors tended to conceive of the self in relation to sexual practices, where for the Stoics:

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 66. “In other words, to form oneself as a virtuous and moderate subject in the use he makes of pleasures, the individual has to construct a relationship with the self that is of the ‘domination-submission,’ ‘command-obedience,’ ‘mastery-docility’ type (and not, as will be the case in Christian spirituality, a relationship of the ‘elucidation-renunciation,’ ‘decipherment-purification’ type).”(Ibid., 70.)

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 245. With *aphrodisia* as the ethical substance, *chresis* as the mode of subjection, *enkrateia* (mastery) as the “form of relationship with oneself” ethical work was done to attain mastery over pleasures and appetites, and freedom and truth as the telos of this Greek technology of the self. (Ibid., 63.)

They describe it [the sexual act] rather as a process in which the individual is passively overcome by the mechanisms of the body and the movements of the soul, so that he must reestablish his mastery by means of a precise adjustment to the needs of nature alone.¹⁶⁸

Sexual activity is not seen as an evil in its own right; rather, it is the loss of mastery over self that is to be avoided in the Stoic sexual ethic. Such mastery of self takes the form of the mind not being overcome by the passions of the flesh.

This mastery of oneself, as articulated in three Stoic technologies of the self, is made possible through the acquisition and assimilation of truth.¹⁶⁹ As Foucault describes the Epicurean stance, there was wrought a “kind of adequation between all possible knowledge and the care of the self. The reason that one had to become familiar with physics or cosmology was that one had to take care of the self.”¹⁷⁰ This relationship with the self, however, “takes the form not only of a domination but also of an enjoyment without desire and without disturbance.”¹⁷¹ The result of self-mastery is thus an enjoyment of oneself markedly different from the Greek model. The connection to epistemology was intended not so much to discern a transcendent principle of truth which would direct rational actions, as it was to know the natural, balanced order of things. So while Foucault indicates that the first centuries of the common era evinced a “certain strengthening of austerity themes,” differences from the earlier forms of austerity in classical Greece are not manifest in a stricter prohibitive code but in “an intensification of

¹⁶⁸ Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Vol. 3: The Care of the Self* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1990), 142.

¹⁶⁹ Foucault, “Technologies of the Self,” 238.

¹⁷⁰ Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics,” 360.

¹⁷¹ Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, 67.

the relation to oneself by which one constituted oneself as the subject of one's acts."¹⁷² An epistolary writing style known as *hupomnemata* was particularly important for this relation, having the objective of making "the recollection of the fragmentary logos transmitted by teaching, listening, or reading a means to establish as adequate and as perfect a relationship of oneself to oneself as possible."¹⁷³ As an intermediary itself, the epistolary relation, as Foucault puts it, places the writer under both his own gaze and the gaze of the other, thereby prompting the formulation of the examination of conscience through the written account.¹⁷⁴ Foucault thereby uses prescriptive code as a foil against this self "constitution," indicating that "constitution" must be engaged beyond the literal observance of the law.

Foucault on Christianity, Self-Renunciation, and Cassian

So, in Foucault's genealogy, what happens on the way from the Stoic emphasis on self-formation to the Victorian period, where the emphasis is on how subjects are controlled through certain authorizing discourses? In one word: Christianity. Foucault reads early Christian *askēsis*, or ethical practice, as making a fundamental shift away from that of the Greeks and Romans in the classical period.

While Foucault was unable to finish his fourth volume in *The History of Sexuality* series, which was to deal with Christianity, before his death, several articles remain

¹⁷² Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 235; Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, 41.

¹⁷³ Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics," 365.

¹⁷⁴ Michel Foucault, "Self-Writing," in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, Vol. 1. Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, NY: New Press, 2000), 219.

which investigate the terrain he would have covered. In his article “Technologies of the Self,” Foucault gives a more detailed analysis of the types of self “constitution” in early Christian monasticism. Using John Cassian as the paradigm for Christian monasticism and the ascetic practices which framed the life of the monastic, Foucault understands the new form of *askēsis* negatively, where self-fashioning gives way to obligatory obedience and where self-examination is replaced by the sacrifice of the self and its own desires.¹⁷⁵ Here, the “self must constitute itself through obedience,” and instead of self-knowledge being functionally geared towards self-mastery, it is directed at eradicating any hidden desires and establishing purity of soul.¹⁷⁶ Instead of transforming the pleasures of the body into an exercise of moderation or a means towards self-mastery, the denial of the body—construed as the desirous flesh—becomes the focal point.

In his lecture-series, the *Hermeneutics of the Subject* and *Du Gouvernement de Vivants*, as well as his article “The Battle for Chastity,” Foucault similarly presents Cassian as inaugurating early Christian subject formation predicated on renunciation and denial; an ethical sensibility that starkly contrasted with the agential modes of self-mastery and cultivation that Foucault so prizes in the ancient Greeks and Romans. Using Cassian as the litmus for Christian asceticism, Foucault reads Cassian’s texts through three negative attributes: self-renunciation, the eradication of desires, and blind obedience to divine command (at the expense of one’s ethical capacity). On Foucault’s reading, Cassian inaugurates interiority through his renunciatory emphases and rejection of “the body,” understood as separable from subjectivity and interiority.

¹⁷⁵ Foucault, “Technologies of the Self,” 246, 248.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 246, 242-243.

Foucault finds it notable that Cassian does not refer to sexual relations anywhere, claiming:

The whole essence of the fight for chastity is that it aims at a target which has nothing to do with actions or relationships; it concerns a different reality than that of a sexual connection between two individuals.¹⁷⁷

This different reality, then, determines the *telos* and therefore the whole technology of the self in this ethical enterprise. Despite the difference in *telos*, like the *hupomnemata* of the Romans, the writing practices of spiritual literature (known as *exagoreusis*) become very important in monastic circles, in helping to bring “to light the movements of thought, writing practices dissipate the inner shadow where the enemy’s plots are woven.”¹⁷⁸ With the promise of revealing true impulses through the practice of writing, this form of confession brings to light the inner demons that may be holding one’s unwilling (and unknowing) soul for ransom. This, however, reveals the problematic nature of the system for Foucault, for it is “much more concerned with thought than with action.”¹⁷⁹

Foucault sees monastic Christianity as privileging the mind differently than the earlier work of the ancient Greeks or the Greco-Roman authors. While the latter used the mind to reform the impetus towards types of action, they never questioned the necessity of the body and its proper use through the right types of disciplines. For the Stoic subject, the goal is harmony, a type of self-equilibrium that shows that no part of the body outweighs or is overwhelmed by any other part. It is, however, a different story with the Christian ascetic subject in terms of the relationship between the body and the mind.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Foucault, “Technologies of the Self,” 249; Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics,” 367.

¹⁷⁹ Foucault, “Technologies of the Self,” 247.

Negation of the body and flagellation were phenomena peculiar to this religious ideal that privileged extreme purity and asceticism over a moderate existence. Instead of transforming desire, Foucault describes desire as being “rooted out” by the Christian ascetic. A specific desire or sin (potential or actual) was localized as the root of pains or “illegal” pleasures, apprehended, and eradicated as the enemy. With a *telos* of immortality and purity, an *askēsis* of self-decipherment, a *mode d’assujettissement* of divine law, and an ethical substance forged over and against desire, concupiscence and flesh, Foucault generalizes a worldview of the monastic Christian in and through his understanding of ascetic practices.¹⁸⁰

Foremost amongst these practices, for Foucault, is the rendering of obedience as the center of the monastic life, noting “Obedience is and must be a manner of being”—a view of obedience necessarily involving the subordination of the individual self to another.¹⁸¹ In his assessment of Cassian and monastic spirituality, the individual submits himself to the discretion of a spiritual director, notably through the practice of confession. The spiritual director then helps the individual discern the source of one’s thoughts, effectively rejecting the thoughts that come from demonic sources and embracing the thoughts that come from God. Through this relationship, according to Foucault, the individual necessarily renounces himself in order to come to knowledge of God and know himself only in subordination to the divine. As part of this critique, Foucault charges Cassian (and late antique Christian monasticism more broadly, as an extension) with undermining the care of the self, focusing instead on knowledge of the self as the

¹⁸⁰ Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics,” 358.

¹⁸¹ Michel Foucault, *Du Gouvernement de vivants: Cours au Collège de France (1979-1980)* (Gallimard: Hautes Etudes, 2012), 265. My translation.

operative category.¹⁸² Confession as a relation involves the assumption that we cannot govern ourselves (although we can potentially command others).

For Foucault, this technology of the self and question of confession highlight the link between subordination and self-knowledge. Because in Cassian there are three possible sources for thoughts (demons, God, or oneself), only the divine source being acceptable, self-examination is compulsory.¹⁸³ Neither one's self nor the demons ought be in control of one's thoughts and actions; one's will should not embrace any thoughts that are not given by God. To make sure this does not happen, it is necessary to dig into the conscience looking for faults. The threat is that if one does not root out the devil or one's self as sources for one's thoughts, then one cannot do good, for one is not following God. Foucault basically assumes a zero-sum game between the demonic/the individual and the divine: as faults lurk in one's behavior and thoughts, one cannot simultaneously follow God. One therefore needs to explore the inner world under the guidance of an elder to root out other threats; here, in Foucault's reading, even the self-relation is tied to obedience to an other (the elder) and ultimately one defers to the practices and thoughts discerned (by the elder) as from God.

Human agency, as a consequence, is obviated. Anything that the person does that has positive transformative potential requires submission to God and the renunciation of one's self. Cassian, in Foucault's view, only thematizes human change and development in negative terms; either one is determined by the machinations of the devil, one's self, or one is determined by submission to God. The latter option is the happier one, but it

¹⁸² Ibid., 261.

¹⁸³ *Conf.*4.

involves a deterministic picture where the self gives way to God, and individual agency is negated in favor of divine agency. Foucault reduces monastic community life to their relationship to political power and to the power relations inherent in self-examination and confession, where mastery over one's self is impossible, but it is transferred onto mastery over another person. In both scenarios, Foucault assumes some form of domination as fully structuring subject formation. Such a view that relations of power are always relations of domination and subordination (be it directed toward oneself or towards others) is characteristic of Foucault's work on power that continues to frame his work on ethics; however, this view does not fully characterize late antique monasticism in the way that Foucault suggests.

Foucault thus uses Cassian's texts to characterize Cassian's *askēsis* as self-renunciatory. He fixates on Cassian's view of confession, in particular, as an act of self-sacrifice and abnegation; here, the "permanent verbalization" of one's innermost thoughts helps one renounce any hidden vestiges of self will. Foucault claims, "we have to understand this sacrifice not only as a radical change in the way of life but as a consequence of a formula like this: you will become the manifestation of truth when and only when you disappear or you destroy yourself as a real body and a real existence."¹⁸⁴ Such sacrifice requires "a giving up of desire and the body," and it is this sacrifice which effects the radical change in the way of life.¹⁸⁵

Judith Butler's reading of Foucault's understanding of Cassian through the "performative force of spoken utterance" further elucidates Foucault's position: "This

¹⁸⁴ Cited in Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), 178, 179.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 163.

version of confession involves a full repudiation of the subject of will, one that is, nevertheless, performed through verbalization and, hence, understood as a form of verbalization that suspends the will itself.”¹⁸⁶ In this reading, Cassian construes confession as a means of repudiating the “subject of will”; the subject must renounce his own will, by verbalizing how he is subordinate to “the truth.” The verbalization performatively realizes the reality expressed confessionally. Foucault and Butler both characterize Cassian’s Christian asceticism as an agonic struggle between the self and “God,” where one needs to sacrifice oneself in order to achieve attachment to God.¹⁸⁷

Foucault’s reading of Cassian therefore has three central characteristics: 1) the renunciation/destruction of the body and desire, 2) the sacrifice of one’s self through the sacrifice of one’s will, in favor of God’s will (a feature which implies that “the self” is more or less elided with an abstract and intellective “will” – a point I make in my treatment of Foucault’s misreading of Cassian in the Introduction), and 3) the discursive reconstitution of the subject through confessional verbalizations. Thus, in Cassian, to put Foucault briefly, there are three central departures from earlier Greek and Roman forms of self-government:

1. the loss of self-government
2. the lack of flourishing of the self, because the self is renounced
3. the focus on knowledge of the self, to the exclusion of the care of the self

Cassian, in Foucault’s reading, defines the self primarily in terms of obedience, humility, and patience. The self here is not willing, living freely, nor judging.¹⁸⁸ These features

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 163.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 164.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 267.

correlate with a characterization of the self that Foucault reads in Cassian's account of self-examination, where 1. we are not in control of ourselves, 2. we cannot master ourselves, and 3. we are not knowable to ourselves.¹⁸⁹ This clearly paints a very pessimistic view of Cassian, where his estimation of the self is dire and any potential for change predicated on submission to other people. Foucault sees only self-renunciation, self-abnegation, and self-denial as central to Cassian's account of the self. In my reading, however, Cassian's Christian practices do not radically depart from the characteristics Foucault assigns to earlier Greek and Greco-Roman practices—instead, especially when it comes to ethical agency, the emphases are very similar.

Cassian's Relevance to Theoretical Discussions

Foucault's treatment of Cassian shows how relevant Cassian's work is to theoretical conversations in religious studies today. Cassian has been recognized by Foucault, and scholars in religious studies through his influence, as central to the construction of subjectivity in the western discourse; a subjectivity where the "self" described by Foucault is self-interpreting and self-renunciatory. Foucault genealogically traces back to Cassian the obsession with the "decipherment of interiority, the subject's exegesis of himself."¹⁹⁰ A monk interiorizes the forms of social control that he submits to "externally"—in Cassian, this includes the dynamic of confession to an elder and one's spiritual submission to God. So, for Foucault, Cassian typifies the shift in sensibility

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 262.

¹⁹⁰ Michel Foucault, "17 February 1982: First hour," *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France 1981-1982*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 300.

away from forming one's self actively as a subject, as the Greeks and Romans practiced, instead giving form to one's life in a cultivated and aesthetic way to renunciation and denial. With Foucault's view of Cassian, an *askēsis* of Greco-Roman self-fashioning gives way to Christian obligatory obedience, and Greco-Roman self-examination gives way to Christian self-renunciation.

Instead of transforming the pleasures of the body into an exercise of moderation or a means of self-mastery, Foucault reads Cassian as denying the body. "Interiority" thus becomes the defining locus of subjectivity, of the status of the human being *as* subject, over and against the "exterior" shell of the human body. Here, the "self must constitute itself through obedience," and instead of self-knowledge being functionally geared towards self-mastery, it is directed at eradicating any hidden desires and establishing purity of soul.¹⁹¹

Despite much excellent scholarship of late antiquity emphasizing the importance of the senses and the mind-heart-body continuum, some scholarship of late antiquity maintains the view of Cassian popularized by Foucault, which emphasizes a spurious commitment to "interiority" as defining the person (over and against the Greco-Roman views of the person that Foucault adulated).¹⁹² David Brakke, for example, in his 2006 *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, positions Cassian in his Afterword as focused radically differently than his ascetic teacher Evagrius. While Evagrius was concerned

¹⁹¹ Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, Vol. 1. Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, NY: New Press, 2000), 246.

¹⁹² Susan A. Harvey, *Scenting Salvation* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006) and Theresa Shaw, *Burden of the Flesh* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998) are exemplary.

with the cosmic struggle between monks and demons, and the battleground of the Egyptian desert tested the mettle of the opposing forces, Cassian—in Brakke’s reading—internalizes this struggle, muting the impact of demonic forces and emphasizing the locus of struggle as within the individual monk: “Cassian devotes much greater attention to the warfare within the individual person, the battle between ‘the spirit’ and ‘the flesh’ of which St. Paul had so eloquently written in Galatians. This ‘interior battle,’ Cassian explains, ‘is a conflict deeply rooted in our body, so to say, according to the design of the Lord.’”¹⁹³

Brakke follows Foucault's reading of Cassian, stating the view of the self assumed, noting how Foucault’s treatment of disclosure and renunciation are tied to this model: “Thus, the monastic subject represents an ancient ancestor of the modern subject, who discloses his or her self by speaking to the therapist or the talk show host. This model appears to assume that the self is interior or hidden and so requires or permits ‘disclosure.’”¹⁹⁴ The view advanced by Foucault, on Brakke’s reading, assumes that “the self” is hidden, is interior, and needs to be disclosed through the verbalization of one’s thoughts and desires—a move Foucault negatively associates with Cassian. One needs to “disclose” the truth about one’s self only if the “interior” is both elided with the “true self” and deemed separate from the “exterior.”¹⁹⁵ Brakke *does* critique Foucault for reading Cassian’s teacher Evagrius as invested in a similar split between interior and

¹⁹³ David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 244.

¹⁹⁴ Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, 222.

¹⁹⁵ A central problem with this model is how “one’s self” becomes totally aligned with the “interior” life of thoughts and desires.

exterior—Brakke devotes an entire article to how Foucault’s reading does not apply to figures in the Egyptian desert like Evagrius.¹⁹⁶ However, Brakke does not critique Foucault’s reading of Cassian as renunciatory and interiorizing.

This reading of Cassian, even by such a superlative scholar as Brakke, reflects the way critical categories of analysis (like “interiority”) are imposed on Cassian’s premodern sources, assuming a dualistic relation between the body and mind in the human person. If Cassian’s influences do not suggest a split subject, and if Brakke works to exonerate his teacher Evagrius’ view of the subject in particular, however, then we might exercise more suspicion over claims that Cassian is such an interiorizer.¹⁹⁷

I noted earlier Foucault’s fixation on confession as illustrative of subject formation in Cassian. Virginia Burrus similarly follows Foucault’s reading here, explaining that “however intensely incarnated it may be, confession seems to remain crucially a verbal act—or, perhaps better, a verbalizing act. ... It is finally by bringing to light what is construed as hidden or secret that confession effects conversion.”¹⁹⁸ Confession, understood in Foucault’s sense, is verbalizing not because it is primarily a speech-based act, but because it performs one’s allegiance to an accepted set of principles and reinforces hierarchical relations of power. The separation, however, between the “verbalizing act” and its “incarnation”—between the speech act and its bodily expression of this act, where hearing is primary—does not neatly apply to Cassian’s texts, where

¹⁹⁶ David Brakke, “Making Public the Monastic Life: Reading the Self in Evagrius Ponticus’ Talking Back,” in *Religion and the Self in Antiquity*, David Brakke, Michael Satlow, and Steven Weitzman, eds. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005).

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Virginia Burrus, *Saving Shame: Martyrs, Saints, and Other Abject Subjects* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 111.

Cassian recurrently authorizes the *abbas*' ability to speak on an issue because they practice these virtues everyday, training themselves over long years to live lives practically consonant with the theoretically esteemed way of life.

Burrus concisely reads Foucault, noting that "the willed submission of thoughts to the power of words is indispensable for the process of conversion toward which confession always aims."¹⁹⁹ What I will argue characterizes Cassian's work, however, does not allow for thoughts to be submitted to words in this way. Thoughts are not on "the inside" and then submitted to "outer words" performed by the body in public spaces that then release the person of such thoughts. There is no simple trajectory, in other words, of 1. thoughts being on the inside, 2. one verbalizing them in a speech-act, and 3. the thoughts being externalized in an effective catharsis. Burrus's understanding of confessional language, which both generates the psychological reality of such thoughts and the obsessive return to these thoughts (due to a mixture of terror and pleasure at them), understands confession to create the conditions to have more to confess. Burrus's reading, while shrewd, accepts Foucault's reading and shows how we need to reconsider Cassian's texts in order to rethink Foucault's own normative categories.

*

There is more at stake here than a more accurate reading of Cassian, as valuable as that is in itself—our very understanding of modern subjectivity and the human person rests on our view of its genealogical influences. According to Foucault, and scholars who accept his reading, Cassian's emphasis on interiority as the locus of subjectivity and the renunciation of the body would be proleptic of modern Cartesian dualisms and the

¹⁹⁹

Ibid.

Protestant emphasis on belief over ritual practices. However, this genealogy itself needs to be critiqued through a careful study of Cassian. Both Cassian's deployment by Foucault and the ways in which he exceeds modern conceptual categories present necessary reasons to critically study Cassian's texts with a critical eye to figurations of subjectivity in modern thought. I will now turn to a closer reading of Cassian to show that the modern philosophical binaries that Foucault's sees in Cassian's texts actually do not apply, and while doing so I will suggest resources for rethinking questions of human agency.

CHAPTER 2

John Cassian on the Human Person and Agency

Opening his most controversial conference, *Conference* 13 “On God’s Protection” (*De Protectione Dei*), Cassian describes coming back from morning synaxis with Germanus. As they wait for Abba Chaeremon to arrive back in his cell, Germanus expresses concern that the prior day’s conference on divine grace and human chastity, while inspiring the “highest desire for an as yet untried chastity” (*summum desiderium incognitae nobis castitatis*), nevertheless “nullified the value of human effort” (*meritum humanae cassasset industriae*) to attain such chastity.²⁰⁰ How, Germanus wonders, can Abba Chaeremon say that the laborer’s attainment of such chastity is *not* due to the laborer’s assiduous efforts? Human effort and zealous toil are, after all, clearly central to the ascetic life described by all the *abbas*. “Otherwise,” Abba Moses in *Conference* 1 states, “there would be no free will in a person, nor would the effort expended in our own correction be of any help to us” (*alioquin nec liberum in homine maneret arbitrium nec in nobis staret nostrae correctionis industria*).²⁰¹ The two friends thus struggle to make sense of Abba Chaeremon’s claims about human effort and divine grace.

Responding to the two friends’ query concerning human effort, Abba Chaeremon

²⁰⁰ *Inst.*12.11.2-3: “He it is who makes us victors over our vices, when our toil and our running do not measure up to them at all and when the effort of our will is unequal to the arduous ascent to the summit of integrity, even though the flesh that we use has been subjugated.”

²⁰¹ *Conf.*1.17.1.

employs the shrewd metaphor of a farmer to explain how human effort and divine grace relate. The farmer works day-in and day-out, tilling the soil, planting, and harvesting—in this he clearly exerts a tremendous amount of effort and exercises much discipline. Abba Chaeremon has seen, however, “continual intense effort conferring nothing on the toilers, because it was not assisted by the Lord's guidance.”²⁰² What, then, does the *abba* understand “the Lord’s guidance” to include?

To start, a good harvest is impossible “if adequate rainfall and a quietly peaceful winter had not played their part.”²⁰³ The environmental conditions have to be beneficial, not only with adequate rainfall (surely a problem in the Egyptian desert), but also with good soil that has been nourished by a quiet winter that will enable the best vegetables and grains to grow. Without proper environmental conditions, Abba Chaeremon says, the material conditions to produce good food simply do not exist. Human effort simply cannot *will* the organic growth of crops.

At the same time, there is absolutely *no* chance of a good crop without the effort of the farmer and his diligence in the fields. Even in this effort, however, the *abba* identifies “the Lord’s guidance.” The farmer can “endure all the burdens imposed by farming” *because* the Lord fortifies him.²⁰⁴ God, again, is responsible for making the most basic implements of farming available to the farmer—to have access to cattle, to be strong in bodily health in order to work the fields, and to have the other tools at his

²⁰² *Conf.*13.3.1.

²⁰³ *Conf.*13.3.1.

²⁰⁴ “For a person should consider and reflect in all honesty upon the fact that by his own power he would have been unable to expend the efforts that he did when he was intently working out of a desire for an abundance if the Lord's protection and mercy had not fortified him to endure all the burdens imposed by farming.”(*Conf.*13.3.3.)

disposal. One needs the appropriate tools and conditions in order to labor effectively towards the desired end.

There is a complex network of elements and agencies involved in a successful farming venture: the person's physical strength, the quality of the soil, the labor involved in tilling the land, the strength of the cattle to push the plow, a good and sturdy plow, weather conditions that promote the right mixture of rain and a temperate winter, the absence of various pests, and the farmer's daily tending to the seasonally-bound processes of farming which enable planting and harvesting at the right time. Abba Chaeremon understands these elements to be effected by God who blesses the endeavors of certain people, enabling them to attain their desired ends. The farmer's strength and will enable good results *if and only if* the Lord enables felicitous weather patterns and forecloses "unexpected accidents" (*insperatos [...] casus*).²⁰⁵ Understanding the role of human effort thus turns on an understanding of that effort as relying on God—God enables the host of conditions that enable human effort.

This view of human agency as fundamentally reliant on a host of other agencies and material conditions is pronounced in Cassian's texts. He fully affirms the centrality of having to work very hard and to labor day-in and day-out in order to advance in a chosen way of life. At the same time, such advancement is fully dependent on elements fully beyond the control of that person—and Cassian understands these broader conditions as well as the inheritances of the person (physiological, psychological, social, cultural, and economic) as determined by God. Human effort is not nullified, and the *abbas'* exhortations to labor and assiduous exercise of a host of practices are as necessary

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*Conf.*13.3.4.

as ever. The point is that “the laborer's toil can accomplish nothing without the help of God” (*nihil posse perficere sine adiutorio dei laborantis industriam*).²⁰⁶

In this chapter, I will develop Cassian’s thinking about the relationship between human effort and divine grace, for which the farmer’s example stands as helpful metaphor. In the first half, I will treat Cassian’s historically controversial position on human choice in connection to his understanding of the monastic occupation, a profession which attendant practices, norms, and aspirations harmonize together to form an integrated way of life. In the second half, I will set up how Cassian understands the constitution of the human person required for his account of human effort to make sense. This reading involves overcoming any substantial dualisms between “inner” and “outer” parts of the person and focuses on how Cassian sees human agency as engaging embodied, affective, and deliberative elements of the human person, all oriented towards the goal of a given occupation. This chapter sets up part II of the dissertation, where I explore in more depth the mechanisms and practices by which such ethical formation is possible.

Human Effort and Other Agencies

- Cassian on Human Nature and Divine Agency

Cassian uses *Conference* 13 to work through a complex account of how divine agency and human agency relate. Because Cassian is not writing in a theoretical and systematic format, it is difficult to pin down definitions for many of these crucial terms. Instead, Cassian foregrounds practical questions and treats them in a practical way. On

²⁰⁶

*Conf.*13.3.1.

questions of agency, it is theologically necessary for him to affirm the centrality of divine agency.²⁰⁷ However, it is also necessary for humans to have some ability to shape themselves for the better: otherwise why would one commit to such arduous ascetic practices?

In his texts, Cassian does not succumb to the binary choice of divine grace *or* human free will. Instead, he affirms the necessity of *both*, while noting that they only *seem* to be opposed:

These two things—that is, the grace of God and free will—certainly seem mutually opposed to one another, but both are in accord, and we understand that we must accept both in like manner by reason of our religion, lest by removing one of them from the human being we seem to contravene the rule of the Church’s faith.

*haec ergo duo, id est uel gratia dei uel liberum arbitrium sibi quidem inuicem uidentur aduersa, sed utraque concordant et utraque nos pariter debere suscipere pietatis ratione colligimus, ne unum horum homini subtrahentes ecclesiasticae fidei regulam excessisse uideamur.*²⁰⁸

Cassian makes the argument from orthodoxy here: in order to affirm the teachings of the church, the human person needs to be recognized as made with freedom of choice just as God needs to be recognized as all powerful. For Cassian, divine grace is all-powerful and absolutely necessary for any creative activity in the world and of the human person. Human free choice, then, relies on divine grace for its efficacy, but still exercises its own agency. Both the free choice of the human being and divine grace need to be recognized as co-operative and “in accord” (*concordant*), even though they can “seem mutually opposed” (*inuicem uidentur aduersa*).

²⁰⁷ Conf.13.9.4.

²⁰⁸ Conf.13.11.4.

Skirting the danger of inflating human ability at the expense of divine grace, Cassian deftly renders human free will a feature of God's creation. Noting how human free will is a feature of how God created human nature, Abba Chaeremon says in *Conference* 13 that "it must not be believed that God made the human being in such a way that he could never will or be capable of the good. He has not allowed him a free will if he has only conceded that he will what is evil and be capable of it but not of himself either will the good or be capable of it" (*Nec enim talem deus hominem fecisse credendus est, qui nec uelit umquam nec possit bonum. alioquin nec liberum ei permisit arbitrium, si ei tantummodo malum ut uelit et possit, bonum uero a semet ipso nec uelle nec posse concessit*).²⁰⁹ Cassian's logic is compelling: if God created human beings with free will, such a will cannot be compelled to choose only bad and evil things. The human will would need to be able to choose good things as well, for freedom of choice involves having the ability to choose different courses of action and ways of life.

Cassian understands human agency in relation to human nature, and his reading of both stress the individual's capacity to progress ethically. It is blasphemy, in Cassian's account, to assert that God created human nature as evil. With this in mind, Cassian directly warns against attributing everything good to God and "nothing but what is bad and perverse to human nature."²¹⁰ Human nature bears the possibility for the will's right orientation and the potential for good action because it "has been bestowed by the kindness of the Creator" (*quod beneficio creatoris indultum est*).²¹¹ For Cassian, it makes

²⁰⁹ *Conf.*13.12.1.

²¹⁰ *Conf.*13.12.5.

²¹¹ *Conf.*13.9.5.

no sense that humans could even desire “the grace of good health” if God did not design humans to be capable of such well-being.²¹² It would be cruel for God to impart the desire for health to humans but not the means of attaining such health.²¹³ Human nature thus includes the capacity to choose to do good because God chose to create human nature as good, but with free will.²¹⁴

This free will is what allows humans to choose between different courses of action. “Consequently there always remains in the human being a free will that can either neglect or love the grace of God,” Abba Chaeremon states.²¹⁵ This tension is visualized by the *abba* in the model of *psychomachia*, where a “good angel” perches on one shoulder and a “bad angel” on the other, each counseling opposing behavior.²¹⁶ Humans have the ability to choose between conflicting paths, and so any movements away from God are through the competing agencies of the human (oftentimes under the influence of

²¹² “John Cassian and the monastic theology of which his work was representative functioned to reestablish this connection. Cassian assumed that divine reward is given to human striving for the good. Action has a direct, reliable connection with its outcome. Human agency is of crucial significance for human life and destiny. Persons can direct and order themselves toward God even to the point of exercising control over their thoughts. Cassian was writing for monks.”(Rebecca Weaver, *Divine Grace and Human Agency: A Study of the Semi-Pelagian Controversy* [Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996], 235.)

²¹³ Cassian asks, in this respect: “What is the point of having longed for the grace of good health if God, who has bestowed the use of life itself, does not also impart vigorous well-being?” (*quid autem prodest sanitatis gratiam concupisse, nisi deus, qui uitae ipsius usum tribuit, etiam uigorem incolumitatis impertiat?*)(*Conf.*13.9.5.)

²¹⁴ Cassian exhorts: “Let us offer him thanks not only for these things, that he created us rational, gave us the power of free will, bestowed on us the grace of baptism, and granted us the knowledge and help of the law, but also for the things that are conferred on us by the daily exercise of his providence.”(*Inst.*12.18.)

²¹⁵ *Conf.*13.12.8.

²¹⁶ *Conf.*13.12.7. In one of only four extra-biblical citations in the *Conferences*, Cassian cites *The Shepherd of Hermas*, 6.2 as teaching that “freedom of will is at a human being’s disposal to a certain degree. In it two angels—that is, a good one and a bad one—are said to be attached to each one of us, but it is up to the human to choose which to follow.”

the devil, as I will discuss shortly). Any blindness that might occur that would block ascetic progress Cassian attributes to the freedom of the human will, not to human nature.²¹⁷ It is not human nature that was created errant: it is free will that allows for people to act in all manner of ways.²¹⁸

For Cassian, human free will is essential to the person's ability to choose a good path, but divine agency is also required in this process. God helps coax the person's will to pursue the ascetic life, to maintain oneself on this path, and to endure struggle and sacrifice: "[God] stirs up, protects, and strengthens, but not so that he removes the freedom of will that he himself once granted" (*ut incitet, protegat atque confirmet, non ut auferat quam semel ipse concessit arbitrii libertatem*).²¹⁹ God cannot contravene human will—one can always choose to act otherwise—but God can nudge the person in the better direction in Cassian's texts.²²⁰ Humans are created by God to have the possibility of having a good will, although God is continuously necessary to progress:

²¹⁷ *Conf.*13.12.3.

²¹⁸ This issue of free will, as opposed to human nature, as responsible for errant behavior is clearly expressed in Cassian's view of concupiscence. Peter Brown succinctly states the divergence between Cassian and Augustine on these grounds: "Cassian's rebuttal of Augustine's notion of concupiscence, in his other *Conferences*, was indirect but equally firm. The war with sexual temptation, the Old Men agreed, was indeed a conflict 'woven into the very fibers of our being. ... But the conclusions that the Old Man drew from this observation were not those that readers of Augustine had come to expect.'" (Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* [New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1988], 420.)

²¹⁹ *Conf.*13.18.5.

²²⁰ This correlation between effort and progress usually holds, but sometimes even undeserving humans can be assisted (*Conf.*13.16.1.) and others can be compelled even against their will (*Conf.*13.17.1.). These difficult passages are certainly not the norm, however, and Cassian seems to include such mention to make room for divine grace to act in unconstrained ways.

But so that it might be still more evident that out of a good nature, which has been bestowed by the kindness of the Creator, the beginnings of a good will sometimes spring up, although they cannot attain to the perfection of virtue unless they are guided by the Lord.

*ut autem euidentius clareat etiam per naturae bonum, quod beneficio creatoris indultum est, nonnumquam bonarum uoluntatum prodire principia, quae tamen nisi a domino dirigantur ad consummationem uirtutum peruenire non possunt.*²²¹

Divine grace thereby operates on the human in two main ways: it both creates human nature (in general) as having free will and it provides the conditions for the (specific) human person to choose a good course of action.

So what is it that God helps, if he cannot determine human will? Of God's help, Cassian says: "Not only does he graciously inspire holy desires, but he also arranges favorable moments in one's life and the possibility of good results, and he shows the way of salvation to those who are straying."²²² God typically alights good desires in the person that prompt the person to cultivate good dispositions to action; at times, God even directly intervenes by pushing people onto the "way of salvation."²²³ Centrally, however, God controls the material conditions of the environment and the host of other factors needed to produce these arrangements. Cassian uses two central metaphors in *Conference* 13 to describe this confluence of factors: that of farming and that of a child's

²²¹ *Conf.*13.9.5.

²²² *Conf.*13.8.4.

²²³ See *Conf.*13.3.2, 5. Cassian stresses the goodness of God, in part to chasten ascetics against believing too strenuously in their own abilities. It is, in short, an attempt to curb pride—a critical move that Cassian makes, indicating that even when he is making a theological point about the nature of God, he always has in mind ethical formation of his ascetics.

development under the care of a nurse.²²⁴ In both cases, he stresses how the effort of the central actor—the farmer and the child—cannot yield successful development alone. Instead, a host of other factors need to be present and material conditions need to be met in order to enable the efforts of the central actor to produce the effects willed.

-Cassian and Controversy

Cassian's views on the goodness of human nature and the potential for good action were not shared by all Christian authorities of the time. His view conflicted most notably with that of his contemporary, Augustine of Hippo.²²⁵ As Rebecca Weaver notes, Cassian presents the "first well-developed alternative to the Augustinian logic of grace"—a logic Augustine developed in his extensive theology.²²⁶ Cassian does not construct this view of divine grace and human action himself—rather, his view is an achievement of longstanding eastern views shared by Origen, Evagrius, and other desert *abbas* Cassian encountered.²²⁷

²²⁴ For farming, *Conf.*13.2-3, and for childhood development, *Conf.*13.14.9. Cassian notes how the best nurse has loving kindness towards the child, and yet allows the child to endure "some burdens and hardships by which he will not be oppressed but exercised."(*Conf.*13.14.9.)

²²⁵ Peter Brown notes: "In his Thirteenth Conference, [Cassian] had attempted, with the utmost tact, to modify what he thought was a dangerous denial of the freedom of the will implied in Augustine's notion of grace and predestination."(Brown, *The Body and Society*, 420.)

²²⁶ Weaver, *Divine Grace and Human Agency*, 71. Weaver also claims, more strongly, that Augustine created this position on divine grace: "Augustinianism was the creation of one man. The tradition to which the bishop of Hippo appealed was primarily one that he himself had constructed."(Weaver, *Divine Grace and Human Agency*, 71.)

²²⁷ Cassian's reliance on Origen and Evagrius is well known, with Peter Brown noting that he gets his positive estimation of human transformation from them: "Cassian wrote as he did because he had been a distant heir of the thought of Origen. *He was convinced that the very depths of the person could shift.* Not fully available to his consciousness, the forces within him nevertheless lay within the power of the free will to master, in vigilant collaboration with the grace of God. The inner world of the monk could be transformed, slowly but surely, in the same way as the huge universe of Origen would sink back, after the disciplined use of freedom by innumerable beings over endless ages, into the primal fire of Christ's embrace."(Brown, *The*

To understand the divergence between Cassian and Augustine on the possibilities for human effort, their respective views of the human person are illustrative. Against Cassian's practical anthropology just discussed, Peter Brown notes: "Augustine, by contrast, had placed sexuality irremovably at the center of the human person. He had done this because, by the time that Cassian wrote, sexuality was held inflexibly in the grip of his notion of a human race condemned, by the justice of God, to endure, in their bodies and their minds, the permanent presence of a *poena reciproca*—an exquisitely apposite and permanent symptom of Adam's fall."²²⁸ Augustine's view of human nature focuses on the fallenness of human beings, instigated by the original sin of Adam, the first man, who condemned the whole human race. Grace, in Augustine's view, is the only possible instigator of human good actions or good will precisely because humans are so fallen—a view of which Brown critiques for its "drastically limited vision of a complex phenomenon."²²⁹ Augustine, at the same time, sees the human will as able to resist the natural world when enabled by divine grace.²³⁰

Body and Society, 422.)

Harmless says of Cassian's inheritance of eastern views as shaping his own position: "Some have seen Cassian's tactic here—that is, putting his own position into the mouth of one of the desert fathers—as disingenuous. But that is to misunderstand Cassian's project and underestimate his genuine debt to Eastern views. Nonetheless Cassian does seem aware of Augustinian positions, and if at times he disagrees, he does so politely and without polemic." (Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 400.)

²²⁸ Brown, *The Body and Society*, 422.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ As Peter King says of Augustine, "the key to moral action is found in the agent's possession and exercise of free will—the psychological faculty of choice and volition, the existence of which Augustine demonstrates in *On the Free Choice of the Will* 1.12.25.82. Just as our minds can transcend the mere sensible world and rise to the contemplation of eternal truths, so too our wills can transcend the natural order and are able to resist all external influences." (Peter King, *On the Free Choice of the Will, On Grace and Free Choice, and Other Writings*, xviii-xix.)

Augustine's rendering of sexuality—and therefore sin—as central to the human person was not shared by Cassian. In Cassian's ascetic logic, he does not see sexuality as the defining feature of the person, but as one way that disordered desires are expressed and a more basic vice that can be worked through.²³¹ The state of one's sexuality is a litmus of one's orientation, the way one orders one's desires, and the whole shape of one's life—ascetic formation helps one not obsess over one's sexuality but rather attend to the shape of one's whole way of life, which requires the continuous toil of human effort. As Boniface Ramsey comments, “[Augustine's] pessimism concerning human effort and his doctrine of predestination undercut the whole possibility of conversion and the necessity of the ascetical practices that were at the heart of monasticism.”²³² While this reading of Augustine paints him in a more singular light than does justice to the complexity of his thought over time, Ramsey does highlight a key tension between Augustine and Cassian. Cassian responds in his own treatment of divine grace and human effort, affirming both the goodness of human nature and the necessity of free will. Cassian's *Conference* 13 is a direct response to Augustine, intending to restore the possibility of free will and human effort. Cassian does not, however, undercut the priority of divine grace—instead, he shows how both grace and free will are typically required to realize a good action.

The issue, then, becomes “the nature of the interaction between divine grace and human agency.”²³³ Cassian describes this interaction in terms that would become central

²³¹ *Inst.* 6.

²³² Ramsey, *Conferences*, 461.

²³³ Weaver, *Divine Grace and Human Agency*, 131. Consider further: “The issue between

to his infamy: “When [God] notices good will making an appearance in us, he at once enlightens and encourages it and spurs it on to salvation, giving increase to what he himself planted and saw arise from our own efforts” (*qui cum in nobis ortum quendam bonae uoluntatis inspexerit, inluminat eam confestim atque confortat et incitat ad salutem, incrementum tribuens ei quam uel ipse plantauit uel nostro conatu uiderit emersisse*).²³⁴ This passage, which suggests that human good will can generate itself even prior to the work of divine grace, drew heat from Augustine and his followers for affirming controversial theological doctrine.²³⁵

We can best view the differences between Augustine and Cassian in light of a particular historical period when issues of church doctrine were being worked out. Cassian’s position sounded suspiciously similar to that of a British monk named Pelagius who claimed that humans have free will even apart from divine grace. Augustine won the contest against Pelagius in 418 at the Council of Carthage, where he formally condemned Pelagius. An ardent follower of Augustine, Prosper of Aquitaine, was attuned to Augustine’s fight against Pelagius. Finding hints of a similar affirmation of human will in Cassian’s texts, Prosper railed against what he saw as Pelagian tendencies in Cassian’s writings in *On God’s Grace and Free Will Against the Conferencer* (*De gratia Dei et*

them was not that, judged by Augustinian standards, Cassian had a deficient understanding of grace. Instead, the issue was the nature of the interaction between divine grace and human agency. For Cassian, a monk instructing other monks, the fundamental point was to maintain the connection between human striving for the good and the outcome of that striving in divine reward. He affirmed the necessity of grace but was careful to do so in such a way as not to jeopardize human agency.”(Weaver, *Divine Grace and Human Agency*, 131.)

²³⁴ Conf.13.8.4.

²³⁵ Abba Chaeremon’s third conference is *Conference 13*, which Ramsey calls the “most controversial of all twenty-four” and “almost certainly ... responsible for the fact that Cassian hardly enjoys the title of saint in the West, despite his vast influence.”(Ramsey, *Conferences*, 459.)

liber arbitrio liber contra collatorem)—Cassian is “the Conferencer” (*collatorem*) and this work is a direct response to *Conference 13*.²³⁶ As William Harmless indicates, Prosper was not immediately successful in his polemic, for “by the early 430s, the main body of Gallic monks and bishops stood closer to Cassian, for all their genuine respect for Augustine, and Prosper had to back off from his campaign. Over the next century, the Gallic church sought to reconcile its dual theological inheritance from Cassian and Augustine.”²³⁷ A century later, however, in 529, the Council of Orange weighed in favor of Augustine against Cassian, “insisting that the fallen human will is incapable of choosing the good without prior grace.”²³⁸ This ruling associated Cassian with what would come to be known as the Semi-Pelagian Controversy and contributed to the obscuring of Cassian’s fame.²³⁹

However, Cassian was no Pelagian, as many scholars point out.²⁴⁰ *Conference 13*

²³⁶ See Alexander Y. Hwang, “Prosper, Cassian, and Vincent: The Rule of Faith in the Augustinian Controversy,” in *Tradition and the Rule of Faith in the Early Church*, eds. Ronnie J. Rombs and Alexander Y. Hwang (Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 68-85.

Weaver argues for how Prosper’s reading of Cassian was incorrect in part because he was following Augustine’s logic: “For example, Prosper summarized Cassian’s position as holding that Adam and his descendants, and thus human free will, were unharmed by the fall, that all persons are capable, *by means of reason*, of anticipating grace, and that the virtue granted by nature is healthy and can be practiced by each person without grace assisting. In other words, Prosper made Cassian into what Cassian was not. Furthermore, not only finding in Cassian some seeds of Pelagianism but also being faithful to Augustine’s habit of carrying the logic of his position to its extreme conclusion, Prosper assumed the full growth of the seeds and placed his opponent firmly in the camp of heresy.” (Weaver, *Divine Grace and Human Agency*, 128.)

²³⁷ Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 400.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Ramsey, *Conferences*, 459; Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 400.

²⁴⁰ Consider, for instance, Peter Munz who defends Cassian’s view of divine grace and the human will, by noting that the volition in Cassian is focused on a negative conception of freedom. (Peter Munz, “John Cassian,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 11.1 (1960): 6-12.) Similarly, Michael Hanby states: “the emphasis tends to fall on the negative capacity for rejection, a

can, in fact, be seen not only as a response to Augustine's over-emphasis on divine grace but also as a response to Pelagius's over-emphasis on human effort.²⁴¹ Cassian describes this dynamic against both sides of the argument on divine grace and human good will:

These things are mixed together and fused so indistinguishably that which is dependent on which is a great question as far as many people are concerned—that is, whether God has mercy on us because we manifest the beginnings of a good will, or we acquire the beginnings of a good will because God is merciful. For many who hold to one of these alternatives and assert it more freely than is right have fallen into different self-contradictory error.

tendency compounded by his conception of the eight principle vices which manifest themselves in mundane attachments.”(Michael Hanby, “Augustine and Descartes: An overlooked chapter in the Story of Modern Origins,” *Modern Theology* 19:4 (October 2003): 455-582, 467.) See also D.J. Macqueen, “John Cassian on Grace and Free Will with Particular Reference to *Institutio* XII and *Collatio* XIII,” *Recherches de theologie ancienne et medievale* 44 (1977): 5-28.

Munz reads Cassian as engaging the “annihilation of the will” and “destruction of one’s imaginary self-hood,” claiming that self-negation aims “at taking to pieces the world of sound and form.”(Munz, “John Cassian,” 11-12.) Hanby agrees with Munz, even extending this reading of Cassian as concerned with self-negation to a broader “proto-Cartesian” negation of the world, though this conclusion must be qualified by the end this asceticism serves and the communal context of its exercise.”(Hanby, “Augustine and Descartes,” 467.)

Philip Rousseau challenges Munz’s reading of Cassian as rejecting the world by asserting Cassian’s affirmation of the cenobitic life (Phillip Rousseau, “Cassian, Contemplation, and the Coenobitic Life,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 26.2 [1975], 118.). Rousseau argues convincingly that Cassian affirms divine grace when referring to the anteriority of divine grace (*Conf.*7.8.1; 13.3.5.) and Cassian’s insistence that “the beginning of a good will is bestowed upon us at the Lord’s inspiration.”(*Conf.*3.8.1.)

²⁴¹ “Since the seventeenth century, this conference has been seen as the opening salvo for the so-called Semi-Pelagian Controversy. This term is a serious misnomer. There is nothing Pelagian or even semi-Pelagian about Cassian. He insists on the complete necessity and centrality of grace. *Conference* 13 can even be read as Cassian’s answer not to Augustine, but to Pelagius. But was it a backhanded attack on Augustine?”(Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 400.)

R.A. Markus also reads *Conference* 13 as an anti-Pelagian treatise (a pre-Augustinian one because it is not as critical of pagan virtue as Augustine was, as Hanby points out). We should question, however, whether we are to understand Cassian as “pre-Augustinian” (and therefore not yet informed by Augustine’s critique of the pagan virtues as Hanby suggests, since to frame the issue in those terms is to assume that a damning critique of pagan virtue is necessary). Cassian repeatedly affirms the necessity of perfecting one’s profession, whatever it may be. He sees practical knowledge as common to all professions, from farmer to sailor to monastic. But this sort of practical knowledge isn’t what is at stake in Augustine’s discussion of pagan virtue. While the practices that contribute to such knowledge and excellence differ from profession to profession, practical knowledge is formally the same in all cases.

*Et ita sunt haec quodammodo indiscrete permixta atque confusa, ut quid ex quo pendeat inter multos magna quaestione uoluitur, id est utrum quia initium bonae uoluntatis praebuerimus misereatur nostri deus, an quia deus misereatur consequamur bonae uoluntatis initium. multi enim singula haec credentes ac iusto amplius adserentes uariis sibi que contrariis sunt erroribus inuoluti.*²⁴²

Human will cannot operate apart from divine grace, but divine grace without human will cannot account for human action by itself, especially the extreme exertions of asceticism. Cassian thinks it is no more coherent to affirm divine grace without recognizing human will than to affirm human will without affirming divine grace. On this question, Weaver notes how Prosper and Augustine promote one line of tradition and Cassian another, the former that of bishops and ecclesial authorities and the latter that of the desert ascetics.²⁴³ This plays on the difference between theological approaches of Prosper and Augustine, on the one hand, and Cassian, on the other, who follows Origen and Evagrius for whom “grace was understood not in terms of its sovereignty or predestinating decrees that unfailingly effected their determinations in human life but in terms of its multi-faceted character, its innumerable adaptations to the condition of the human person.”²⁴⁴

²⁴² *Conf.*13.11.1.

²⁴³ “Prosper argued this point and then, to reinforce his accusation of heresy, quoted a letter of Pope Innocent to the council of Carthage of 416, referred to the Eastern bishops’ requirement that Pelagius deny that grace is a payment to merit, noted the pronouncements of the African councils of Mileve and Carthage in 416, and cited the letter of the Council of Carthage of 418 to Pope Zosimus upholding Innocent’s judgment against Celestius and Pelagius, as well as Pope Zosimus’s concurrence with the African bishops.(*Conl.*5.3) Prosper intended this compilation of citations to show that Cassian’s apparent attempt at synthesis was contrary to the authoritative tradition and teaching of the church. The monk was opposing tradition, however recent its development. Significantly, the tradition to which Prosper appealed was the one represented by the pronouncements of bishops and council and not the tradition of the elders upon which Cassian had relied.”(Weaver, *Divine Grace and Human Agency*, 129-130.)

²⁴⁴ Weaver, *Divine Grace and Human Agency*, 236.

Cassian's positive view of human nature has an attendant emphasis on how humans can progress in ascetic formation. God will typically not work with just anyone—Cassian notes that divine protection goes “together not with a lazy or careless person but with one who labors and toils” (*non otioso neque securo, sed laboranti ac desudanti eam cooperatam*).²⁴⁵ It is therefore necessary, most often, that the person labors and toils in order to benefit from divine protection—here, one learns “by disposition and virtue and his own experiences” (*quam affectu atque uirtute et experimentis propriis*).²⁴⁶ There is, in other words, a crucial relationship between Cassian's anthropology and his ethics; human nature has the seed of goodness that can develop in virtue given the toil of the person and the material conditions given by God. His optimistic anthropology enables a progressive ethics.

Cassian's account of human effort—in line with his predecessors—is more complex than that of either Augustine or Prosper. The fusion between human choice and divine grace—the “subtle and inextricable mix of human effort and God's grace” as Harmless puts it, or “interacting agencies, each with the power of self-initiation, both of which must be held together in a necessary tension in order to do justice to the complexity of the church's faith” as Weaver describes it—does not imply that human choice simply submits to divine grace.²⁴⁷ Instead, a much more complicated relation inheres between divine and human agencies. Colish insightfully reads Cassian as promoting “the synergistic interaction between God and man typical of the Byzantine

²⁴⁵ *Conf.*13.13.5.

²⁴⁶ *Inst.*12.13.

²⁴⁷ Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 399; Weaver, *Divine Grace and Human Agency*, 130.

Church Fathers and the eastern orthodox tradition as a whole,” clarifying that Cassian cannot be assumed to think about “the human contribution to this ethical enterprise...as ethically autonomous either in a strictly Stoic or in a Pelagian sense.”²⁴⁸ I follow Colish’s language of “synergistic” to describe how agencies are mutually reinforcing and in no way autonomous from each other.

For Cassian, there is not just an accord between divine and human agencies, but a deeper and necessary fusion of them. The human will is separate from the divine will and yet it becomes difficult to tell them apart when they operate to the same ends.²⁴⁹ Cassian’s description of the divine grace and human free will includes three conditions that affirm the necessity of both:

Therefore it is understood by all the Catholic fathers, who have taught perfection of heart not by idle disputation but in fact and in deed, that the first aspect of the divine gift is that each person be inflamed to desire everything which is good, but in such a way that the choice of a free will faces each alternative fully. Likewise, the second aspect of divine grace is that the aforesaid practice of virtue bear results, but in such a way that the possibility of choice not be extinguished. The third aspect is that it pertains to the gifts of God that one persevere in a virtue that has been acquired, but not in such a way that a submissive freedom be taken captive.

et idcirco hoc ab omnibus catholicis patribus definitur, qui perfectionem cordis non inani disputatione uerborum, sed re atque opere didicerunt, diuini esse muneris primum ut accendatur unusquisque ad desiderandum omne quod bonum est, sed ita ut in alterutram partem plenum sit liberae uoluntatis arbitrium: item que etiam secundum diuinae esse gratiae ut effici ualeant exercitia praedicta uirtutum, sed ita ut possibilitas non extinguatur arbitrii: tertium quoque ad dei munera pertinere ut adquisitae

²⁴⁸ Marcia L. Colish, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Middle Ages: Stoicism in Christian Latin Thought through the Sixth Century* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1990), 116.

²⁴⁹ *Conf.*13.7.

*uirtutis perseuerantia teneatur, sed ita ut captiuitatem libertas addicta non sentiat.*²⁵⁰

There are three crucial phrases in this passage that testify to the necessity of human choice in Cassian. First, it is necessary that “*the choice of a free will faces each alternative fully*” (*in alterutram partem plenum sit liberae uoluntatis arbitrium*). Here, human free will must critically recognize alternative courses of action, choosing to desire the good, in accordance with the divine will instead of in submission to it. Second, it is necessary that “*the possibility of choice not be extinguished*” (*possibilitas non extinguatur arbitrii*). Instead, human choice must be continuously active, choosing to engage the practices that habituate one in good courses of action. Third, one “perseveres in a virtue” but “*not in such a way that a submissive freedom be taken captive*” (*ita ut captiuitatem libertas addicta non sentiat*). Through habituation, one acquires the disposition to act virtuously but this does not render the person captive or subject to the disposition—one maintains one’s choice at every stage. Cassian, in this passage, affirms the centrality of human agency, the training in virtues, and the maintenance in virtuous dispositions; in short, the exercise of freedom *in tandem with* divine incitement to good action. No binary opposition between divine and human agency is accepted.²⁵¹

-Human Agency versus Demonic Agencies

²⁵⁰ *Conf.13.8.4.*

²⁵¹ Far from a binary, Cassian stresses the necessity of both grace and free will at all times: “What does this all mean except that in each of these cases both the grace of God and our freedom of will are affirmed, since even by his own activity a person can occasionally be brought to a desire for virtue, but he always needs to be helped by the Lord?” (*nisi quod in his omnibus et gratia dei et libertas nostri declaratur arbitrii, quia etiam suis interdum motibus homo ad uirtutum adpetitus possit extendi, semper uero a domino indigeat adiuuari?*)(*Conf.13.9.4.*)

The synergism between human and divine agencies is central to Cassian's account of the monastic profession. However, asceticism also involves an arduous negotiation with another class of agencies, the demonic agencies that tempt and torture ascetics. Cassian treats demons in depth throughout his works, devoting analysis of individual demons in eight of the twelve books of the *Institutes* and throughout the *Conferences*.²⁵² Instead of fleeing, the ascetic must "learn to triumph by endurance and by doing battle" (*tolerantia potius et conflictu didiceris triumphare*).²⁵³ The ascetic must engage in constant warfare against the demons and their leader, for "the wily serpent is ever at our heels—that is, he lies in wait for our end, and he seeks even to the close of our life to overthrow us" (*Uersutus enim serpens calcanea nostra semper obseruat, id est insidiatur exitui nostro et usque ad finem uitae nostrae nos subplantare conatur*).²⁵⁴

These demons would become known as the deadly vices through Gregory the Great, but can be best understood in Cassian's texts as subtle bodied spirits (referred to, alternately by Cassian, as *spiritus*, *vitium*, or *daemon*).²⁵⁵ These demons exist as corporeal agencies in the world. Certain demons are associated with inciting particular vices in the ascetic, corresponding to an undesirable set of behaviors. Many demons can assault the

²⁵² *Inst.*5-12. Cassian focuses on the relation between demons and humans in *Conference* 7 and on demonology in *Conference* 8. Here he uses the language of daemon most frequently.

²⁵³ *Inst.*10.25.

²⁵⁴ *Inst.*4.37. Of the pride that led to the fall of the devil, Cassian says: "This is the cause of the first downfall and the ultimate origin of the disease that, once again by way of him who had let himself be cast down, crept into the first man and produced the weaknesses and the wherewithal of all the vices. For in his belief that he could attain to the glory of the Godhead by his own free will and effort, he lost even that which was his by the grace of the Creator."(*Inst.*12.5.)

²⁵⁵ In *Conference* 5, Cassian does not use "*daemon*" at all. Instead, he refers to the eight "*spiritus*" from the *Institutes* 5-12 as "*vitium*" in *Conference* 5, reserving "*spiritus*" to refer to the human person's spirit. I am not quite sure of what to make of this shift in terminology yet.

person in quick succession, so learning how to deftly negotiate some of the easier ones (gluttony and fornication in Cassian's schema) is necessary to focus on defeating the more difficult (mostly, pride).²⁵⁶

Demons cannot penetrate the mind of the human person—rather, demons can only discern the state of the person throughout the person's behavior and signs visible to observers.²⁵⁷ As demons are constantly waiting for opportunities to prey upon humans, Cassian describes them as acute readers of the human psyche—they infer a person's mental state through other behavioral patterns. The types of bodily signals the person gives attracts different demons—looking at the last morsel of food signals that the time is ripe for the demon of gluttony to pounce, or flipping to the end of one's text to see how

²⁵⁶ The relation between the vices and corresponding virtues is more thoroughly explored in the twenty-four books of the *Conferences*. In book 5, Cassian describes how the eight virtues correlate with the vices, indicating the causal chain from one to the other: "this way of linking the virtues is clearly designed to teach us that one passes from sleeplessness and fasting to chastity, from chastity to knowledge, from knowledge to patience, from patience to kindness, from kindness to a spirit of holiness, and from a spirit of holiness to the rewards of genuine love."(*Conf.*14.16.)

Establishing more "basic" virtues is crucial for progressing on the spiritual path. Cassian emphasizes, for example, how necessary it is to fast as a counter to gluttony. Thus, the cultivating of virtues is correlated with the coping with vices. Cassian thereby schematizes how the monk can actively engage in the process of self-cultivation. The role of divine grace in this process becomes more and more pronounced as the virtues become more difficult to ensure. Centrally important, however, is the emphasis that Cassian puts on what the monk *can* do in ascetic practice.

²⁵⁷ Like Evagrius, who knew by external signs if one is susceptible to evil manipulations, "John Cassian likewise stresses that demons are able to detect by outward signs what is hidden in a monk's soul."(Shaw, *The Burden of the Flesh*, 149.) Shaw states further: "This emphasis on external signs of internal conditions is significant because it further highlights the importance of the external presentation of the ascetic body. We may assume that if demons are able to determine the extent of a monk's perfection by his outward demeanor and actions, then observant humans may be able to make similar physiognomic judgments of each other."(Shaw, *The Burden of the Flesh*, 149.)

much more one has to read is the telling signal that the demon of *acedia*—the spirit of listlessness, spiritual torpor, and melancholy—can prey.²⁵⁸

Demons are important for understanding how agencies interact in Cassian's model. Demons cannot penetrate the inner spaces of the human, and yet they are a crucial source of thoughts. In fact, they are one of three sources of human thoughts, along with the individual person and God.²⁵⁹ As we will discuss in the next chapter, this interplay of agencies requires the person to consent or reject thoughts, meeting them with pleasure and therefore sustaining them or overcoming them as undesired and therefore not engaging them. Either way it is necessary to understand that the boundaries of the person are rather porous—one does not have a stable and singular interior will that consents either to the divine will or to the external demonic will. Instead, there is a complex of competing desires and the person must negotiate these various influences—only over time, cultivating a specific disposition, can one face various agencies and consistently not be swayed by them.

- Profession as a Way of Life

The charge of the ascetic, then, is to battle these demons using all the tools and practices specific to the ascetic way of life. Here, Cassian figures asceticism as “the

²⁵⁸ *Inst.5; Inst.10.1*. Charles Stewart notes how *acedia* “provides one example of a demonic thought that allied the irascible and sensuous parts of the soul and ‘suffocated the intellect’ (Evagrius, *Praktikos*, 36).” (Charles Stewart, “Erotic Dreams and Nightmares from Antiquity to the Present,” *Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute* 8 (2002): 279-309, 304.)

²⁵⁹ Note *Conference 4*, where the three sources of thoughts are discussed. Similarly, dreams could come from God, the Devil, or the person (see Tertullian, *On the soul*, 47)—“a tripartite scheme was apparently adapted from pre-Christian philosophical traditions.” (Stewart, “Erotic Dreams,” 289.) “Mixed dreams have an exogenous element; they result from outside forces—the impact of image on the sleeper. These images happen to coincide with internal desires.” (Stewart, “Erotic Dreams,” 289.)

arduous profession of their way of life” (*ardua conuersationis eorum professio*).²⁶⁰ The language of “profession” (*professio* or *propositus*) or “occupation” (*occupatio*) to describe a way of life is striking as Cassian describes a class of people marked primarily not by moral superiority but by profession.²⁶¹ Ascetic living understood as a profession requires engaging specific practices, adopting certain norms, and holding certain aspirations.

Abba Moses, the main interlocutor of the first and second conferences, notes:

All the arts and disciplines ... have a certain *scopos* or goal, and a *telos*, which is the end that is proper to them, on which the lover of any art sets his gaze and for which he calmly and gladly endures every labor and danger and expense.

*Omnes, [inquit], artes ac disciplinae scopon quemdam, id est, destinationem et telos, hoc est, finem proprium habent: ad quem respiciens uniuscujusque artis industrius appetitor, cunctos labors et pericula dispendiaque universa aequanimiter libenterque sustentat.*²⁶²

To achieve the proximate goal—the *scopos*—and the ultimate end—the *telos*—specific to a given occupation requires commitment to the labor practices specific to it as a discipline. To progress in an occupation, it is necessary to develop its skills, habits, and dispositions, enduring difficult labor in the process, working to render one’s way of life fully oriented towards one’s chosen goal.²⁶³

²⁶⁰ *Inst.*2.5.2.

²⁶¹ Cassian, for example, refers to “our occupation” (*propositi nostri*) in *Conf.*1.1.1.

²⁶² *Conf.*1.2.1.

²⁶³ *Conf.*1.4.1: “As I have said, in every art and discipline a certain *scopos* takes precedence. This is the soul’s goal and the mind’s constant intention, which cannot be maintained nor the final end of the longed-for fruit arrived at except by an encompassing diligence and perseverance.” (*in omni ut dixi arte ac disciplina praecedit quidam scopos, id est animae destinatio siue incessabilis mentis intentio. quam nisi quis omni studio perseuerantia que seruauerit, nec ad finem desiderati fructus poterit peruenire.*)

Cassian interestingly sees this mode of orientation as not just part of the monastic life, but as characterizing any profession. In *Conference* 1, he illustrates how a farmer, a merchant, a soldier, and, a monastic all order their lives in a similar way, despite the differences in what they are oriented towards and what practices constitute their respective lives.²⁶⁴ Different dangers afflict the different professions, but they all need to be overcome through unceasing effort and the building of skills specific to that profession.

Nevertheless, Cassian seems to figure the ascetic life as an occupation and profession that exercises human agency in its highest form, because one operates synergistically with divine grace and in opposition to demonic agencies:

Our profession also has a *scopos* proper to itself and its own end, on behalf of which we tirelessly and even gladly expend all our efforts. For its sake the hunger of fasting does not weary us, the exhaustion of keeping vigil delights us, and the continual reading and meditating on Scripture does not sate us. Even the unceasing labor, the being stripped and deprived of everything and, too, the horror of this vast solitude do not deter us. Without doubt it is for its sake that you yourselves have spurned the affection of relatives, despised your homeland and the delights of the world and have journeyed through so many foreign parts in order to come to us, men rude and unlearned, living harshly in the desert.

habet ergo et nostra professio scopon proprium ac finem suum, pro quo labores cunctos non solum infatigabiliter, uerum etiam gratanter inpendimus, ob quem nos ieiuniorum inedia non fatigati uigiliarum

See also, *Conf.*1.4.4: “Fixing our gaze on this goal, then, as on a definite mark, we shall take the most direct route. If our attention should wander somewhat from it we shall at once return to its contemplation, accurately correcting ourselves as if by a kind of rule that will always measure all our efforts and recall them to this one mark, if our mind should have deviated ever so slightly from the proposed direction.” (*in hac ergo destinatione defigentes nostrae directionis obtutus uelut ad certam lineam cursum rectissimum dirigemus, ac si paululum quid ab hac cogitatio nostra deflexerit, ad contemplationem eius ilico recurrentes rursus eam uelut ad quandam normam rectissime corrigemus, quae semper omnes conatus nostros ad unum hoc reuocans signum arguet statim, si a proposita directione mens nostra uel paululum deuiauerit.*)

²⁶⁴

*Conf.*1.2.1-3.

*lassitudo delectat, lectio ac meditatio scripturarum continuata non satiat, labor etiam incessabilis nuditas que et omnium rerum priuatio, horror quoque huius uastissimae solitudinis non deterret. ob quem uos ipsi procul dubio parentum spreuistis affectum et patrium solum ac delicias mundi tot pertransitis regionibus despexistis, ut ad nos homines rusticos et idiotas atque in hoc heremi squalore degentes peruenire possetis.*²⁶⁵

It is “on behalf of” this way of life that the ascetic can withstand the physical and psychological pains that characterize many of these practices, especially as one struggles to adopt these practices as one’s own. By advancing in these practices, the pains of labor pass and one becomes habituated to them, rendering them constitutive of one’s life everyday: “Then all the things that you used to do out of a certain dread of punishment you will begin to do without any difficulty, as it were naturally, and no longer with a view to punishment or fear of any kind, but out of love for the good itself and out of pleasure in virtue.”²⁶⁶ Such habituation, however, requires that one stay oriented towards the *scopos* and *telos*, “on behalf of which” such trials can be endured. “For its sake”—that is, with it in mind as the end to which one wants to reach—involves the orientation to this end, which requires the adoption of the practices, norms, and dispositions specific to it. Cassian presents the ascetic way of life, profession, and occupation as crucially entailing both the practices that constitute it (the subject of which I will make part II) and the resulting dispositions that signal the transformation of the self.

Such a focus on the way of life, or profession, of the ascetic accords with Cassian’s stated goals for his texts. Of the *Institutes*, for example, he says: “my plan is to say a few things not about the marvelous works of God but about the improvement of our behavior and the attainment of the perfect life, in keeping with what we have learned

²⁶⁵ *Conf.*1.2.3.

²⁶⁶ *Inst.*4.39.3.

from our elders” (*propositum siquidem mihi est non de mirabilibus dei, sed de correctione morum nostrorum et consummatione uitae perfectae secundum ea, quae a senioribus nostris accepimus, pauca disserere*).²⁶⁷ The focus of Cassian’s texts is *not* on miracles and shows of divine power, but human behavior and ethical formation in the ascetic occupation. This focus is corroborated by Cassian’s emphasis on experience and practice, and the hard work of habituation required in order to advance in this way of life:

For the whole of [the monastic life] consists in experience and practice alone and just as such things cannot be handed on except by an experienced person, so neither can they be grasped or understood except by someone who has striven to learn them with like zeal and effort. But if they are not continually discussed and refined by frequent conferences with spiritual men, they quickly slip back into oblivion due to mental neglect.

*totum namque in sola experientia usu que consistit, et quemadmodum tradi nisi ab experto non queunt, ita ne percipi quidem uel intellegi nisi ab eo, qui ea pari studio ac sudore adprehendere elaborauerit, possunt: quae tamen si conlatione iugi spiritualium uirorum frequenter discussa non fuerint et polita, cito rursum mentis incuria dilabuntur.*²⁶⁸

Not by “leisurely meditation or verbal teaching,” but only through “zeal and effort” can the ascetic life be formed, through habituation in certain practices and continuous discussion with elders who have participated in this occupation.²⁶⁹

The practical goal of the monk is needed in order to establish the proper practices that reinforce one’s orientation towards God and thereby sets the conditions even for contemplative virtue.²⁷⁰ Consider his description of the superlative Abba Moses, “who in

²⁶⁷ *Inst.*Pref.8.

²⁶⁸ *Inst.*Pref.5.

²⁶⁹ *Inst.*Pref.4.

²⁷⁰ *Conf.*1.4.

the midst of those splendid flowers gave off a particularly sweet odor because of both his practical and his contemplative virtue” (*qui suavius inter illos egregious flores non solum actuali verum etiam theorica virtute flagrabat*).²⁷¹ Cassian’s focus is practical (*actuali*) and contemplative (*theorica*) without any separation between them. Even contemplation is a bodily practice, insofar as bodily practices are required for mental states to be achieved. Cassian’s work is not theologically doctrinal or overly systematic. Cassian’s central concern is with how to attend to one’s life as an ethical exercise requiring daily practices that enact one’s ethical status. Contemplation and practice are thus both constitutive of the integrated orientation of the person.

- The “Will” as Shaping an Orientation through Practices

Cassian’s view of experience—far from disengaged, purely intellectual contemplation—requires a combination of body, heart, and mind all oriented towards a goal.²⁷² This orientation itself is the achievement of human effort, the expression of human will not as an intellectual achievement alone but that of the body and emotions as well. Human “free choice” (*liber arbitrium*) involves the person’s orientation towards the goals of one’s profession by practicing its bodily, affective, and intellectual practices.²⁷³

²⁷¹ *Conf.*1.1.1.

²⁷² Cassian reiterates his priority of practical intelligence gleaned through lived experience over worldly knowledge: “They did not receive it in a worldly spirit by way of dialectical syllogisms and Ciceronian eloquence; rather, by their experience of an unspoiled life and by the most upright behavior, as well as by the correction of their vices and, to speak more truly, by visible indications, they learned that the nature of perfection is contained in it, and that apart from it neither the love of God nor the cleansing of vice nor the improvement of behavior nor the perfection of virtue will be able to be laid hold of.”(*Inst.*12.19.) Consider also, Cassian’s affirmation that “[y]ou will be teaching something acquired not so much by reading as by the sweat of experience.”(*Conf.*14.17.)

²⁷³ *Conf.*13.9.5. I make a deliberate effort to distance my reading of Cassian’s *liber arbitrium* from the typical translation of the Latin as “free will”—this is in order to think more dynamically about what Cassian means by *liber arbitrium*, without associating this choice and

Cassian does not affirm an abstract or intellectual notion of human “free will” that determines the person’s actions and thoughts—one’s intention, in short—from “within” the person. Cultivating the dispositions specific to one’s chosen profession rests, instead, on adopting practices of everyday life. Cassian describes, for instance, how distraction comes in many forms and trumps even the best efforts of one’s will:

For we do not keep to solitary silence or strict fasting or intense reading by our own will even when we are able to, but even against our own will we are frequently distracted from beneficial practices by conflicting interests, so that we are obliged to beseech the Lord for ample space or time in which to carry out these things.

*nam neque remotionis silentium nec districtionem ieiuniorum nec lectionis instantiam etiam illo quo possumus tempore pro nostro arbitrio retentamus, sed quibusdam occurrentibus causis etiam inuitissimi frequenter retrahimur a salutaribus institutis, ita ut uel loci uel tempori copiam, in quo haec exercere possimus, necesse sit nos a domino deprecari.*²⁷⁴

The very practices that support the right orientation of the will—silence, fasting, and scriptural meditation—are difficult to maintain. “Conflicting interests” can include everything from demonic intrusions to visits from fellow monks that require practices of hospitality. To have “ample space or time” depends on the practical conditions of one’s day: in order to practice silence, fasting, and reading, one needs to not have other urgent matters to take care. To curb such distractions, as Cassian described above, God needs to make the practical conditions amenable to the practice of concentration and discipline.

judgment with the faculty of “the will” that becomes dominant in western thinking. Considering the translations of Cassian’s Latin for “human choice” is interesting: in *Conf.13.10.1*, “freedom of our will” (*nostri [...] arbitrii*) and “power of free will” (*uirtutem liberi arbitrii*); in *Conf.13.10.2*, “power of our will” (*arbitrii nostri facultas*), “our free will” (*liberum arbitrium nostrum*), and “their free will” (*liberum eorum [...] arbitrium*).

²⁷⁴ *Conf.13.6.4.*

The various circumstances of the environment need to cooperate to enable the individual monastic to stay focused and will oneself to stay oriented towards good action.

Everything can pose a distraction for the life of the ascetic, and despite one's efforts to keep to the practices with the intensity of attention in body, heart, and mind, one needs to be met with the conditions of the environment that do not put up too many obstacles. Environmental conditions alone are, yet, not sufficient: monastics must dedicate themselves wholly to the practices that anchor their attention and confirm one's orientation towards ascetic practice and progress. If the monastic does not commit himself to the necessary practices, it does not matter if the environmental and practical conditions are ripe for the sowing of virtue. These practices constitute the requirements for ascetic development and the proper orientation towards one's way of life. Engaging these practices is the primary means of expressing one's ethical agency and one's ability to shape one's life, synergistically with divine grace.

This synergy of human and divine agency raises an interesting specter of double orientation for the ascetic. The ascetic needs to be oriented towards God and the ultimate end of the kingdom of God in order to maintain attention on the proximate goal of "purity of heart" (*puritas cordis*) in order to maintain fortitude in the face of arduous daily practices and the threats of backsliding continuously present. Without these enfolded orientations, maintenance of such a disciplined way of life would be nearly impossible—so God is necessary as defining the ultimate end towards which all humans ought to tend. In this respect, Cassian can be seen to attribute all things to God as their ultimate cause without requiring any more immediate and specific intervention by God into the individual's life.

Cassian's view of agency is thus much richer than the language of "willed submission" connotes; it does not do justice to this complex synergism between divine and human agencies nor to the complex set of practices that train and constitute the orientation of the person. The central and main act of the will is not to choose submission, after which time one has no will and simply follows the commands of elders and the rules of tradition. The will, in Cassian's account, is less a singular faculty "inside" the human person that decides what the person will do and more an orientation of the whole person. As we will continue to see in the following chapters, Cassian sees the human person's ability to choose divine courses of action as exercised in multiple registers—the bodily and the affective, in addition to the representational/mental, forms of awareness need to be oriented towards divine goals, virtues, and courses of action.

Human Agency Beyond the "Inner" and "Outer" Binary

Cassian's view of human agency, then, is expressed as a feature of one's profession, reflecting certain views of the human person and how this profession is enacted. Before I turn to the practices in part II, we need to frame Cassian's view of agency in relation to the view of the human person that renders it possible—and in order to best understand this view of the human person, we need to start with a slight detour into how "inner" and "outer" function in Cassian's texts. Agency is not just an "inner" feature of the person, as deliberative will, but consists in commitment to practices. There is no coherent split between the "interior" and "exterior" aspects of the person—nor a priority given to the former over the latter.

- "Inner" and "Outer" as Stages in Monastic Life

The first thing to note about Cassian's language of inner and outer is how it correlates with his two texts. In the move from the *Institutes* to the *Conferences*, Cassian exhorts in the latter's preface: "let us proceed from the external and visible life of the monks, which we have summarized in the previous books, to the invisible character of the inner man, and from the practice of the canonical prayer let our discourse arise to the unceasing nature of that perpetual prayer which the Apostle commands" (*proinde ab exteriori ac uisibili monachorum cultu, quem prioribus digessimus libris, ad inuisibilem interioris hominis habitum transeamus, et de canonicarum orationum modo ad illius quam apostolus praecipit orationis perpetuae iugitatem ascendat eloquium*).²⁷⁵ From focusing on the external life to focusing on the internal life, Cassian has been taken to separate and stratify the latter over the former.²⁷⁶

However, as Harmless notes, "this tidy division should not be overdrawn—as though the two works were intended for different audiences."²⁷⁷ It is incorrect to overstate the difference between the two texts as if they were intended for different audiences and written in different genres. Philip Rousseau, instead, suggests "the two modes of life might be more accurately considered as possible stages in the lives of individuals."²⁷⁸ This reading recognizes how the outer and inner are both constitutive of the ascetic profession *and* required for the formation of ascetic dispositions for all

²⁷⁵ *Conf.Pref.5.*

²⁷⁶ Passages cited include: "These books are designed more for the observance of the outer man, and the formation of cenobites."(*Inst.2.9.*) "Those following will relate more to inner discipline, the perfection of the heart, and the life and teaching of anchorites."(*Inst.2.9.*)

²⁷⁷ Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 401.

²⁷⁸ Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority, and the Church*, 182.

ascetics—there is a movement from the ascetic’s *cultus* to the ascetic’s *habitus*.²⁷⁹ Instead of a separation of practices from contemplation—or the work of the body from that of the mind—this understanding shows how both constitute the ascetic way of life together. Reading the outer “cenobitic” and inner “anchoritic” aspects allegorically, as Harmless suggests, would confirm this reading, where “[b]oth works speak to both types of monks, since all monks must deal with both external patterns and interior states.”²⁸⁰

Cassian’s presentation of the Egyptian elders certainly is idealized – these elders are exemplary of anchoritic behavior and reflect the apex of the monastic life. It is, perhaps, most necessary to see Cassian as discussing the ideal monk here for political as well as narrative and ethical reasons. Cassian ascribes significant authority to these elders on the basis of a set of characteristics: their development in virtue, their advance in purity, their simple elegance in way of life, their wisdom based on experience. By affirming the authority of the desert elders, and his own experience of their way of life, Cassian reinforces his view that experience is the bedrock for authority—and his own authority is bolstered by his first-hand experience in the desert and cultivation of the ascetic way of life over decades.

- “Inner” and “Outer” as Aspects of the Person

²⁷⁹ I am not alone in reading Cassian as rejecting dichotomies of inner and outer. Of Cassian, Rousseau argues: “He makes it clear, however, later in the same book, that at least the terms ‘outer’ and ‘inner’ (exterior and interior) do not necessarily refer to two distinct groups of people...These two activities, ‘thought’ and ‘labour,’ (*cogitate* and *opus*) form a real unity.”(Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority, and the Church*, 177-178.)

While the *Institutes* suggest that the cenobitic and anchoritic are separable ways of life, the *Conferences*, on Rousseau’s reading, shift to understand the cenobitic and anchoritic aspects as constituent stages in the development of the individual monk. The distinctions between the communal and solitary simply do not hold, especially because their features mutually constitute each other. (Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority, and the Church*, 177-183; see also Chadwick, *John Cassian*, 53-54.)

²⁸⁰ Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 402.

Cassian's allegorical treatment of "inner" and "outer" reflects how *exterioris hominis* and *interioris hominis* describe continuous, as opposed to discrete, features of the person. Cassian warns against making the central mistake of thinking "that the whole of perfection and the height of purity consist exclusively in the asceticism of the outer man" (*omnen perfectionis et castimoniae summam in sola credat exterioris hominis castigatione consistere*).²⁸¹ Cassian vehemently rejects this exclusive attention to "outer" practices as a measure for chastity, arguing the simultaneous necessity of the "discipline of the inner man" (*disciplinis interioris hominis instituta*).²⁸² Even if one practices chastity of body but is stuck in unfruitful patterns of thought, or lusts after illicit images, one lacks purity of heart. In order to cultivate the *scopos* of purity of heart, however, work on the "inner" thoughts and feelings needs to take place simultaneously with the "outer" practices of asceticism. To experience these practices necessarily involves changes in all dimensions of the person; purity is never an intellectual shift separate from the body. Rather, the co-constitutive relationship between bodily states, affective responses, and beliefs emphasizes the way that ascetic experience is necessarily embodied.

Virtues of body, heart, and soul are practiced equally and in tandem, where the state of the "outer" human is constituted by the intention of the "inner" and the "inner" ability to hold to a way of life is enabled by outer habituation in practices. Practices are necessary for contemplation, with both "depending on the quality of our living and purity

²⁸¹ *Conf.*22.3.4.

²⁸² *Ibid.*

of our hearts.”²⁸³ Cassian sees the heart and thoughts as moving unpredictably, so to keep the heart grounded “the weight of toil” in the body is needed as an anchor. Cassian thereby emphasizes the aim of attention that takes the purity of heart as its proximate objective (i.e. the direction) in order to reach the ultimate objective (i.e. the goal) of inhabiting the kingdom of God. Both objectives, however, can only be attained through practices which one takes on as constitutive of the practices’ aim. As we will consider in part II, these practices always entail the integration of bodily, affective, and deliberative attentions of the person. First, however, let’s follow through the view of the human person that follows from this non-stratified understanding of inner and outer.

Human Person and Integration through Ethical Formation

Having set up how Cassian’s sensibilities promote an integration of the outer and inner foci of attention, as well as the cenobitic and anchoritic elements, I can frame Cassian’s view of the human being as functioning as a whole. Cassian employs an allegory of a household to illustrate this, for the *oikonomia* (household) requires a careful harmonization and integration of its constituent features. So, too, does Cassian suggest that the economy of each human follows such an order. The harmonious and complementary functioning of parts is, as common to much classical thought, the measure of ideal order.

²⁸³ Columba Stewart states in this respect: “Cassian does not, however, oppose the ‘practical’ and ‘contemplative’ aspects of the monastic life. Monastic life is *always* both ‘practical’ and ‘contemplative’; contemplation includes and situates action without eliminating its necessity.”(Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 54.)

To describe the constituent parts of the human, then, also requires the prescription for their best use; the following passage thus illustrates both Cassian's anthropology and the features of his ethical program that enable the human being to progress in virtue:

For as long as the man who is strong and armed—that is, our spirit—keeps watch over his house and secures the depths of his heart by the fear of God, all his property will be safe—namely, the profits of his labor and the virtues that he has acquired over a long period. But if someone who is stronger comes upon him and overcomes him—namely, the devil, through the assent of our thoughts—he will take away the arms in which he trusted—namely, the recollection of Scripture and the fear of God—and he will divide his spoils, which means that he will disperse the deserts of his virtues by the contrary vices, whatever they may be.

*dum enim fortis, spiritus scilicet noster, domum suam custodit armatus, recessus cordis sui dei timore communiens, in pace erit omnis substantia eius, id est emolumenta laborum ac uirtutes longo tempore conquisitae. si autem fortior superueniens uicerit eum, id est diabolus cogitationum consensu, arma eius diripiet, in quibus confidebat, id est memoriam scripturarum uel timorem dei, et spolia eius diuidet, uirtutum scilicet merita per contraria uitia quaeque dispergens.*²⁸⁴

Cassian describes a householder who is responsible for the overall functioning of the household. The spirit (*spiritus*) of the human being works in a similar way to this analogy, caring for the operations of the person as a whole. If the householder, as spirit, protects the household well, then the treasures of the household will be safe. The householder *spirit* needs to both keep the household in order and protect the depths of his heart (*cordis sui*) from the thievery of the devil. In the *Conferences*, Cassian describes the thoughts (*cogitationum*) as surfacing “in our hearts,” and he figures the “heart” as the adjudicator between thoughts.²⁸⁵ The heart becomes synonymous with the sanctuary, which needs to be kept free of pollutants while preserving the treasures.

²⁸⁴ *Inst.* 6.13.2.

²⁸⁵ *Conf.* 1.26; Cassian exhorts the weighing of thoughts “with utmost scrupulosity” on scales of heart which adjudicates by measuring likeness to apostles (*Conf.* 1.21.).

The thoughts, importantly, are what either consent to, or reject, the advances of the devil—the thoughts are morally neutral, tending naturally in no particular direction. Perhaps we could call them hired guards who are to protect the household, but whose fidelity goes to the highest bidder. Thoughts have the power to protect or to undermine the security of the household, to build up virtue following the commands of the spirit or to consent to the devil’s promises for greater treats. In this analogy, scriptural recollection and fear of God provide the armor which keeps the guard thoughts focused and incentivized in positive ways; because the thoughts are preoccupied with virtuous examples, they are not swayed by the temptations of the devil.²⁸⁶ They thereby protect the household as a whole.

To maintain this focus, however, requires strength that comes from an accumulation of virtues and profits of bodily labor. This focus reflects the necessity of the body in Cassian’s system as described in this chapter. Throughout the *Institutes*, Cassian emphasizes manual labor and physical engagement as necessary for the cultivation of the virtues. Here, we can say that the spirit benefits from the labor of the body, as this labor undermines the thrall of the vices. Cassian states elsewhere that the focus involved in manual labor prevents the onslaught of many different demons — because physical engagement requires so much attention, there is less room for other demonic temptations to lure thoughts in their direction.²⁸⁷ The treasured property, here,

²⁸⁶ For thoughts as living creatures, see *Conf.*24.3.2, 24.5.1.

²⁸⁷ For demonic thoughts attempting to intrude, see *Conf.*2.13.7, 2.13.11, 7.5.5, 12.6.3, 12.11.3.

are the profits and virtues accrued through manual labor, and as Cassian makes clear in other sections, physical fasting, and unceasing prayer.²⁸⁸

Through such physical practices as manual labor and especially recitation of the psalms, the mind is “slimmed down” to a reduced number of errant thoughts, thereby more able to turn to heaven.²⁸⁹ Scriptural readings and fasting likewise serve the “useful purpose” of “purifying the heart and punishing the flesh” when the flesh runs counter to the spirit.²⁹⁰ It is vital to note that the punishing of the flesh is not an end in itself nor the standard way to relate to the body—the objective is harmonization and integration between body, mind, and heart. So, the context of Cassian’s broader anthropology clearly needs to be taken into account.

Cassian’s emphasis on the work of the heart—and its purification as a goal—indicates a sense of a unified person; that is, one that is not at odds with itself, for it follows its desire for God completely. This transformation is dynamic as the human refashions oneself into the image and likeness of God, through the synergism of one’s own practice and the work of divine grace.²⁹¹ The heart marries the mind and the body, in a connection more fluid than a dichotomized view of the self would allow.²⁹² Cassian’s

²⁸⁸ *Inst.*2.18, 6.2.1; *Conf.*2.5.2.

²⁸⁹ *Conf.*1.17.

²⁹⁰ *Conf.*1.10. Cassian also says to “work over the earth of the heart with the plough of Scripture (i.e. the memory of the Lord’s cross), to not let some beast of the mind pass through into the sanctuary of the heart.”(*Conf.*1.22.)

²⁹¹ *Conf.*9.6.5, 11.4, 11.6.3, 11.7.3, 11.9.2.

²⁹² Harmless’ account of how *puritas cordis* involves not the body, heart, and mind is vital: “For Cassian, purity of heart touched not just the heart (in the modern sense) or the body (in an extended sense), but also the mind. He routinely links purity of heart with tranquility of mind. The connection is not obvious to us. We tend to distinguish heart from mind, emotion from thinking. But Cassian, like many early Christian theologians, treats the biblical term ‘heart’ (*cor*

texts clearly reflect what Theresa Shaw states of this general necessity: “in order to achieve a life in accord with nature and to maintain a healthy condition in the soul, one must not only apply techniques of self-examination and evaluation, but also make practical, daily steps toward virtue. Training or *askēsis* toward virtue and autonomy involves the whole person. ... Thus soul and body are in a dynamic, mutually dependent relationship.”²⁹³ Health, in this Greco-Roman context, is defined as the quelling of the passions, via the tempering of the body and the purification of the heart.²⁹⁴

Evidence for this also lies in the traditions and intellectual views that Cassian pulls together, notably the way that he brings together Evagrian and Macarian heart-centered desert spirituality.²⁹⁵ Cassian was influenced by Origen and Evagrius—two very intellect-centered theologians—but he also incorporated the practical elements of Macarius and the desert tradition of heart-centered *askēsis*.²⁹⁶ This emphasis on the “heart” implies a type of relation to God that does not translate into the “will” as

in Latin) as a synonym for ‘mind’ (*mens*). In the ancient view, mind is much more than the locus of thinking; it is the conscious center of our experience as human beings, what we tend to call the self. And Cassian saw the mind—at least, the mind as it is now enfleshed in the physical world—as singularly unstable.”(Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 390.)

²⁹³ Shaw, *Burden of the Flesh*, 46. Shaw also describes how Galen, the 2nd century CE physician from Pergamon, “demonstrates as well as any figure in antiquity that the modern disciplinary boundaries between science and religion or philosophy and medicine are artificial.”(Shaw, *Burden of the Flesh*, 46.)

²⁹⁴ For example, *Inst.*6.3: “But this disease [fornication] requires solitude and distance, along with affliction of body and contrition of heart, so that, once the dangerous fever of seething emotions has passed, a state of integral health may be acquired.”

²⁹⁵ Marcus Plested, *The Macarian Legacy: The Place of Macarius-Symeon in the Eastern Christian Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

²⁹⁶ See Chadwick, *John Cassian*; George Demacopoulos, *Five Models of Spiritual Direction in the Early Church* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006); Harmless, *Desert Christians*; Harmless, “Cassian,” in Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth, eds. *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Foucault's reading has it. For Cassian, working in the tradition of Macarius, the heart helps unify the person (in contradistinction to the mind, *l'âme*, which is the other category Foucault employs).

- *Integration of the Bodily, Affective, and Intellectual*

The household allegory sets up an integrative view of the human being that Stewart describes, where instead of “interiority” being privileged, emphasis is on harmonious integration. Cassian's understanding of the human being recognizes the tension, but promotes the integration between the constituent features of the flesh, body, mind, spirit, and soul. Although Cassian distinguishes between experiences primarily concerned with the outer and those with the inner, these are two ways of describing where one's attention is drawn. He certainly does not promote hard and fast differences between what is “inner” experience (typically of the mind) and what is “outer” practice (typically associated with the body). Instead, his usage designates two phenomenological descriptors—not ontological distinctions between mind and body.²⁹⁷

This metaphor helpfully showcases how complex and mutually dependent the features of the human person are. The mind does not rule over the body, but the body influences the mind and shapes it and the spirit as a whole. If the body is not sufficiently engaged, the devil can sneak in and distract the thoughts. With the attention of the mind thus distracted, the heart and its treasures are compromised, so the spirit is no longer able

²⁹⁷ Cassian's usage of *interioris* and *exterioris* might be seen to parallel the way these terms are used in the Book of Ezekiel in the Vulgate. Here, the terms describe different parts of the temple, indicating spaces that are most sacrosanct as on the interior of the temple where the “holy of holies” resides; the exterior is still constitutive of the temple, but includes the edifice framing the inner chamber. *Ezechiel (liber ab Hieronymo ex hebraico translatus)*, in *Library of Latin Texts* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2013).

to keep order and protect the household. Instead, the thoughts, and with them the mind, follow the sparkly distractions of the devil, leaving the household defenseless against the thieves who plunder the treasure sanctuary of the heart, substituting vices like fool's gold for virtues of pure good.

The whole person, with all associated forms of awareness, needs to be purified in order to establish true integrity, and as I suggest through my analysis of the above metaphor of the human being, progress in the monastic life comes only through the mutual reinforcement of the activities of the “body” (*corpus*) and “mind” (*mens*).²⁹⁸ The “body” (*corpus*) is not sinful in itself, but only the “flesh” (*caro*) which operates in an economy of constant, misdirected desire. The “body” (*corpus*), however, depends on the “will and command” of the “heart” (*cor*), and acts from the disposition cultivated by the heart—when the heart is purified, it tends towards salubrious behavior, when the heart is overrun by vices, it tends towards negative.²⁹⁹ The “heart” (*cor*), when purified of the excessive wants of the “flesh” (*caro*), allows for the “body” (*corpus*) to follow the governance of the “spirit” (*spiritus*). As the “body” (*corpus*) follows the “spirit” (*spiritus*), so does the “mind” (*mens*) focus more on the felicitous “thoughts” (*cogitationes*) and so corroborates the balance of the “body” (*corpus*).³⁰⁰

A relationship that facilitates the establishment of “integrity of mind and body,” central to Cassian's picture of the human being is how mutually constitutive the

²⁹⁸ *Inst.* 5.6.1, 5.7.1, 5.8.1, 5.10.1.

²⁹⁹ *Inst.* 6.2.

³⁰⁰ As I will argue in Chapter 3, fasting is important, according to Cassian, because “if the flesh be filled with an excess of food, it be found at odds with the salutary precepts of the soul and insolently reject the governance of its own spirit.” (*Inst.* 6.2.)

relationship is between body, heart, mind, and spirit.³⁰¹ Cassian is very clear that all constituent parts of the human person need continuously to work together, and that the body cannot be renounced and forgotten. Instead, he focuses on how nature requires its due, and if the body is not given a sufficient amount of sustenance and care the person cannot function.³⁰² In essence, the goal of bodily work is balance and moderation—the body needs to be cared for so that it can sustain the whole organism of the person. “Anyhow,” Cassian notes, “the mind can better understand what is presented to it bit by bit and without too much strain on the body.”³⁰³ Cassian’s view fundamentally resists a hierarchical dualism between the mind and body; the work of the body influences the thoughts of the mind and fortifies the orientation of the spirit, rendering the whole fully integrated in attention and cultivation of monastic perfection.

- *Integration, Agency, and Ethics*

Cassian’s view of the human person as an integrated whole, constituted by multiple forms of awareness, directly enables his more robust view of ethical agency, attentive to both what humans can do and the salience of social formation. Since bodily practices shape internal awareness, and vice versa, the activities and forms of attention one commits to will directly shape one’s ethical progress. Rejecting the view that humans are totally dependent on the work of divine grace, Cassian states, “The sum total of our improvement and tranquility, then, ... comes, rather, under our own power.”³⁰⁴ People

³⁰¹ *Inst.* 6.4.1.

³⁰² *Inst.* 3.8.3.

³⁰³ *Conf.* 14.18.

³⁰⁴ *Inst.* 8.17.

can improve through their own efforts in crucial ways. The things that people can do, the practices they engage—the way they fast, the means of controlling thoughts, the warring with demons, the mindfulness of disposition—shape the whole individual.³⁰⁵

Training requires selecting organs, impulses, or desires to work on one at a time, but transformation requires that each part harmonize and work with a singular intention, habituated in modes of action that do not conflict. While any practice may focus attention on a certain organ or area, every practice requires the harmonization of all constituent organs in order to assist the transformation of the person as a whole.³⁰⁶ The person addressed and exhorted by Cassian's texts is active and accountable, not characterized by self-reunciation. Both his main texts, instead, schematize the means to transform one's self and one's community, ultimately shaping the Christian monastic community.³⁰⁷

By reconsidering Cassian's view of the human person and understanding of agency as requiring the integration of the heart, mind, and body through ethical practice, I argue Cassian promotes an integrative model that does not rely on exclusionary categories like "interiority" and "exteriority" or mind over body. This problem becomes clear when considering the influences of both medical and philosophical texts of the time, as well as the role of community, on Cassian. For Cassian, the "inner" person is not a

³⁰⁵ *Inst.* 5.10.1, 5.41.1.

³⁰⁶ *Conf.* 6.10, 12.5.5, 16.22.2.

³⁰⁷ Weaver connects the centrality of community to human agency in Cassian's context: "His instruction presupposed that the properly regulated communal life of a monastery provided a context propitious to the operation of grace. In contrast, the congregational setting with which Augustine had to deal lacked just such pervasive regulation. Accordingly, he identified a different arena for the operation of grace. The benefits of grace that Cassian could locate in the regulated community Augustine located in the outworking of the divine decrees on the human heart." (Weaver, *Divine Grace and Human Agency*, 236.)

terrain that can be considered in isolation from the physiological and socially participatory “outer” bodies. His emphasis, in particular, on the work of the heart indicates a sense of a unified person; that is, one that is not at odds with oneself, for one follows one’s desire for God completely.

Conclusion

This chapter has looked at ethical formation in Cassian’s texts where his account of human agency entails a particularly positive anthropology. Cassian’s anthropology not only *enables* but *requires* such a robust view of ethical agency, involving bodily, affective, and intellectual practices that train and tutor the person to act in desired ways. Ethical agency can be understood as expressed through the active cultivation of a disposition to action oriented towards the goods inherent to a given occupation that defines one’s chosen way of life. Such agency is expressed not as unrestrained freedom, but in concert with a number of other agencies, both personal—with divine and demonic agencies fortifying or distracting the person—and sub-personal, as the host of environmental, social, and biological conditions that shape the person’s possibilities for action and development.

Cassian shows us a different way to think about human agency and relationality. He promotes a view of the human person not in terms of domination or freedom, but with a subtle and integrated view of agency that belies the binary choice between determination and free will. Cassian wrestles with this question of human agency in relation to divine agency and the work of grace throughout his work, and he dedicates all of Book 13 of the *Conferences* to this discussion. It is notable that Foucault does not cite

this conference in his published articles and lectures treating Cassian. Given how much Foucault dismisses Cassian's account of agency and affirms only the elements of obedience and subordination, it is both necessary to give an extended treatment of Cassian's texts here and interesting to see how and why Foucault's reading of Cassian diverges so drastically from Cassian's own texts taken as a whole.

A model of "willed submission" where the will is understood primarily as a faculty is limited, in part, because it does not recognize the centrality and integratedness between the orientation of the will and the bodily, affective, and deliberative practices in Cassian's texts. If, then, the will is not the defining feature of the human person, then the "self" cannot be equated with it and its "inner" workings. Instead, Cassian's account opens the critical space for thinking about the "self" *not* reduced to an inner and volitional faculty but as a more integrated human person, inclusive of the various forms of awareness all of which exert influence over the decisions, judgments, and actions of the person.

Human agency (and one's will as a full orientation of the person) inheres in one's commitment to practices that help shape one's orientation towards the goods of that profession as a whole—body, heart, and mind. This chapter thus sets up how a lived-perspective is primary for Cassian's understanding of human agency and how he understands it *not* to be an exercise of the faculty of the will, but, rather, an orientation of the whole person. This orientation, furthermore, defines the ascetic way of life, the very profession, and occupation of the monastic. The trick now is to analyze what the exercise of human choice and decision involves. What can one do, in a world of contingency and

where ultimately, everything relies on God's grace? What is the content of what people can do? How do such practices constitute the disposition shaping a whole way of life?

Addressing these questions is vital to understanding Cassian's view of the human person and ethical agency and will frame the following chapters of this dissertation that look at what Cassian thinks humans can do on the most basic everyday level. As we will explore in more depth in Chapters 3, 4, and 5, Cassian does not think that spiritual progress is distinct from experiential progress. In Cassian's paradigm a mental "interior" can never be defined in abstraction from the individual that is shaped through manual labor and embodied practices and whose identity is formed through participation in social practices. With this sense of how practices and habituation characterize the ascetic profession comes a richer sense of what a transformative ethics looks like for Cassian—so Part II will now turn to the practices that constitute this life and the mechanisms by which such transformation is effected.

PART II

Practicing Ethical Formation

CHAPTER 3

Physical Practices: Bodies, Labor, and Prayer

In Chapter 2, I analyzed Cassian's integrated philosophical anthropology and theory of ethical agency. Most importantly here: a host of bodily, affective, and intellectual practices orient the whole person towards the desired goal. In this chapter, I will elucidate how physical practices are central to Cassian's ethical program and view of agency.³⁰⁸ Physical practices, in short, constitute for Cassian an essential locus for shaping one's self through the simultaneously embodied, affective, and deliberative cultivation of a way of life. How one shapes one's way of life—including which physical practices are engaged and to what end—expresses human, self-shaping ethical agency in turn.

Cassian himself devotes much of both the *Institutes* and *Conferences* to affirming the centrality of physical practices in the ascetic way of life. He repeatedly declares the priority of wisdom culled through the arduous work of bodily experience (*praktike*) over theoretical understanding (*theoretike*) alone.³⁰⁹ Such physical practices are central in Cassian not just as rote activities that are merely preliminary to contemplation and that

³⁰⁸ Cassian is by no means alone in this, as Paul Kolbet describes of Athanasius. "Not unlike contemporary Hellenistic philosophers, Athanasius believed that personal practice convinced the mind as much as any proof. He, therefore, advised Marcellinus to adopt a regime of physical actions that occupy the mind and train the body." (Paul R. Kolbet, "Athanasius, the Psalms, and the Reformation of the Self," *Harvard Theological Review* [1999]: 101.)

³⁰⁹ *Conf.*14; *Conf.*1.3.

can be discarded as one advances in the ascetic life. Rather, such physical practices help train the human person in a series of activities that unify the focus of the various parts of the person—including the body, the heart, and the mind.³¹⁰ As discussed in Chapter 2, Cassian counsels that a unified attention oriented towards a single good is necessary to advance in a chosen way of life. Otherwise, the competing desires (and objects of attention) of the different aspects of the person draw the person in conflicting directions and produce discord—a dynamic Cassian illustrates via his allegory of the mind as a high-ship in a tempest, where thoughts shove the ship around.

In Cassian's account, physical practices—such as consumptive practices, manual labor, and prayer practices—are structured, stylized, and integral forms of self-transformation. Cassian emphasizes the living body and its constitutive consumptive practices as necessary for shaping one's way of life and, ultimately, transforming oneself. Cassian does not, however, see the "body" as a mere vessel for the guiding power of reason, intellect, or will. Instead, physical practices notably involve bodily, affective, *and* intellectual attention to be integrated and oriented towards the overarching ends of the ascetic profession. Physical practices constitute the everyday practices essential to ethical formation that bring together the work of body, heart, and mind. They are not just propaedeutic for, but are constitutive of, the ascetic profession as its necessary and enduring foundation.

³¹⁰ As noted in the Introduction, there is overlap with Pierre Hadot's account of "spiritual exercises," but I am calling much more attention to how bodily engagement constitutes part of one's ethical agency (avoiding too much priority being given to the work of the mind, intellect, or will in determining behavior). See Pierre Hadot. *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (New York, NY: Blackwell, 1995).

This chapter will give an account of the physical practices that enable self-formation and are crucial to Cassian's account of human agency. In the first section, I will sketch the basic elements for the ascetic way of life, analyzing how habituation and accommodation operate in Cassian's texts. Next, I will treat in more depth three physical practices Cassian recognizes as central to the ascetic profession—consumption, manual labor, and prayer—contextualized in relation to Greco-Roman views of physiology and psychology. In the third section, I will analyze two test cases in Cassian's texts that show how physical practices enable transformation of the whole person through the examples of nocturnal emissions and tears. Analyzing these physical practices allows us, in turn, to focus on the mechanisms of every day that enable long-term transformation. Being able to engage these physical practices is the mark of human agency, as we saw in Chapter 2, but advancing in these practices also increases one's ability to transform oneself.

Basic Practices and the Frame of Life

Cassian constantly describes physical practices and a range of physically intensive activities as the backbone for one's way of life. The *Institutes* treats foundational practices for the monastic life that Cassian is centrally concerned with communicating to the monastics in southern Gaul living in cenobitic communities. The first four books give an account of the structural features that frame the practices of the cenobitic monastics, from the seemingly mundane type of dress to the appropriate diet to the number of services the monastic should observe.³¹¹ Such specifications, however, also fill the

³¹¹ The practical import of Cassian's texts is reflected even in how Cassian's texts spread—the first four books of the *Institutes* were at a later date disseminated as the “Rule of Cassian,” although Cassian's preface to the *Institutes* show that he did not intend for the books to circulate

Conferences where, in a double respect, not only do the *abbas* prescribe specific practices, but these practices constitute part of the narrative for the *Conferences* where the young Cassian and Germanus follow the practices set by a given *abba*.³¹² The fourth book of the *Institutes*, in particular, presents in a concentrated form the themes that permeate all twenty-four books of the *Conferences*. Cassian does not treat daily, concrete practices in a cursory or merely introductory way. Instead, these practices are the backbone for the total monastic way of life, and the significance of individual practices can only be understood in their relevance to this larger context.

Cassian gives a rich sense of the monks' everyday life, from physical labor to dietary consumption, from the relations between fellow monks to the relation to God, from the reading of scripture to the contemplative practices of unceasing prayer.³¹³ The first book of the *Institutes*, for instance, prescribes the dress monastics would wear every day, each garment of which Cassian gives a "spiritual" meaning that reflects the monastic profession's additional layers of scriptural and historical significance. Cassian describes such practices, including dress, as effecting the "regulation of behavior" in addition to caring for the "well-being of the body."³¹⁴

independently. (Owen Chadwick, *John Cassian* [Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1968], 195.)

³¹² Cassian refers to Germanus and himself as "one mind and soul inhabiting two bodies" (*unam mentem atque animam duobus inesse corporibus*)(*Conf*.1.1.)—we will treat their friendship in more depth in Chapter 5.

³¹³ *Conferences* 8, 14, and 10 in particular.

³¹⁴ "There are some other things in the garb of the Egyptians that pertain not so much to the well-being of the body as to the regulation of behavior, so that the observance of simplicity and innocence may be maintained even in the very character of their clothing. Thus, day and night they always wear small hoods that extend to the neck and the shoulders and that only cover the head. In this way they are reminded to hold constantly to the innocence and simplicity of small children even by imitating their dress itself." (*Inst*.1.3.)

By observing these practices that regulate one's behavior each day, one becomes habituated in these practices—like those elders who had “celebrated continuously and spontaneously throughout the course of the whole day, in tandem with their work” (*per totum diei spatium jugiter cum operis adjectione spontanee celebrantur*).³¹⁵ Such celebration of the monastic offices suggests how exemplary ascetics do not require the ritualized hours set aside for prayer—instead, one changes the quality of one's life by enabling such a continuous and spontaneous celebration at every moment. Becoming habituated in such practices also helps free up reflective space for working out other practices, both physiological and psychological.

Cassian affirms that through such habituation, one can continuously and spontaneously perform the practices that are vital to the monastic life, while acting not out of blind adherence to a rule, but by continually adapting such practices to oneself and making them one's own.³¹⁶ Making these practices one's own, in turn, reflects the intentional and voluntary nature of one's profession that is to commit oneself to a “voluntary service (*voluntarium munus*)” which “is more pleasing than functions that are carried out by canonical obligation” (*gratius uoluntarium munus quam functiones quae canonica compulsione redduntur*).³¹⁷ As Cassian sees that “what is unceasingly offered is

Cassian's full list of clothing discussed (and worn) follows: 1. Belt; 2. Garment; 3. Hoods; 4. Colobia; 5. Cords; 6. Mafortes (short cape); 7. Melotis (goatskin or pera); 8. Staffs; 9. Footwear; moderation of observance with climate or custom; 10. Spiritual belt.

³¹⁵ *Inst.*3.2.1.

³¹⁶ Cassian urges accommodation of practices to the capacity of the individual and warns against aiming for excessive asceticisms, as Stewart notes: “The exceptional disciplines of the great are dangerous temptations for the ordinary monk: the normal disciplines are hard enough.” (Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 73.) Even Cassian's prescriptions are recommendations for action that need to be adopted and accommodated by the individual for the individual.

³¹⁷ *Inst.*3.2.1; see also *Inst.*6.2.

greater than what is rendered at particular moments” (*plus enim est id quod incessanter offertur quam quod per temporis interualla persoluitur*) the goal is to choose to train in the practices and become habituated in a disposition where one continuously acts in a desired way—thereby shaping one’s way of life.³¹⁸ Cassian stresses the need to accommodate practices according to one’s capacity—noting that different physical constitutions as well as geographical aspects and cultural milieu need be considered; one cannot perform the same practices with the same intensity in the cooler climate of Gaul that the elders could in the heat of the Egyptian desert. Cassian indeed claims quite often that one should adopt one’s practices to one’s environment and capacity—monastics in Gaul will have different dietary needs than those in the Egyptian desert, so the emphasis should be on attaining balance and integration of physiology and psychology so that the whole person may be supported.³¹⁹ By adapting such practices in order to make them an expression of one’s own particular self, the individual is—in turn—transformed by these practices, so that these practices constitute the transformed self. As I will describe in more depth in Chapter 5, Cassian paints this transformative process as a form of liturgization of everyday life.

Taking these many dimensions of practice into account, Cassian schematizes a rich way of life using the elders of the Egyptian desert to illustrate ideal ways of living, while frankly addressing the anxieties common to all humans cultivating virtues and mitigating vices. Cassian describes many of the relevant practices as “virtuous activities (*virtutes*)” by which people are ethically formed and transformed, noting that “fasting, vigils,

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ *Inst.*5.9; 6.23; *Conf.*21.23.

scriptural meditation, nakedness, and total deprivation do not constitute perfection but are the means to perfection” (*jejunia, vigiliae, meditatio scripturarum, nuditas, ac privation omnium facultatum non perfectio, sed perfectionis instrumenta sunt*).³²⁰ Foremost amongst these disciplines of bodily cultivation are fasting (*jejunia*), manual labor (*operatio manuum*), and holding vigil (attended by practices of “deprivation of sleep”). To these I now turn.

- Consumptive Practices

Food and drink are particular objects of concern for Cassian and he urges the deliberate shaping of one’s consumptive practices. The daily regimen of the desert figures—reflected in the narrative of Abba Moses, young Cassian and Germanus in *Conference 2*—consists of two pieces of hard bread (known as *paxamatia*), a drop of oil, a mixture of salt and water (known as *muria*), accompanied by minimal intake of water.³²¹ The opening narrative of Book 8 of the *Conferences* features the young Cassian and Germanus offered hospitality in the form of an elaborate feast of salt, three olives each, five ground chick peas (*trogalia*) each, two prunes each, and a fig each—Cassian is clear to narrate that this was the maximum amount one could consume in the desert without being looked down upon.³²² Cassian thus presents in his texts the spectrum of nutritional consumption typical in the Egyptian desert, where the ascetic champions

³²⁰ *Conf.3.2.1.*

³²¹ *Conf.2.19*; Aline Rouselle, *Porneia: On Desire and the Body in Antiquity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 160-78; Teresa M. Shaw, *The Burden of the Flesh* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998), 117-118.

³²² *Conf.8.1.*

lived.³²³ Other notable references to food include references in *Institutes* Book 4, where food preparation is discussed in communal contexts, and in other references to hospitality.³²⁴ The majority of references to food are paired with discussions of fasting, the means of moderating one's intake, and the imperative to adjust Cassian's suggestions to the capacity of one's individual physiology.³²⁵

The many references to food in Cassian not only give fascinating insight into Mediterranean consumptive practices in late antiquity, but also reflect the various anxieties concerning what one ingests. As Peter Brown has comprehensively argued, the primary anxiety for Christian monastics in late antiquity was not sexuality but food.³²⁶ Theresa Shaw's impressive study of dietary and sexual practices in *The Burden of the Flesh* contextualizes Cassian's view of such practices with reference to the cultural and geographical contexts of his own formation. The Egyptian monastic diet, which figures most prominently in Cassian's texts, consists mostly of dried and uncooked foods as cited above, seen to have a drying and cooling effect on the bodily humors.³²⁷ Informed by

³²³ Yet consider: "In any case, one should question how literally Cassian's descriptions of desert meals were meant to be taken: writing for monks in southern Gaul where both foods and climate were different from Egypt, these certainly were not sample menus." (Rousselle, *Porneia*, 73.) See also Maria Dembinska, "Diet: A Comparison of Food Comparison between Some Eastern and Western Monasteries in the fourth-twelfth Centuries," *Byzantion* (1985): 433-462.

³²⁴ *Inst.* 4.11; 4.22. *Conf.* 2.26; 8.1; 12.15; 21.23. Cassian rounds out his regimen of self-care by recommending between three and four hours of sleep per night. See Columba Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 72-78.

³²⁵ On fasting: *Inst.* 2.18; 5.5; 5.20; 5.24; 6.23; *Conf.* 2.5.2; 2.16; 2.21.1-2; 2.22.1; 2.23.1; 12.11.2; 21.11; 21.29.2; 22.3.2; 22.6.4.

³²⁶ Peter Brown, *The Body and Society* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1988), 218-24.

³²⁷ *Inst.* 4.21-22. See also Palladius, *Hist. Laus.* 11 on Ammonius' diet of uncooked foods. The monk's goal in general is to dry (*Con.* 12.11; 22.6) and cool (*Inst.* 5.23; 6.17) the body. Rousselle, *Porneia*, 220-221.

views of the person common to the Greco-Roman medical culture which informed many early Christian views in late antiquity, Cassian correlates levels of bodily fluids to increased libido, where consuming too much fluid or food increases the libidinous fluids as well.³²⁸ This physiological correlation between fluid levels is, for Cassian and for others in his milieu, tied to a psychological correlation between susceptibility to the vices of gluttony and fornication.³²⁹ To progress in ascetic virtue, one needs to start with fasting, for without curbing gluttony one can never curb incitement to fornication.³³⁰

The connection amongst physiological fluids thus necessitates the simultaneously psychological and physiological practice of moderation in the discipline of fasting. Excess as such is the problem, and therefore also more easily remedied by an “evenhanded abstinence” avoiding rich foods and minimizing intake of even common foods.³³¹ Only the balancing of all the humors can curb excesses in any single part for

³²⁸ Shaw shows how Greco-Roman medical theory, physiology, and dietetics (as well as philosophy) sets the context for early Christian ascetic practice, where one's formation and self-definition are “displayed in the body and its activities.” (Shaw, *The Burden of the Flesh*, 52.)

See also: “Cassian deliberately chose the medical terminology of his age in order to express his sense of psychic powers that burned like subcutaneous fevers *within the unconscious self*. Sullen resentments, unacknowledged egotism, and a diffuse anger lay congealed, in the soul, like undispersed residues of noxious humors. Only by remaining alert to his own sexual temptation could the monk measure the continued, debilitating presence within him of more tenacious spiritual ailments. He must approach his sexual fantasies much as a doctor felt the pulse to learn about his patient's true condition.” (Brown, *The Body and Society*, 421.)

Cassian develops this link between gluttony and sexuality clearly in his twenty-second chapter of the *Conferences*, where overeating is one of the three central causes of nocturnal emissions: 1. too much food, 2. an unfocused mind, or 3. the work of the devil, as discussed in book 6 of the *Institutes*, with the demon of fornication.

³²⁹ Shaw, *The Burden of the Flesh*, 77.

³³⁰ Herbert Musurillo, “The Problem of Ascetical Fasting in the Greek Patristic Writers,” *Traditio* 12 (1956): 1-64.

³³¹ *Conf.* 22.3.2.

what one eats shapes the fluid makeup of the person and is reflected in the imbalance of the other humors.³³² One cannot, furthermore, indulge in the excesses of deprivation followed by feasting; nor can one engage excessive fasting in climates that cannot support the body. Stewart notes that “Cassian is wary of the physical and psychological enervation that comes from alternating severe fasts with excessive eating and therefore recommends a regular and moderate diet.”³³³

As Shaw states, physiology and psychology are continuous for Cassian—thus careful dietary practices are required for psychological balance to be possible.³³⁴ Cassian exhorts monastics to watch that “the purity of body which we have acquired may long remain in us and imitate in some respect our inviolate chastity of spirit.”³³⁵ An individual cultivates purity of body and this purity may be effectively maintained if the body continues to imitate the chastity of spirit. Cassian uses notable language of imitation for the way the purity of one’s body is to both follow and be reinforced by the purity of one’s spirit. One needs to purify the body to advance in virtue, developing a chaste spirit, but once a chaste spirit is cultivated, the body can imitate the spirit in its strength of

³³² A central issue, of course, is the distance between this ideal of balance Cassian advocates and the extreme fasting practices which historians argue brought individuals to near starvation. See Rouselle, *Porneia*, 175-78, and Peter Brown, *The Body and Society*, 218-24.

³³³ Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 72-73.

³³⁴ Shaw notes that ethics and medicine are not independent in this context, citing research that recognizes that in antiquity “Medicine and ethics are not developed as two independent techniques, they are deeply connected by a certain understanding of the human.”(Pigeaud, “La maladie de l’âme,” 27.) The scientific and the normative, then, are not seen as independent realms; instead, a shared understanding of the human results in medicine and ethics as two techniques treating the person in different but complementary ways. Shaw uses this grouping to show how “it is simply artificial and somewhat dangerous to apply modern distinctions of physiology and psychology to the ancient formulations—at least without careful definition.”(Shaw, *Burden of the Flesh*, 52.)

³³⁵ Ibid.

conviction. On this note, Cassian says: “the chastity of the inner person is discerned by the perfection of this virtue [of dietary restraint]” (*interioris hominis castitas virtutis hujus consummation discernitur*).³³⁶ Purifying the person requires the simultaneous purification of body and spirit; the condition of one shapes the other and the optimal state is for an integration of attention and activity. Purifying the heart, then, is another way to purify the whole person; Cassian’s references to the heart as the integration of physiology and psychology becomes synonymous with the person (a point developed further in Chapter 4).³³⁷

- Manual Labor Practices

References to physical labor permeate the pages of both the *Institutes* and *Conferences*. Cassian reiterates repeatedly how necessary performing manual labor is for the training of the monk. Cassian makes clear that this emphasis on work is the cornerstone of *askēsis* for elders throughout the Egyptian desert who “measure the state of their heart and their progress in patience and humility by their eagerness to work” (*actum cordis ac profectum patientiae et humilitatis sedulitate operis metientes*).³³⁸ Here, we see how even the spiritual state of monks is assessed by gauging one’s desire to work. Eagerness to work is not just needed by a novice, for monks at all stages need work in order to progress in virtue.

³³⁶ *Inst.*5.11.1.

³³⁷ Psalmic recitation and scriptural meditation will be the focus of Chapter 4, where I will describe in more depth how reflecting on these salubrious images avoids reflecting on distracting ones. Cassian describes the monk’s whole life as becoming one of deliberate prayer, as meditation on texts and supplications constitute the continuous background of all activities of a monk of the Egyptian desert.

³³⁸ *Inst.*10.22.

Cassian illustrates the necessity of continuous and daily manual labor through the example of Abba Paul. Abba Paul had plenty of food from nearby date palms, Cassian states, so he did not need to work in order to grow more food. Nevertheless, he would labor tirelessly every day, continuously storing up the fruits of his labor, and at the end of the year he would burn up the entire lot of food, “to that extent proving that without manual labor a monk can neither stay in one spot nor ever mount to the summit of perfection” (*in tantum probans sine opera manuum nec in loco posse monachum perdurare, nec ad perfectionis culmen aliquando conscendere*).³³⁹ Central here is how the *abba*’s industry, discipline, and commitment to manual labor not only reflects Abba Paul’s virtue but also contributes to ascetic training in perfection. In this way, such labor itself constitutes the ascetic way of life in its most exemplary register.³⁴⁰

In the example of Abba Paul, continual labor is always needed to effect transformation of the person for three reasons: 1) it purges the heart of errant desires, 2) it centers one’s thoughts, and 3) it centers one’s physical being. So Cassian describes Paul: “And so, although the obligation of earning a livelihood did not demand this course of action, he did it just for the sake of purging his heart, firming his thoughts, persevering in his cell, and conquering and driving out acedia” (*ut cum hoc fieri nequaquam necessitas victus exigeret, pro sola purgatione cordis et cogitationum soliditate, ac perseverantia cellae, vel acediae ipsius victoria et expugnatione perficeret*).³⁴¹ With the focusing of one’s hands, heart, and mind of manual practices, one is not as susceptible to demonic

³³⁹ *Inst.*10.24.

³⁴⁰ *Conf.*10.22, 10.24.

³⁴¹ *Inst.*10.24.

influence. Physical labor helps the monk negotiate the nefarious demon of *acedia* who prompts spiritual torpor and distracts the person from the spiritual life. Cassian especially connects the imperative of manual labor to success in the struggle with demons. Without it, there is no hope of combatting demonic warfare, especially because of the view that “a monk who is working is struck by one demon, whereas an idler is destroyed by innumerable spirits” (*operantem monachum daemone uno pulsar; otiosum vero innumeris spiritibus devastari*).³⁴² While the monk is focused on physical labor, he is less prey to an onslaught of demons because his attention is already held; the idler, in contrast, is easily distracted by any demonic threat because he lacks this focus.

Ultimately manual labor enables and is always accompanied by constant prayer, features which Cassian particularly reflects on to extol the way of life of elders in the Egyptian desert, suggesting the broad contours of a desirable way of life in general:

For they are constantly doing manual labor alone in their cells in such a way that they almost never omit meditating on the psalms and on other parts of Scripture, and to this they add entreaties and prayers at every moment, taking up the whole day in offices that we celebrate at fixed times.

*Ita namque ab eis incessanter operatio manuum privatim per cellulas exercetur, ut psalmorum quoque, vel caeterarum Scripturarum meditatio numquam penitus omittatur. Cui preces et orationes per singula momenta miscentes, in his officiis quae nos statuto tempore celebramus, totum diei tempus absumunt.*³⁴³

³⁴² *Inst.*10.23.

³⁴³ *Inst.*3.2.

With the body preoccupied with the tasks at hand, the monk simultaneously and constantly meditates on passages from sacred scripture.³⁴⁴ Manual labor is vital not just because it is a focusing activity, but because of which objects hold the monk's attention. Through habituation in practices of physical labor, prayer, and scriptural meditation, one's desires and attention are directed towards salutary images and the cultivation of virtues (which prevents competing desires from following demonic enticements). It is in this way that "prayer and manual labor are natural partners," as Stewart says of Cassian's traditional attitude.³⁴⁵

- Prayer Practices

Cassian describes the different canonical hours of prayer, especially in the cenobitic setting in *Institutes* Books 2 and 3. While collective liturgy will be discussed in Chapter 5, it is useful to get a sense of what individual bodily engagement looks like in these prayer practices. What I want to focus on here is how Cassian extols prayer that is not imposed by the canonical hour, as mentioned in the last section, but instead that which fills all of one's actions: constant or unceasing prayer.³⁴⁶

Cassian's texts often reference core features of the physical practices that accompany spoken prayer and, in fact, his *Conferences* 9 and 10 provide "the most extensive single treatment of prayer in early monastic literature."³⁴⁷ One stands with arms

³⁴⁴ The topic of prayer will also be treated in Chapters 4 and 5.

³⁴⁵ Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 107; see also *Conf.*10.14.2; 4.12.4; *Inst.*2.1.4; 7; 10.

³⁴⁶ "For Cassian, the monk is a contemplative and is most truly himself when he prays." (Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 393.)

³⁴⁷ Columba Stewart, "Prayer," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, eds. Susan Ashbrook Harvey and David G. Hunter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 753.

outstretched in the *orant* posture. At intervals, one drops quickly to one's knees and bends one's head to the ground in a supplicating position. Cassian strongly states that one immediately gets up and continues to pray standing up with arms outstretched—such a quick supplication ensures that no one falls asleep on the ground.³⁴⁸ Individual prayer includes the recitation of psalms and short personal prayers, as well as excerpts from scriptures memorized by ascetics. Prayer as the constant occupation of the ascetic, co-present with manual labor and any other activity, is contemplative and orients one's focus towards God in all one's tasks.

As the precondition for constant prayer, Cassian stresses that the forms of attention one cultivates through dietary and manual practices likewise prepare one for the concentrated form of prayer: “The way we want to find ourselves when praying is the way we ought to be preparing ourselves before praying” (*Quamobrem quales orantes volumus inveniri, tales nos ante orationis tempus praeparare debemus*).³⁴⁹ Just as fasting and manual practices prepare one for the intense attention required in prayer practices, deepening one's prayer practices helps to better define one's orientation and therefore enables the stabilization of one's attention.

The distinctiveness of prayer practices is that they not only help hone the quality of attention in all other practices as well, but as Cassian describes, the person as a whole can be more fully oriented towards the good when one is oriented toward in prayer.³⁵⁰ As

³⁴⁸ *Inst.*2.7.2.

³⁴⁹ *Conf.*9.3.3.

³⁵⁰ Stewart notes the centrality of prayer amongst other central theological issues: “Cassian's theology of prayer is of a piece with his eschatological orientation, his integrative view of the human person, and his spiritual understanding of the Bible. All come to bear on the practice and experience of prayer.”(Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 132.)

we considered in Chapter 2, when discussing the possibilities of this unceasing prayer, Cassian describes the mutual fortification between physical labor and spiritual meditation:

The upshot is that it is hardly possible to determine what depends on what here—that is, whether they practice manual labor ceaselessly thanks to their spiritual meditation or whether they acquire such remarkable progress in the Spirit and such luminous knowledge thanks to their constant labor.

*ita ut quid ex quo pendeat, haud facile possit a quoquam discerni, id est, utrum propter meditationem spiritalem incessabile manuum opus exerceant, an propter operis jugitatem tam praeclarum spiritus profectum, scientiaeque lumen acquirant.*³⁵¹

This understanding undercuts Foucault’s assumption that an exclusionary emphasis on thought is present in Cassian’s texts. Prayer fortifies one’s orientation, but so, too, do labor and fasting likewise enable such attention. As discussed in reference to manual labor, embodied experience and habituation are necessary for the desired transformations to occur—transformations that require the integration of bodily and mental forms of attention. Stewart describes Cassian’s view of prayer as a mixture between “the cool, apophatic tradition represented by Evagrius and the much warmer, experiential tone of Pseudo-Macarius.”³⁵²

Cassian’s account of Abba Moses reflects his view that habituation in prayer practices enables an orientation of the whole person and trains one’s attention on an ultimate good. In book 1 of the *Conferences*, Cassian presents Moses as voicing the

³⁵¹ *Inst.* 2.14.

³⁵² Stewart, “Prayer,” 754.

imperative to have not only the ultimate objective of reaching the “kingdom of God” but the proximate objective needed in order to successfully pursue it, as discussed in Chapter 2.³⁵³ As Stewart analyses Cassian, we are reminded that “every aspect of human existence has a role in the reintegrative process he calls ‘purity of heart,’ ‘perfect chastity,’ or ‘unceasing prayer.’ He was no dualist: the most intimate and private realms of bodily and sexual experience were drawn into the project of transformation through grace.”³⁵⁴ Development of purity of heart through these prayer practices requires that progress of body, heart, and mind occur in tandem—both body and mind act as signs for the state of the other. When the body is purified of sensory attachment, then the mind is able to keep its attention on the desired focus (of God). When the mind stays focused in the right way, one is able to regulate the actions of the body, training it into modes of life that require habituation. The most explicit signs of the state of one are present in the other.

Prayer is at the heart of monastic life for Cassian and by orienting the person’s various forms of awareness—bodily, affective, and intellective—towards God, the whole is continually transformed so that one lives one’s life more and more with such goods ever present. This articulation of unceasing prayer involves the centrality of experience and a further refutation of Foucault’s claim that renunciation of self is primary. For Cassian, one engages in ascetic practices precisely for the transformative potential; to

³⁵³ *Conf.1.3; Conf.1.4.*

³⁵⁴ Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 131. Stewart here also notably refers to the “prudery that we so often mask with affected openness and selective honesties” when discussing reasons for people’s refusal to recognize the importance of the whole person for Cassian.

properly engage these practices is to transform one's life in every way and to develop the self's potential, not to renounce it.

*

(1) Consumptive, (2) manual, and (3) prayer practices in Cassian's texts thus reinforce a reading of Cassian's integrated anthropology. To make any progress at all requires habituation in physical practices that focus the different parts of the person on the same goal. Carefully regulating one's consumptive practices, for Cassian, helps to eliminate excess fluids thereby balancing the physiology of the person; only when one's physiology is in balance, in turn, can one continue to struggle with psychological vices one by one (for physiological imbalance correlates with psychological imbalance, and any transformation of the person requires the co-constitutive balancing of physiology *and* psychology).

Physical practices like manual labor are also necessary, according to Cassian, for they act like an anchor for the person, focusing one's attention on their execution, preventing other desires from being realized.³⁵⁵ As regulating consumptive practices and engaging manual practices are always necessary in the ascetic life, they transform one's way of life as its very backbone—instilling disciplinary focus and preempting the free play of other desires.

Prayer practices, then, both help orient these other practices towards an end that incentivizes such transformation and are themselves enabled and strengthened through consumptive and manual practices. Ideally, as Cassian reflects through Abba Moses, all forms of awareness—bodily, affective, and mental—are unified and focused on achieving

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*Inst.*2.14.

the same end (*skopos*). In all three sets of practices discussed here, the integration of physiology and psychology is what enables transformation—for the person can only transform if all the parts of the person are focused on the same end; the alternative is to have different parts of the person following different desires which conflict and preempt the person as a whole from acting effectively and consistently.

Transformation through Physiology and Psychology

Cassian's treatment of nocturnal emissions and tears both vividly illustrate the integration of the features of the human person in a transformative ethics focused on constitution through physical, scriptural, and prayerful practices. This discussion will explore the implications of the prior section's argument on these issues of how physiology and psychology of the individual mutually constitute each other central to Cassian's texts. I will look particularly at how, with these two phenomena, for Cassian, one's progress is measured by bodily, affective, and intellectual forms of awareness in tandem, oriented towards the same end and anchored in the regulation of everyday behavior.

- Nocturnal Emissions

Cassian is notable for his frank and involved treatment of nocturnal emissions, devoting the entire twenty-second book of the *Conferences* to it and peppering the *Institutes* and *Conferences* alike with references. The *Conferences*, although certainly a long tome of 24 books, in modern translations omits Book 22 when making selections.³⁵⁶

³⁵⁶ Boniface Ramsey's latest translation of the *Conferences* (1997) presents the text in its entirety and does not shy away from such bodily issues.

Owen Chadwick, in his 1950 classic on the life and texts of Cassian, avoids reference to Book 22 altogether and when any mention of nocturnal emissions occurs in the texts that he cites from other books of the *Institutes* (Book 6 on fornication, for instance) he employs very loose euphemisms instead.

What is significant here is how Cassian's treatment of the male body in its natural functioning has been partly obscured, which reflects larger issues concerning Cassian's anthropology. If this omission is redressed, then the body is more present both as a source of concern and in its relation to figurations of the human person more broadly. David Brakke summarizes what I have been arguing as my broader thesis concerning "inner" and "outer" very succinctly in relation to the problem of nocturnal emissions: "Nocturnal emissions are problematic, then, because they suggest the persistence of boundaries between a person's 'inside' and 'outside,' a distinction that precludes an entirely visible self."³⁵⁷ Transforming oneself so that one no longer experiences nocturnal emissions, then, reflects the continuity of "inner" and "outer" enhanced and harmonized through ethical formation. This makes possible the porous, non-dichotomized, integrated, and transparent self that Cassian desires. This feature renders Cassian's view of nocturnal emissions particularly important.

The discourse of nocturnal emissions always occurs in relation to the ideal of chastity in mind, heart, and body that Cassian constantly seeks. As Cassian states: "[i]t will be a clear sign and a full proof of this purity if either no unlawful image occurs to us as we lie at rest and relaxed in slumber or at least, when one does surface, it does not

³⁵⁷ David Brakke, "The Problematization of Nocturnal Emissions in Early Christian Syria, Egypt, and Gaul," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3.4 (Winter 1995): 448.

arouse any movements of desire.”³⁵⁸ There are two possible iterations indicating progress in purity of heart (the proximate goal of the monk) and the monastic life more broadly: first, seductive images will abate in frequency when the monk is asleep; second, even if the images do occur, the monk does not desire to further the train of images. That such images occur is an inevitability; the human person cannot control this.³⁵⁹

The status of divine agency is central here. Full chastity and the full quelling of nocturnal emissions can be obtained only through divine grace, and Cassian also stresses the limits of human agency. Cassian thus exhorts the monastic to be one of those graced individuals who establish a “degree of purity through lengthy toil and effort and by way of integrity of mind and body, and who do not feel the stings of the flesh in the form of an onslaught of base desire but only in the form of a movement of nature.”³⁶⁰ Cassian sees nocturnal emissions as natural processes of the body that should not precipitate shame. He claims that the physical erection, as a natural and bodily “movement of nature,” is not morally problematic; the problem arises when desire is involved. Cassian thereby figures the physical movement as natural but pleasure is not:

This is incumbent upon us, then, and we must fight against the movements of the soul and the impulses of the flesh until the condition of the flesh submits to the requirements of nature and does not arouse pleasure, expelling excess matter without any harmful wantonness and not doing battle with chastity.

Huc usque igitur festinandum est nobis et eo usque aduersus animae motus uel carnis incentiua pugnandum, donec ista carnis condicio necessitatem naturae expleat, non suscitet uoluptatem, concretam

³⁵⁸ *Inst.*6.10.

³⁵⁹ *Inst.*7.3.1; *Conf.*22.3.5.

³⁶⁰ *Inst.*6.4.

*exuberantiam sine ullo pruritu noxa que propellens, non pugnam suscitans castitati.*³⁶¹

The monk, through habituation and purification can control his desire to be seduced by demonic influence. One should not desire to indulge in lusty images, but should be fully oriented towards God.

What one can control, thus, is how one focuses one's attention: one should occupy one's mind with spiritual pursuits and practices or else one will be distracted by harmful thoughts, as we saw in the discussion of demons.³⁶² Even if one practices chastity of body but is stuck in unfruitful patterns of thought, or lusts after illicit images, one lacks purity of heart. Cassian sees such a person as making the central mistake of thinking "that the whole of perfection and the height of purity consist exclusively in the asceticism of the outer man" (*omnen perfectionis et castimoniae summam in sola credat exterioris hominis castigatione consistere*).³⁶³ Cassian vehemently rejects this exclusive attention to "outer" practices as a measure for chastity, arguing the simultaneous necessity of the "discipline of the inner man" (*disciplinis interioris hominis institute*).³⁶⁴ In order to cultivate purity of heart, work on the "inner" thoughts and feelings needs to take place in tandem with the "outer" practices of asceticism.

Cassian's exemplary ascetic figures are thus those who move from the experience of "corruption," read as susceptibility to base desires, through to the inverse and corollary experience of purity through the physical and mental efforts of the monk who effects the

³⁶¹ *Inst.*6.22; see also *Inst.*3.5.1.

³⁶² See especially *Inst.*2.13.1, 2; *Inst.*6.10.

³⁶³ *Conf.*22.3.4.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

“integrity of mind and body” through these ascetic practices. To experience these practices necessarily involves changes in all dimensions of the person; purity is never an intellectual shift separate from the body. Rather, the co-constitutive relationship between bodily states and mental orientations/beliefs emphasizes the way that ascetic experience is necessarily embodied.

- Tears

The example of nocturnal emissions—with their multiple sources, the possibility of a natural source (without the participation of desire), and their status as the ultimate test of one’s progress in virtue—serves as a negative example for how difficult it is to fully harmonize the multiple forms of attention of an integrated and mutually influencing psychology and physiology. To turn to a positive example of this same dynamic, Cassian’s account of tears—as a simultaneously integrated and mutually constitutive psychological state and physiological event—provides an excellent illustration of marking one’s progress in the ethical life. The physical expression of tears does not stand as a sign for one’s interior state of compunction and sorrow; tears are not just the signifier for the more valuable psychological state signified. Instead, tears in fiery prayer help constitute the referent—*compunctio*—as compunction is the spontaneous expression of tears and sorrow.

Having the resources to combat the onslaught of demons, the objective of the monk is *puritas cordis*, approached through continual prayer, obedience to elders, and orientation to God. As these practices are engaged, one can possibly experience deep unceasing prayer and the tears that manifest as part of this experience. Abba Moses of *Conferences* 9 and 10 discusses the centrality of prayer practices in two stages. Book 9 is

primarily dedicated to an analysis of the Lord's Prayer; the authority of this form of prayer is recognized as a requirement. In a transition to Book 10, Cassian introduces another form of prayer, "fiery prayer" or "wordless prayer" (*ineffabilem orationem*).³⁶⁵ This "higher stage" is "known and experienced by very few," thus it is neither a common occurrence nor is it a requirement of the ascetic way of life. This prayer does not differ from the other form of prayer in any physical gesture or articulation. One engages the same practices of continual prayer, yet at times with richer affective effects, surpassing human comprehension and exceeding what the "self-conscious mind is able to articulate easily or to reflect upon" (*quanta nec eloqui facile nec percurrere mens in semet ipsam reuersa praeualeat*).³⁶⁶ Described as illuminated by "heavenly light," this moment of fiery prayer is wordless and yet "the mind" (*mens*) "gushes forth as from a most abundant fountain and speaks ineffably to God" (*conglobatis sensibus uelut de fonte quodam copiosissimo effundit ubertim atque ineffabiliter eructat ad deum*). In Cassian's account, this intense and prayerful communion with the divine is experienced as an infusion of divine light in the person still engaging in the practices. This experience of fiery prayer does not involve one moving "beyond" the body, for one continues to engage the same physical practices—one can experience the fullness of prayer as an achievement of perfect integration between bodily, affective, and intellectual practices without the discursive reflection back on one's state.

Tears can participate in a variety of propositional attitudes, ranging from "tears about past failures to tears in anticipation of future beatitude."³⁶⁷ In fact, Cassian suggests

³⁶⁵ *Conf.*9.25.1.

³⁶⁶ *Conf.*9.25.1.

a four-fold progression in *compunctio*. First, the tears made from remembering past sins.³⁶⁸ Second, the tears anticipating the glory of the afterlife, characterized by “unbearable joy” (*intolerantia gaudii*) and “tremendous liveliness” (*alacritatis immensitas*).³⁶⁹ Third, the tears spawned by fear of hell that prompts opposing emotions of terror and repentance. The second and third stages are best suited for the forms of canonical prayer outlined in *Conference* 9.15. Finally, the fourth involves tears of sorrow for sins of others, precipitated especially for those who have advanced far in purity of heart and who make this part of their unceasing prayer as in *Conference* 10.11.1.³⁷⁰

Compunction is elicited from the recesses of the soul, reflecting the depth that such divine illumination reaches.³⁷¹ Tears, in this type of prayer, occur when “it [the mind] is filled with such an abundance of compunction and with such sorrow that it cannot deal with it except by an outpouring of tears.”³⁷² An excess of compunction links to an excess of tears—this is more than a cause and effect chain: compunction does not lead to tears, causally, but excessive compunction involves physical tears as part of the

³⁶⁷ *Conf.*20.8.11.

³⁶⁸ *Conf.*20.7.

³⁶⁹ *Conf.*9.27.

³⁷⁰ Tears, interestingly, are never expressions of grief particular to Christ, as Irénée Hausherr notes in his study of the doctrine of compunction in the Christian East, “weeping for Christ is not Christian. Monastic *penthos* will never be found related to the death of Christ.” (Irénée Hausherr, *Penthos: The Doctrine of Compunction in the Christian East* [Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1982], 7.)

³⁷¹ Prompted by a singular divine infusion, there are yet many forms that such compunction can take. The “fruits” of compunction—that is, the manifestations—can be primarily characterized as either joyous and exultant or silent and stuporific. Of the silent type, three modes of expression are possible: one can be rendered stunned, or one can groan excessively, or one can only handle this experience by excessive tears.

³⁷² *Conf.*9.27.

experience. The feelings of compunction correlate with the physical phenomenon *spontaneously*, Cassian crucially notes.³⁷³ Physical release of tears correlates with the intensity of compunction (which involves deep sorrow). In fiery and wordless prayer, compunction is a physical, emotional, and intellectual state that involves not only psychological sorrow (propositionally directed at objects) but also physiological tears simultaneously.

Stewart describes Cassian's *compunctio* as "a multivalent term, signifying both state and event."³⁷⁴ So, too, do I read Cassian's account of *compunctio* as simultaneously the state of sorrow and the event of tears that cannot be separated; there is no diremption between state and event, because there is no separation between a psychological "state" and a physical "event" (just as there is no separation between an inner state and an outer event). The multivalence of a term like *compunctio* reflects the mutually constitutive nature of psychology and physiology that Shaw points to in Cassian.

When considering agency, the flow of tears, just as the cessation of nocturnal emissions, is only possible with divine agency.³⁷⁵ As opposed to the account of nocturnal emissions where three sources were possible—demons, oneself, or God—with tears, only the divine can be the source.³⁷⁶ Trying too hard to weep may either reflect a prideful

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 125. "He hands on the traditional understanding of *katanyxis/penthos* as an abiding virtue of the monastic life, thereby adhering to the tradition of Egyptian desert monasticism."

³⁷⁵ *Conf.*9.30.1. "This process cannot, however, be triggered at will. ... Tears, like 'fiery prayer,' are beyond human control." (Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 128.)

³⁷⁶ Kallistos Ware, "An Obscure Matter: The Mystery of Tears in Orthodox Spirituality," in *Holy Tears: Weeping in the Religious Imagination*, eds. Kimberley Patton and John Hawley, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005), 244-245. Ware describes Cassian's emphasis on

character (where the monastic wants to show off his sincerity) or it can lead to despairing of the arduous work in ascetical practices.³⁷⁷ The threat of pride continually lurks, as Evagrius cautioned before that one can forget why one is crying and become prideful of these tears as marks of divine favor—a dynamic which clearly shows that the vices are still footed deeply in the person and therefore do not concord with the tearful physical expressions. Stewart comments on the role of *compunctio* in the ascetic life, epitomized by tears which are not “left behind” after a monk has attained a certain level of perfection. Instead, as Stewart notes, “like all ascetical disciplines, they were never left behind ... weeping for sins was seen not as a phase of the monastic life but as a way to characterize the whole of it.”³⁷⁸

Cassian’s account of tears illustrates the goal of the monastic program, *puritas cordis*, by showing what the fruits of the deepest compunction can be in terms of divine delights. Always engaging physical practices, the monastic becomes constituted through habituation in these practices, both psychological and physiological. Human agency participates synergistically with divine agency, as Colish argued, as habituation through dietary, manual, and prayer practices is the precondition for divine illumination and the *compunctio* it elicits.³⁷⁹ Just as one cannot have contemplation without action, ascetical

the spontaneity of tears, and how they cannot be induced through willful effort but are instead a gift of god – while also noting that tears for sin can have utility even for beginners.

³⁷⁷ The possibility of despair lurks in all ascetical practices and that is a danger when trying too hard to weep; the danger of pride is especially relevant. See Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 124, 129.

³⁷⁸ Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 124.

³⁷⁹ Marcia Colish’s account of the relation between agencies in Cassian’s texts is particularly excellent and one I foreground in the Introduction: “What Cassian proposes is the synergistic interaction between God and man typical of the Byzantine Church Fathers and the eastern orthodox tradition as a whole. Stoicism provides him with a way of conceptualizing the human

discipline encompasses the contemplative and the active, the “inner” and the “outer,” as different dimensions of the total phenomenology. The role of toil is still, therefore, central to fiery prayer and the mystical phenomenon of divine illumination.

Ethical Transformation and Cassian’s Integrated Anthropology

As established in Chapter 2, contemplation and practice jointly reinforce the unification of the different parts of the person—this is likewise seen in the examples of nocturnal emissions and tears. Transformations of the self, where vices are left behind and virtues cultivated, are seen in these crucial examples. Advances in contemplation firmly rely on the quality of one’s practices and the degree to which one’s heart has been purified; such advances rely, in other words, on a transformed self shaped through these very practices.

The monk works physically to help purify the heart, redirecting desire towards God alone. The disposition cultivated through such habituation emphasizes the individual monk’s continual attention to cultivating good thoughts and actions, and undermining bad ones. Cassian, in other words, describes the key features of the ethical life in terms of a disposition to act in a certain way; such action necessarily starts with and requires the continued work of the body. As one progresses, certain practices become second nature, so one does not have to reflect on their performance—however, these practices still

contribution to this ethical enterprise.” Marcia Colish, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1985), 116.

constitute a crucial dimension of contemplation. Advances in contemplation firmly rely on the quality of one's practices and the degree to which one's heart has been purified.³⁸⁰

Describing monastics' everyday practices, Cassian illustrates clearly how integrated contemplation and practices are in this perspective:

For they practice equally the virtues of body and of soul, balancing the profit of the outer man with the gain of the inner. On the heart's slippery movements and thought's unstable undulations they fasten the weight of toil as a kind of steadying and immovable anchor, and, once the shifting and roving character of the heart has been fixed to it, it can be kept within the confines of the cell as if in a most secure harbor.

*nam pariter exercentes corporis animae que uirtutes exterioris hominis stipendia cum emolumentis interioris exaequant, lubricis motibus cordis et fluctuationi cogitationum instabili operum pondera uelut quandam tenacem atque immobilem anchoram praefigentes, cui uolubilitas ac peruagatio cordis innexa intra claustra cellae uelut in portu fidissimo ualeat contineri.*³⁸¹

Virtues of body and soul are practiced equally and in tandem, where the state of the “outer” human relies on the state of the “inner,” and vice versa. Cassian sees the heart and thoughts as moving unpredictably, so there can be no advance in contemplation without daily practices of manual toil; one's ability to attain such contemplation is “depending on the quality of our living and purity of our hearts.”³⁸²

³⁸⁰ The work of virtue, I suggested above, is not the internal work of the mind in abstraction. Instead, the movements of the heart are unstable without the centering influence of physical labor. Such labor is seen to keep the thoughts focused, because if one is paying attention to an activity, there is less space for having errant thoughts and desires.

In addition to manual labor, the notion that one gains authority through one's experiences likewise affirms the centrality of embodiment in ascetic practice. These two dimensions further illustrate how Cassian promotes an integrated ethic, which does not privilege mind over body.

³⁸¹ *Inst.*2.14.

³⁸² Columba Stewart states in this respect: “Cassian does not, however, oppose the ‘practical’ and ‘contemplative’ aspects of the monastic life. Monastic life is *always* both

Far from a disjunction between the exterior and the interior, between practice and theory, between action and contemplation, Cassian affirms a continuum and mutual reliance between them. While the proverbial difference between Mary and Martha is that between choosing the contemplative life and the practical life, Cassian goes out of his way to affirm both ways of life.³⁸³ The divide between labor of the body and labor of the mind is not relevant to the text. The themes treated here center on how monastics think about their own actions, how they order their own daily activities, and how they understand the simultaneously spiritual and material significance of any given practice. The contemplative life cannot occur outside of the practical life. If we consider Cassian's texts primarily with an eye to ethical agency, such separation proves itself untenable.

- *Reading ethical agency in this fold*

Cassian predicates the ethical agency of the individual on both practice and contemplation being enacted and, through practice and over time, integrated. Dualizing the exterior and the interior—especially when thinking about the human person—is determinedly *not* a part of Cassian's project. For Cassian, one's ethical agency enables transformation figured as a gradual integration of the forms of awareness, attention, and desire of the whole person; the end of such transformation is "purity of heart" involving the disposition to act and reflect in a certain way.

The psychology and physiology of the body in action needs to be integrated through the capacity of ethical agency. The body does not act as a mere "sign" signifying the substantially more significant "inner," intellectual, and spiritual referent; the body is

'practical' and 'contemplative'; contemplation includes and situates action without eliminating its necessity.'"(Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 54.)

³⁸³ *Conf.*1.8.

not only important, in other words, for what it reveals about the mind. The “external” body cannot be considered only as symbolic structure or discursive site, nor can the “inner” life account for the human person as a whole. Cassian's texts thus suggest that bodily activities shape and constitute practical reasoning. With more attention to the co-constitution of practical reasoning and bodily activities, a richer understanding of the mechanisms of ethical agency can be articulated; no account of ethical formation is complete without recognizing the constitutive role of bodily forms of awareness.

Cassian's view of ethical agency can thus best be engaged by calling attention to features of the human being for Cassian that Foucault's reading misses: 1. a person's ethical agency is most evident in the practices that reinforce the integration of one's physiology and psychology; 2. such practices shape the person through a combination of labor, exertion, and attention; 3. this combination signals a co-constitutive relationship between psychology, as thoughts and forms of attention (typically reduced to the isolated and “inner” in modern discourse), and physiology as activities and practices (similarly over-identified with the “outer,” to the exclusion of the co-participation of intellectual awareness).

- Not “the Will” as Faculty, but the Person as the Locus of Free Choice

Key to Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 both is to understand the various agencies at play that cannot be reduced to an abstract and intellectual notion of the faculty of “the will.” Instead a complete nexus of bodily, affective, and intellectual agencies of the person operate in tandem with agencies not at all under the individual's control: those of the divine and of demons. To reinforce this, I have discussed first nocturnal emissions, where fluid that is natural is treated as extricable from the forms of desire that typically subtend

erections and emissions. The focus on the bodily and everyday anxieties shows that Cassian, further, is not theorizing the ideal monk in a vacuum, but is very mindful of context, capacity, and stages of progress. Tears, furthermore, reflect compunction, purification, and sublimity and are the physical constituents of the transformation of one's being.

The larger argument this chapter sets up and that the following chapters develop is to show how the whole person—and not just “the will”—is relevant for ethical agency. Any view, such as Foucault's, that prioritizes the “inner” as the locus of the self, the seat of the will, and the site of ethical agency stands at odds with Cassian's texts. Cassian understands this harmonization of focus and orientation of the whole person—bodily, affectively, and mentally—as enabling ethical progress. As one progresses in the ethical life, this harmonization is reinforced. This model of the whole person oriented towards a good does not rely on “the will” as the human faculty doing all the ethical work. Instead, the body, heart, and mind all have ethical relevance and all shape our ethical perception and possibility for action. What is relevant for ethical agency when considering the ascetic way of life, as in Cassian's texts, is not a singular faculty but an orientation of the whole person.

- Foucault versus Cassian

My treatment of Cassian on physical practices helps address the problematic nature of the interaction between body and mind in Foucault's own vision of ethics, helping to dispel his reading of Cassian. Discussing the relationship between constitution and writing, Foucault evocatively uses the language of the “body”:

The role of writing is to constitute, along with all that reading has constituted, a ‘body.’ And this body should be understood not as a body of

doctrine but, rather—following an often-evoked metaphor of digestion—as the very body of the one who, by transcribing his readings, has appropriated them and made their truth his own: writing transforms the thing seen or heard ‘into tissue and blood’ (*in vires et in sanguinem*). It becomes a principle of rational action in the writer himself.³⁸⁴

In its focus on the mental processes underlying writing, this passage exemplifies how Foucault’s consideration of the desiring subject invariably focuses on the cerebral capacities of individuals. The “body” is constructed through the rational exercises of writing and the disposition that is established when things are transformed “into tissue and blood” is a mental one. In *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault further focuses on intention as defining the ethical quality of sexual acts:

Yet, in order for it to achieve its aim, enabling the individual to live on in his children and to contribute to the security of the city, a whole mental endeavor was necessary: an unfailing concern for the dangers that surrounded the use of pleasures, threatening the purpose that nature gave them.³⁸⁵

This “mental endeavor” is what differentiates adherence to a code from a cultivated “aesthetic of existence.” In *The Care of the Self*, even in spite of the privileging of the natural state of the body over the rationalizing capacities of the mind, it is the “soul” which must learn the rules of the body in order to enforce them again:

This regimen does not require that one institute a struggle of the soul against the body, nor even that one establish means by which the soul might defend itself from the body. Rather, it is a matter of the soul’s

³⁸⁴ Michel Foucault, “Self-Writing,” in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, Vol. 1. Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, NY: New Press, 2000), 213.

³⁸⁵ Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Vol. 2: The Use of Pleasure* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1990), 124.

correcting itself in order to be able to guide the body according to a law which is that of the body itself.³⁸⁶

It is in this relation to one's body that one establishes a true mastery over one's self, and this relation can be seen as an "intensification of the relation to oneself."³⁸⁷ While this assumes a belief that a rational order rules the universe (and the attendant notion that biology tends towards balance), the goal is to attain the state where the "soul, purified of all its vain representations, no longer gives its attention to anything but the austere economy of organic functions."³⁸⁸

Even in his ethical work, Foucault displays an excessive concern for the intellectual dimensions of subject formation. In his introduction to *The Use of Pleasure*, where he lays out his methodology for the ensuing works, he defines *askēsis* generally as "an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought."³⁸⁹ He states elsewhere that the technology of the self is "soul-oriented" although it also clearly involves concerns of the body.³⁹⁰ Indeed, Foucault is known primarily as a body-oriented thinker for his emphasis on the body as bearing the marks of power. To this end, Talal Asad characterizes the body for Foucault as "the arena for that continuous labor of inspecting and testing."³⁹¹

³⁸⁶ Michel Foucault. *History of Sexuality, Vol. 3: The Care of the Self* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1990), 134.

³⁸⁷ Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, 41.

³⁸⁸ Ibid., 136.

³⁸⁹ Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 9.

³⁹⁰ Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, Vol. 1. Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, NY: New Press, 2000), 254.

³⁹¹ Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 113.

While the body may be the arena, however, the mind seems to be both the referee and players. Bodies must be checked, inspected and tested, yet it is really mental excess and desire that is the focus of ethical work and *askēsis*.

By reconsidering Cassian's texts, we can see that the transformation of the whole person relies on physical practices and forms of care of the self more than Foucault recognizes. Foucault's reading that an "interior" space is necessarily demarcated as part of subjectivity requires more careful definition of psychology as operating not just on the "interior thoughts" but also on the individual as a whole, including the bodily, affective, and intellectual practices of habituation. While Foucault sees nocturnal emissions as rejected along with the body, Cassian has a much more complex understanding of the body, figuring it as enduringly necessary for ascetic formation and the transformation of the person.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the importance of physical practices of ethical cultivation, including dietary nutrition, bodily labor, and physical practices of prayer. Here, embodiment proves absolutely necessary as a primary locus of ethical action (construed as the cultivation of appropriate dispositions), not just as a vehicle of change, but as constitutive of forms of awareness. Such an emphasis in Cassian further reflects the view I advanced in chapter 2 concerning his integrated anthropology.

The first part of this chapter treated Cassian's accounts of what people do practically, analyzing Cassian's most central bodily activities—dietary practices, manual labor, and prayer practices—and how they are important for ethical formation. While the

first four books of the *Institutes* treat many of these practices in a more systematic way than the *Conferences*, Cassian refers to these practices constantly in *both* texts, confirming Rousseau's argument that Cassian's two texts need be read together as describing a whole way of life.³⁹² These practices cannot be seen as merely preliminary for Cassian; rather, all the practices of the *Institutes* and the *Conferences* are continuously necessary for the individual, for even as one advances in these practices, this simply reinforces one's disposition to keep engaging them. Engaging these practices (and the self-reinforcing nature of these practices, as one becomes habituated in them) shapes the everyday features of one's way of life, so I read Cassian as rendering such practices not just preliminary to but even *constitutive* of ethical agency.

In the second part of this chapter, I argued that Cassian's notion of ethical progress requires the transformation of the whole, integrated person. Understanding the transformative emphases of this second part relies on two prior arguments that 1) Cassian emphasizes the centrality of practices (argued in the first part of Chapter 3) and 2) Cassian does not have a dualist anthropology (argued in Chapter 2). Such a transformative emphasis is necessary to recognize because of what it reflects about Cassian's view of ethical agency as the ability to shape oneself in tandem with a host of other agencies (divine and demonic) which can result in an transformation of the whole person, with the bodily, the affective, and the mental unified in their orientation. Cassian reflects on the markers for such transformation of the whole person most vividly with two of his most frequently treated themes: the cessation of nocturnal emissions and the

³⁹² Of Cassian, Philip Rousseau argues that "distinctions in his work—between contemplative and active; between community and solitude—are by no means as clear as one may imagine." (Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority, and the Church*, 177.)

precipitation of tears from fiery prayer. Cassian's discussions of nocturnal emissions and tears illustrate how the physiology and psychology of the individual mutually constitute each other (in concert with agencies, demonic and divine), while also prescribing how transformation requires the continuous unification of their attention.

With these phenomena, the problem is not the bad body but the nature of the whole person's orientation, body, heart, and mind. Such an orientation, towards God not towards sex, is best enabled through prayer practices. The co-constitutive relationship between physiology and psychology requires a rethinking of the relationship between thoughts and forms of attention typically thought of as "inner" and activities and practices typically thought of as "outer." Understanding the priority of these features and how they relate in Cassian's thought also helps clarify how habituation in bodily activities enables ethical transformation. With such a view of ethical agency and transformative possibility, Cassian's system is focused on shaping the self through such transformative practices.

CHAPTER 4

Narrative Identities: Emotions, Imitation, and Habituation

In the last chapter, we discussed how physical practices frame one's way of life and enable key features of ethical agency in Cassian's texts. I drew attention to the centrality of the body and its physiological activities in the shaping of one's way of life and the transformation of oneself as an integrated unit. I focused on the dietary, manual, and prayer practices that centrally shape this enduring background according to Cassian. As described in the introduction, manual labor is coupled with "meditating on the Psalms and on other part of Scripture."³⁹³ The other practice that Cassian repeatedly stresses—that of scriptural *meditatio* and reading practices more broadly—requires further development in this chapter.

Throughout the *Conferences* and *Institutes* alike, Cassian refers to the necessity of scriptural *meditatio* for those who want to progress in the ascetic life—an emphasis broadly characteristic of asceticism in early Christianity.³⁹⁴ This daily recitational practice, as we will see in this chapter, requires rigorous engagement of the emotions. The *imitatio*, or imitation, of scriptural figures is not just an intellectual exercise nor is it

³⁹³ *Inst.*3.2.

³⁹⁴ On the role of Scripture in desert asceticism, Douglas Burton-Christie counters the assumption desert ascetics did not have contact with Scripture, understanding any ambivalence towards Scripture as a function of the "shift in emphasis from oral to written discourse." (Burton-Christie, *Word in the Desert*, 108.)

mindless mimicking.³⁹⁵ As one recites scriptural passages, one gradually learns from scriptural figures how to feel and how to act, while also adapting these emotions and actions to the particulars of one's self.³⁹⁶

Cassian promotes imitation of not only scriptural figures, but also other exemplary early Christian authorities, foremost amongst them, the elders of the Egyptian desert.³⁹⁷ As discussed in the early chapters, Cassian exhorts ascetics-in-training to learn from desert elders the "incitement to perfect life" (*incitamentum ex his uitae perfectae*) and the "outline of chosen orientation" (*propositi forma*).³⁹⁸ In addition to the scriptural *meditatio* that the *abbas* recommend within Cassian's narratives, a second level of *imitatio* is present in Cassian's texts, where the desert elders themselves become exemplary figures for imitation.³⁹⁹ This works both internal to the narratives in Cassian's

³⁹⁵ *Imitatio*, as the Latin term for the Greek *mimēsis*, refers both to "imitation as reproduction" and "imitation as representation" (Henry Liddell, Robert Scott, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon*). Central to both is "the deliberate imitation of the behavior of one group of people by another as a factor in social change." (*OED*, *mimēsis*)

Derek Kruger notes that "For the anonymous author of the *History of the Monks of Egypt*, the connection between writing saints' lives and more conventional modes of asceticism rested on the multivalence of the word *mimēsis*, where a *mimesis* of the saints could be either an imitation of them or a representation of them." (Krueger, *Writing and Holiness: The Practice of Authorship in the Early Christian East*, 97.)

³⁹⁶ "Texts played a crucial role in the promulgation of ascetic beliefs and practices. Oral traditions and written texts often served as road maps toward this new identity. Fittingly, the perfected self conformed to models embedded in writings. Exegetes drew ascetic lessons from scripture reading patriarchs, prophets, and apostles as models of moral rectitude and self-control." (Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*, 95.)

³⁹⁷ Both Rebecca Krawiec and Conrad Leyser note Cassian's construction of the *abbas*' words as "no less than the word of God." (Rebecca Krawiec, "Monastic Literacy in John Cassian: Toward a New Sublimity," *Church History* 81.4 [December 2012], 770; Conrad Leyser, "Lectio Divina," 90.)

³⁹⁸ *Inst.* 4.23.

³⁹⁹ Understandings of the *Apophthegmata Patrum* (referred to as the *Sayings*), as that articulated by Burton-Christie, can be fruitfully applied to Cassian's *Conferences*: "The *Sayings* constitutes, as Regnault reminds us, 'une galerie de portraits,' 'un montage audiovisuel.' As such

texts—where *abbas* discuss other exemplary *abbas*—and as a structural feature of Cassian’s texts—where Cassian-as-author describes the *abbas* who are the key interlocutors of the *Conferences* as exemplary for their virtues.

A third level of *imitatio* rounds out Cassian’s complex program: Cassian-as-author figures his younger self and companion Germanus as the youthful foils seeking out the wisdom of the *abbas*. Derek Krueger argues that “the composition of Christian hagiography in the Late Ancient Eastern Mediterranean involved the representation in narrative of the pious performances of holy men and women,” where in addition to the holy person whose life of sanctity is to be modeled, the author of the hagiography also models Christian virtues of humility.⁴⁰⁰ With the *Conferences*, there is both the representation of esteemed elders and the self-denigrating language of Cassian as the author of the text.⁴⁰¹ Cassian’s insertion of his younger self (along with his friend Germanus) into the narrative, however, adds an additional level of modeling where he renders his younger self as a model for how to appropriately react to the elders; Cassian

the *Sayings* brings us in touch not only with the words of the desert monks but also with their countenances. It is important to keep this ‘double character’ of the *Sayings* in mind, for it is often in the movements, gestures, and faces of the holy exemplars that we are led to understand the way in which they have engaged the project of the sacred texts.”(Burton-Christie, *Word in the Desert*, 95.)

⁴⁰⁰ Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*, 94. Discussing the physical practices of the author writing these works, Krueger notes: “in the hands of hagiographers, writing, like fasting or prayer, became a technology for attaining the goal of their own ascetic profession: a reconstituted ascetic self, displaying the virtues exemplified by the saints about whom they narrated. Authors strove to emulate their subjects through representation, configuring themselves through the production of texts.”(Krueger, “Hagiography as an Ascetic Practice in the Early Christian East,” 232.)

⁴⁰¹ Note, particularly, Cassian in the preface to Part 1 of the *Conferences*. Cassian here conforms to the standard maneuver of authors writing hagiographies, as Krueger notes generally: “Authors inscribed themselves into their writing at the edges of their narratives. Rhetorical strategies deployed in the prologues and epilogues of saints’ lives permitted authors to model the core values expressed in the body of their text.”(Ibid., 218.)

constructs, in other words, an additional level of “ascetic performances, expressions of piety achieved through rhetoric.”⁴⁰² As I will show in this chapter, the way that Cassian describes their emotional responses and ways of deferentially approaching the *abbas* in the *Conferences*’ narratives model how he wants the reader—in Gaul and throughout the ages—to approach his own texts and the wisdom of the *abbas*. My reading of Cassian therefore extends Krueger’s reading by highlighting another narrative and ethical device in Cassian’s texts.⁴⁰³ Cassian’s texts help shape the reader through multiple narrative strategies, through authoritative prescription (of the elders), through exemplary modeling (as the elders do in Cassian’s description of them), and through a progressive modeling for how to engage this process (as the young Cassian and Germanus enact).

While Cassian also considers *meditatio* a physical practice, it requires its own chapter for three connected reasons. First, *meditatio* requires an additional level of imitation and interpretation that sets it apart from the other physical practices in its dependence on texts. Second, *meditatio* enables contemplative knowledge (*theoretike*) in addition to the practical knowledge (*praktike*) foundational to other practices in Chapter 2.⁴⁰⁴ Third, *meditatio* explicitly focuses on how to tutor the emotions in the shaping of monastic selves.

⁴⁰² Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*, 98.

⁴⁰³ It is notable, in this respect, that Cassian stresses he does not write about miracles but about what ascetic practices one should learn; his goal is ethical and exhortative, even down to his own position as author, where he does not simply describe phenomena but participates in it himself, like Krueger describes of other hagiographers during this time: “But hagiographers did not merely describe the world of the ascetics; they also participated in this world through their own observance of ascetic conventions in the production of texts.” (Krueger, “Hagiography as an Ascetic Practice in the Early Christian East,” 217.)

⁴⁰⁴ “Here is a hermeneutic firmly embedded within the practical challenges presented by the ascetical life the monks had taken up in the Egyptian desert: a hermeneutic that demands,

Narrative practices thus involve several components, each of which is vital to the overall effectiveness of Cassian's texts. In this chapter I will parse these narrative practices in order to showcase their constituent parts and the complex dynamics that render them a vital part of ethical formation for Cassian. The first two sections treat direct prescriptions by *abbas* in Cassian's texts on how the ascetic is to approach the scriptural texts (through *imitatio*), first through scriptural *meditatio* and then scriptural interpretation. The second two sections analyze Cassian's texts as suggesting that the ascetic is to approach exemplary desert figures—including Cassian in his younger textual incarnation—as one would scriptural ones. Here, my analyses focus on both direct prescriptions of the *abbas*, and indirect literary devices Cassian uses to frame his texts and the portrayal of his protagonists.⁴⁰⁵ In all four sections, my analysis will be organized around how the emotions are central to imitation as enabling ethical formation.⁴⁰⁶ I will

ultimately, that the meaning of a text be expressed in a life.”(Burton-Christie, *Word in the Desert*, viii.)

⁴⁰⁵ Scholarship has been done on the broader literary culture that bears noting. Rebecca Krawiec argues that Cassian creates a monastic literary culture in the image of Greco-Roman rhetorical education, rendering monastic learning a continuation of the pedagogical processes. (Rebecca Krawiec, “Monastic Literacy in John Cassian: Toward a New Sublimity,” 765-795.) This parallelism enables Cassian's new monastic audience of elite males in Gaul to recognize the prestige of Cassian's literary program that yet exceeds its rhetorical counterpart through the loftier goals of the monastic *artes*.

Cassian's texts, according to Krawiec, “serve the same function as rhetorical handbooks and treatises: explaining the education, providing the models to be admired, placing the reader into a relationship with the text itself, and throughout imagining the ideal form of its subject, which remains always implied in the author.”(Krawiec, “Monastic Literacy in John Cassian: Toward a New Sublimity,” 794-795.) These many features do indeed characterize Cassian's texts, in my above reading as well. Cassian's *Conferences* explains the theory behind the monastic profession, presents *abbas* for admiration, engages the reader actively with the text through exhortation and the role of the young Cassian and Germanus, and characterizes the ideal monastic subject while noting that such perfection is not fully achievable.

⁴⁰⁶ I follow the work of Anna Gade—on recitation practices on Muslim practitioners in Indonesia—in understanding recitation practices as constitutive of subjectivities. Recognizing and theorizing the role of emotions is particularly important in Gade's work, where they are “a site of

argue that in Cassian's ethics, affective awareness integrates bodily and intellectual activities of the person. This, in turn, enables the cultivation of ethical dispositions informing the ascetic self.

Scriptural *Meditatio* as a Recitation Practice

Scriptural *meditatio*, understood as “careful and sustained meditation on the Word of God,” has been enduringly central to Christian asceticism.⁴⁰⁷ Jean LeClercq influentially explains *meditatio* as a spiritual exercise involving the reading of a text, central to early monasticism.⁴⁰⁸ This contemplative reading practice typically involves oral recitation, “the private recitation of a text, with a view toward memorizing it.”⁴⁰⁹ Reading is very rarely silent or “in one's head.”⁴¹⁰ Part of the reason is typographical—

creative agency or problem solving” involving “moral, cognitive and especially affective modes.”(Anna Gade, *Perfection Makes Practice: Learning, Emotion, and the Recited Qur'an in Indonesia* [Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2004], 72-74.)

⁴⁰⁷ Douglas Burton-Christie, “Early Monasticism,” in *Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism*, eds. Amy Hollywood and Patricia Z. Beckman (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 51. See also: Luke Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Steven D. Driver, *John Cassian and the Reading of Egyptian Monastic Culture* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002); Elizabeth Clark, *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

⁴⁰⁸ Jean LeClercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. Catherine Misrahi (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 1982), 15-17.

⁴⁰⁹ Thomas H. Bestul, “Meditatio/Meditation,” 157. See also Brian Stock, *Ethics through Literature: Ascetic and Aesthetic Reading in Western Culture* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2008); Duncan Robertson, *Lectio Divina: The Medieval Experience of Reading* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011); Michael Casey, *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1997).

⁴¹⁰ “Meditation was not, as the word has come to imply today, an interior reflection on the meaning of certain words. It was first and foremost the utterance, or exclamation of words, which were gradually digested and interiorized. Meditation on Scripture was an oral phenomenon. We see this from the account of witnesses, who are said to both hear and see monks meditating on Scripture.”(Burton-Christie, *Word in the Desert*, 123.)

texts in this temporal and geographical milieu did not have spaces between words nor paragraph breaks nor section headings.⁴¹¹ The reader would read the written text aloud, apprehending the words most readily by sounding them out.

In the desert milieu Cassian narrates, recitation is happening *all* the time. For cenobitic communities, as Cassian describes in the *Institutes*, every day there are set offices where Psalms are recited and sung.⁴¹² In the *Conferences*, Cassian turns to describe the reading practices of desert ascetics who exceed even these set offices with “perpetual and unceasing continuity of prayer.”⁴¹³ Exemplary ascetics commit themselves to continuously engaging in scriptural *meditatio*, believing that “the successive books of Holy Scripture must be diligently committed to memory and ceaselessly reviewed” (*diligente memoriae commendanda est et incessabiliter recensenda sacrarum series Scripturarum*).⁴¹⁴

For the desert elders Cassian treats, a host of scriptural readings were engaged daily. Notable attention is given to character archetypes in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament “whose lives and actions, aspirations and personalities are interpreted as

⁴¹¹ “Reading in the early monastic environment was normally performed out loud. Early medieval authorities testify, and modern studies of the manuscripts have shown, that from the second century CE onward, the spaces and *interpuncta* which had been placed between words disappeared, leaving the reader to contend with unseparated text (*scriptura continua*). In the era of Saint Benedict, a monk making his first approach to a text needed to vocalize in order to decipher the writing. Pronunciation remained necessary at all subsequent stages of the reading process, particularly in the work of memorization, which formed the basis of the monastic *meditatio*.” (Robertson, *Lectio Divina: The Medieval Experience of Reading*, xiv.)

⁴¹² In the *Institutes*, Books 2 (“The Canonical Method of the Nighttime Prayers and Psalms”) and 3 (“The Canonical Method of the Daytime Prayers and Psalms”) are replete with references to practices of Psalmody and prayer. See also Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 380.

⁴¹³ *Conf.*9.1.

⁴¹⁴ *Conf.*14.10.4.

epitomizing the goals and requirements of the monastic life.”⁴¹⁵ Most central to the Egyptian desert experience, though, is the daily diet of Psalms.⁴¹⁶ Paul Kolbet has elegantly argued that “The daily chanting of Psalms then is a therapy that gradually heals the human person. The language of the Psalter progressively ‘counters the instability of selfhood’ with the stability of a written text that becomes a second nature when it is written in the soul.”⁴¹⁷ Recitation of the Psalms is a central practice engaged as a technology of the self similar to the spiritual exercises of the Hellenistic schools, because it is a way of “attending” or “caring for oneself.” The Psalms are a tool that one uses “to form” or “model oneself.”⁴¹⁸

These Psalms permeate Cassian’s texts in several different ways. There are, to start, more discernable citations of the Psalms than any other book.⁴¹⁹ Cassian, through the *abbas*, cites the Psalms directly in the *Conferences* twenty-three times.⁴²⁰ Cassian also repeatedly refers to the practice of singing the Psalms: from the correct number of Psalms to sing in *synaxis* to keeping vigil at night with the Psalm’s protection to the connection

⁴¹⁵ Kelly, *Cassian’s Conferences*, 3.

⁴¹⁶ Paul R. Kolbet, “Athanasius, the Psalms, and the Reformation of the Self,” *Harvard Theological Review* (1999): 100-101.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., 101. See also: Geoffrey Harpham, *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 1992), 87.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., 89. Kolbet references Athanasius, *Ep.* 19 (PG 27:32b) and Athanasius, *Ep. Marcell.* 10.

⁴¹⁹ Reference to the Psalms is only missing from *Conf.*15. See Kelly, *Cassian’s Conferences*, 87.

⁴²⁰ All direct citations of the Psalms in the *Conferences* include: *Conf.*3.4.6; 3.9.1; 6.9.1, 4, 6; 7.4.3; 7.32.4; 9.34.11; 9.29.4; 9.17.1; 11.13.3; 11.3.1; 12.11.1; 12.6.2; 13.11.4; 13.10.2; 14.9.2; 17.27; 16.26.2; 16.3; 19.8.3, 4; 21.26.3.

between prayer and singing the Psalms.⁴²¹ Cassian therefore promotes Psalmic practices as a means of identifying normative Christian asceticism, where the manner of Psalmody identifies Christians as much as ways of fasting and manner of clothing.⁴²² He cautions against angrily singing the Psalms out of annoyance at other worshippers or distractedly singing the Psalms, while thinking about other things like pagan poetry.⁴²³ Some of the most interesting references, however, involve the salubrious effects of singing the Psalms.⁴²⁴ These refer to the merit inherent in the singing of the Psalms, when one is fully focused on this activity, with body, heart, and mind. Through the orienting of these parts of the person, singing the Psalms becomes paradigmatic of the way to live “in meditation always.”⁴²⁵ At its most advanced, singing the Psalms becomes an occasion for fiery prayer, the mystical culmination of the ascetic life.⁴²⁶

⁴²¹ Main references to the practice of prayer and Psalmic recitation include: *Conf.*1.3.1, 17.3, 23.6.2, 23.7.2 (practice of prayers and Psalms); *Conf.*10.10.8 (singing Psalms at synaxis); *Conf.*23.5.9 (singing a Psalm to God); *Conf.*8.16 (demonic intrusions and singing Psalms for synaxis); *Conf.* 23.16.1 (led by mind to do bad things because body of death is in the way); *Conf.*7.23.1 (vigil at night with Psalmic protection); *Conf.*20.1.3 (reciting Psalms for entrance to monastery, see also: *Inst.*4.3.1; 4.19.1).

⁴²² *Conf.*18.2.3.

⁴²³ In a few occasions, Cassian refers to poor execution of Psalm singing, including *Conf.*10.13.1-2 (where the mind whirls around moving distractedly from Psalm to Psalm), *Conf.*14.12 (even when singing Psalms, images of poetry crop up), and *Conf.*16.15 (where the ascetic angrily sings Psalms out of annoyance at other ascetics).

⁴²⁴ References to the exemplary or salubrious effects of singing the Psalms are developed throughout the *Conferences*, especially *Conf.* 1.17.2, 6.10.3 (singing the Psalms marks the good person); *Conf.*9.26.1 (reciting a verse of the Psalm as precipitating fiery prayer); *Conf.*10.11.4 (experience Psalm as one's own); *Conf.*10.11.6 (all dispositions of the person are present in Psalms); *Conf.*10.11.5 (all recitation is good); *Conf.*11.15 (reciting Psalms as a way of life); *Conf.*14.9.3 (one who is singing the Psalm with a pure heart will understand); *Conf.*18.2.3 (markers of identity: way of fasting, manner of Psalmody, clothing); *Conf.*18.11.2 (as guides for prayer, see also: *Inst.*2.7.3).

⁴²⁵ *Conf.*11.15.

⁴²⁶ *Conf.*9.26.1.

As Cassian understands it following the practice articulated in Athanasius's *Letter to Marcellinus*, the goal here is to experience the Psalm as one's own.⁴²⁷ Reading, reliving, and repeating the Psalms until verses are memorized and learned "by heart" are all intrinsic to the reading practice. Memorization is not the *end* of the practice, but is a means by which one gradually adopts the disposition of the Psalmist through "long habituation and meditation" (*longo usu ac meditatione concepit*).⁴²⁸ As Cassian says:

When we have the same disposition in our heart with which each Psalm was sung or written down, then we shall become like its author, grasping the significance beforehand rather than afterward. That is, we first take in the power of what is said, rather than the knowledge of it, recalling what has taken place or what does take place in us in daily assaults whenever we reflect on them.

*eundem namque recipientes cordis affectum, quo quisque decantatus uel conscriptus est Psalmus, uelut auctores eius facti praecedemus magis intellectum ipsius quam sequemur, id est ut prius dictorum uirtutem quam notitiam colligentes, quid in nobis gestum sit uel cotidianis geratur incurisibus superueniente eorum meditatione quodammodo recordemur.*⁴²⁹

Cassian—like other desert ascetics in the *Apophthegmata*—links the individual's practical, everyday struggle with various vices and demons to the dramatic renderings of the Psalmist, where one reflects on one's daily experiences for analogous sources of practical knowledge.⁴³⁰ As one reflects on one's everyday life, one is able to gain access to the laments and hymns, the woes and joys, dramatized in the Psalter. Psalmic

⁴²⁷ *Conf.*10.11.4. See Athanasius, *Ep. Marcell.*, 11.

⁴²⁸ *Conf.*14.13 .

⁴²⁹ *Conf.*10.11.

⁴³⁰ "Macarius told one of his disciples that the best way to pray in the midst of any struggle was simply to cry out, 'Lord, help.' In another instance, a monk has said to have been kept from being dragged from his cell by a demon by crying out, 'Jesus save me.'" (Burton-Christie, *Word in the Desert*, 123.) References are to Macarius the Great 19 and Elias 7.

exemplars like David show how to act and how to feel and how to think in tandem.⁴³¹ One is thereby able to “take in the power of what is said, rather than the knowledge of it,” reflecting how for Cassian, purity and understanding are co-dependent: one who is pure in heart will understand the Psalm as one sings it, and one can only become pure in heart by gradually attaining understanding through daily recitation and prayer practices.⁴³² There is a fascinating gradual merging of the bodily practice of recitation, with cognitive reflection on one’s struggles, with affective motivation to make one’s *own* such modes of action, emotion, and thought. As Christopher Kelly notes, “For Cassian, the monk’s very life becomes the hermeneutical medium for understanding divine revelation, an understanding experience in the light of theories.”⁴³³ Still through its recitation and reflection, the specifics of the individual’s practical experience and her active desiring to shape her disposition renders the practice her own.

We can say that Cassian sees “continual meditation” (*meditationis jugitas*) as having a tri-fold function: 1. to hold the mind’s attention, 2. to gradually gain understanding of scripture, and 3. to affectively motivate dedication to this process,

⁴³¹ “Christ’s example, however, is mediated through Scripture. The Psalms are a crucial vehicle through which one internalizes the victory of the Word over passions, death and the devil. Athanasius says that ‘it was indeed for this reason’ that God made Christ’s life ‘resound in the Psalms before his sojourn in our midst,’ so that he could furnish ‘the model of the earthly and heavenly man in his own person.’ Since Christ’s life echoes throughout the Psalms, the one reciting them both benefits from the power provided by his example, and internalizes that example through daily vocalization.”(Kolbet, “Athanasius,” 94.)

⁴³² *Conf.*14.9.3. “The capacity of meditation upon Scripture to protect the monks from demonic assaults was not simply a matter of the ‘brute power’ of the words. Meditation was an act which could have real psychological significance. It is important to note in this regard that the ‘battles with the demons’ reflect the immense psychological challenges the monks experienced in their life in the desert. The power of meditation to help the monk work through this interior struggle is related in a story told by Macarius about a brother who was beset by temptations.”(Burton-Christie, *Word in the Desert*, 124.)

⁴³³ Kelly, *Cassian’s Conferences*, 97.

thereby taking in the knowledge of it.⁴³⁴ Meditating on scripture provides a positive way to occupy the “mind’s attention” (*mentis intentio*) so that the mind cannot simultaneously be distracted by “harmful thoughts” (*noxiarum cogitationum*).⁴³⁵ In Chapter 2, we looked at how the mind is characterized like a high-ship in a tempest, tossed around by the choppy waves. This image helps make sense of *meditatio*: if one engages in activities which focus the mind on good things like heroic David and on good practices like fighting adversaries, then the sea becomes calm and the mind is not tossed about.⁴³⁶

By providing a positive occupation for the mind, scriptural *meditatio* also enables a progressively deepening comprehension of the scriptural material. During the day, one repeats scriptural passages, laboriously committing them to memory. However, Cassian notes, only “slightly meditating at night” one reflects back on what was memorized, gradually apprehending the meaning of what was memorized.⁴³⁷ While the mind is

⁴³⁴ *Conf.*14.10.4.

⁴³⁵ Ibid. See also, Claudia Rapp, “The ingrained concerns and desires of the world and the pleasures of one’s previous life continuously threaten to invade the mind and disturb its equilibrium. John Cassian ... adds a vignette from his own experience: during his withdrawal to the desert, even though he lived in solitude, he still managed to experience anger — not at a neighbor, but at the few objects in his cell, his pen, his penknife, and his flint for making fire (*Inst.*8.19). Cassian here experienced concretely what Evagrius Ponticus had formulated in the abstract: “Against people of the world, the demons fight primarily through things, against monks, they fight mostly through thoughts. For they are deprived of things because of the desert. And in the same measure as it is easier to sin internally than in actuality, in the same degree is the internal war more difficult than that about things. For the intellect is a thing that is easily set in motion and badly equipped to hold in check prohibited imaginations.”(Claudia Rapp, “Desert, City, and Countryside in the Early Christian Imagination,” in *The Encroaching Desert: Egyptian Hagiography and the Medieval West*, Jitse Dijkstra and Mathilde van Dijk, eds., [Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2006], 105.)

⁴³⁶ *Conf.*10.8.5-6.

⁴³⁷ *Conf.*14.10.4. Here, says Cassian, “things that we have gone through repeatedly and are laboring to memorize (*deinde quod ea qua creberrima repetitione percursa, dum memoriae trader laboramus*), we shall see more clearly afterward when we are free from every seductive deed and sight, and especially when we are slightly meditating at night.”(*Conf.*14.10.4.)

engaged in the labor of memorization, it cannot yet attain deeper insight into the meaning of the text—only when one is at rest is such understanding revealed (*intelligentia reveletur*).⁴³⁸

We see here how *meditatio* links the activities of memorization and reflection, as a meditative activity.⁴³⁹ The practices and forms of habituation engaged during the day constitute the person through the act of *meditatio* as much as the forms of reflection characteristic of the night. Indeed, we see in Cassian's passages how important habituation is even for the possibility of reflective understanding—habituation, wrought through repetition and memorization, is a constitutive feature of spiritual meditation.⁴⁴⁰ Textual memorization requires that one engage in rote repetition, on the one hand, and in focused reflection, on the other—so *meditatio* involves both habituated and reflective dimensions of cognition.

Cassian suggests that the relationship between recitation and understanding reflects the dynamic between two different forms of knowledge he inherited from his

⁴³⁸ *Conf.*14.10.4.

⁴³⁹ “A constant prayer, as demanded by Cassian, this peculiar form of silent reading of the Scriptures is meditative in essence (*meletē, meditatio, ruminatio*).”(Gedaliu G. Stroumsa, “The Scriptural Movement of Late Antiquity and Christian Monasticism,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16:1 [Spring 2008], 70.)

⁴⁴⁰ *Conf.*14.13; *Inst.*2.15.1; 3.2. See also Ramsey, *Conferences*, 54. Amy Hollywood makes the connection between habituation in practices and experiential effect explicit: “There is no distinction here between mediation (through the words of scripture) and immediacy (that of God's presence), between habit and spontaneity, the impersonal and the personal, or feeling and knowledge.”(Amy Hollywood, “Song, Experience, and the Book in Benedictine Monasticism,” in *Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism*, eds. Amy Hollywood and Patricia Beckman [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012], 67.)

teacher, Evagrius: *praktike* and *theoretike*.⁴⁴¹ *Praktike*, as practical understanding, is like mastery of a particular skill through training in a set of practices. We can see the recitation and laborious memorization of scriptural practices as a practical skill with a host of strategies that assist with this labor.⁴⁴² Contemplative knowledge, then, is a reflective form of understanding only possible with mastery of its foundational practical skill. The end of the recitation is, Cassian says, to “understand what is sung.”⁴⁴³

However, a necessary precondition for advancement in these very practices are the physical practices forming the core of *askēsis* specific to the monastic occupation (*propositum*) that understands how vices work and forms the mind, heart, and body according to the virtues.⁴⁴⁴ Cassian pointedly links progress in the ascetic profession with the ability to engage in *meditatio*: “For it is impossible for the soul which is even slightly taken up with worldly distractions to deserve the gift of knowledge or to beget spiritual understanding or to remember the sacred readings” (*impossibile namque est animam, quae mundanis uel tenuiter distentionibus occupatur, donum scientiae*

⁴⁴¹ Ramsey notes that the *praktike/theoretike* divide appears most influentially in Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 2.1, and that Cassian likely inherited it from Evagrius. See Ramsey, *Conferences*, 499. I maintain the Greek transliterated terminology because their rough English correlates—practical and theoretical—do not have the same multivalence and integrated associations germane to the ancient terminology. Consider, for example, Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 6, where development in practical knowledge (a coupling of *technē* and *phronēsis*) and theoretical knowledge (*episteme*) alone leads to wisdom (*sophia*) and when coupled with intellect (*nous*).

⁴⁴² Aaron Stalnaker has discussed a similar sense of virtue acquisition as skill-building in early Confucian texts. Stalnaker, “Virtue as Mastery in Early Confucianism,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 38.3 (2010): 404-428.

⁴⁴³ Such reflective understanding comes only after one has fully inhabited the scriptural passage—and it is this movement of incorporation and transformation that I will turn to next. In the next section, on hermeneutics, I will develop in more depth how *theoretike* as contemplative knowledge requires not just memorization and reflective understanding, but putting such reflection into action in one’s life, allowing this understanding to shape one’s way of life further.

⁴⁴⁴ Ramsey, *Conferences*, 500.

promereri uel generatricem spiritualium sensuum aut tenacem sacrarum fieri lectionum).⁴⁴⁵

Only by focusing on the scriptural texts fully can one even “remember the sacred readings”—memorization of the texts relies on the discarding of other mental occupations and the cultivation of certain physical practices, oral training in literacy, and the daily practice of reading.⁴⁴⁶ As attention can only focus on one set of concerns at a time, either worldly or scriptural—the foci of vices and those of virtues is a zero sum. For Cassian, *praktike* comes through the cleansing of vice and the orientation towards virtue—*theoretike*, in turn, takes *praktike* as its precondition.⁴⁴⁷ This dynamic involves important ethical dimensions: while one cannot forcefully will understanding, one can engage both the practices of recitation and memorization specific to *meditatio* and the broader set of physical practices that remain the core of the ascetic’s life.

- Adopting Emotional Dispositions of Exemplars in the Psalter

So what goes on when one is transforming oneself through memorization and reflection? How, exactly, does *meditatio* shape the person in the encounter with scripture, notably through the cultivation of particular affects? How might this complex set of reading practices inculcate dispositions so that one acts like the scriptural exemplar?

⁴⁴⁵ *Conf.*14.9.3.

⁴⁴⁶ Christopher Kelly notes that “scholars such as Samuel Rubenson, Roger Bagnall, and Douglas Burton-Christie suggests a higher rate of literacy within early monastic communities in Egypt than previously assumed.”(Kelly, *Cassian’s Conferences*, 5.)

⁴⁴⁷ “But Cassian’s real concern is much broader: the monastic quest for insight into God’s Word, for what he calls *spiritalis scientia*, ‘spiritual knowledge.’ This is quite different from book-learning or professional exegetical expertise; it is contemplative insight into ‘the secrets of invisible mysteries.’ It is possible only by God’s grace—though it builds on and presumes a life of disciplined virtue and regular prayer.”(Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 401.)

For Cassian, the goal of the monastic life is to cultivate purity of heart (*puritas cordis*).⁴⁴⁸ To do this requires the formation of a disposition, an *affectus* for action that rejects vices and the onslaught of demons while cultivating virtues and an orientation towards God.⁴⁴⁹ The Latin category of *affectus* is a multivalent term, an umbrella category that includes its English cognate affect, but most interestingly indicates a person's emotion, state of mind, and disposition. Standing at the center of John Cassian's ascetic program, *affectus* is present in bodily practices of consumption and labor, but especially highlighted in his reading practices as Amy Hollywood points out, enabling the "acquisition of proper dispositions through habit."⁴⁵⁰

Cassian describes this *affectus* as "a disposition for the good itself and a love of virtue."⁴⁵¹ Such an *affectus* reflects one's exceptional ability to "hold to one state of mind

⁴⁴⁸ Cassian's understanding of "purity of heart" integrates activities of the mind as well as the body, transforming the dispositions to action of the whole person. This is the goal of all *askēsis*, which fulfillment is deferred until the eschaton and yet which orients one towards this end every day. Kelly articulates a similar sense of the way scripture connects increase in purity of heart and the formation of the monk: "The closer to purity of heart he gets the more the scriptures reveal themselves, and it is in the monk's own manifestation of the scriptures that he achieves the monastic ideal. He becomes Israel, the one who sees God." (Kelly, *Cassian's Conferences*, 91.)

⁴⁴⁹ Cassian speaks of the need to form a certain disposition as a means of counteracting worldly strife: "As long as such inequity is rampant in this world, then, this behavior will be necessary and beneficial to the one who practices it, crowning a good disposition and a pious will with the reward of an eternal legacy" (*donec ergo in hoc mundo inaequalitas ista grassatur, erit haec actio necessaria et utilis exercenti, restituens quidem bono affectui et piaie uoluntati retributionem hereditatis aeternae*). (*Conf.*1.10.5.)

Each person ought to engage everyday practices that strive for this orientation and disposition to action; this applies even to lay-people attaining excellences in their own professions, so this is not exclusive to ascetics. Rather, common to all professions, says Cassian, is the means by which one shapes an integrated disposition. Cassian and his usage of *affectus*, we will see, opens ethical possibilities that recognize both how people are affected and affecting, notably when it comes to self-formation.

⁴⁵⁰ Hollywood, "Song, Experience, and the Book in Benedictine Monasticism," 67.

⁴⁵¹ *Conf.*11.6.1.

(*affectus*) in the midst of so many different affairs and assaults.”⁴⁵² Cassian uses *affectus* roughly to designate a disposition to action that a person can cultivate; a disposition that involves the integration of bodily, affective, and intellectual consciousnesses united in a single orientation. Cassian’s notion of purity of heart (*puritas cordis*) and the disposition of belief (*affectus fidei*) toward God render affect and emotion at the center of his ascetic program; an inheritance, in part, from the Egyptian desert tradition of heart-centered *askēsis* exemplified by Macarius the Great.⁴⁵³ The goal of meditatio, then, is to share the disposition, or *affectus*, in “our heart” with each scriptural passage and Psalm as it is recited, so fully that one becomes “like its author.”⁴⁵⁴

Consider, for example, Cassian’s treatment of Psalm 70:1 reading “O God incline unto my aid; O Lord make haste to help me” (*domine ad adiuvandum mihi festina*).⁴⁵⁵ Cassian positions this verse at the heart of Psalmic recitation as the means by which “to leave behind all the limits of the visible by reflecting on a single verse” (*unius uersiculi uoluntate a cunctis uisibilium terminis emigrare*).⁴⁵⁶ This Psalm includes “the

⁴⁵² Conf.12.13. That the translator, Ramsey, makes the decision to render *affectus* as “state of mind” reflects the modern impulse to intellectualize these practices, in line with Foucault’s reading. In my reading, *affectus* in Cassian’s usage is crucially not just state of mind—it is also state of body and heart; my preferred translation would be “disposition” that could then accommodate the unified orientation of the bodily, affective, and intellectual features.

⁴⁵³ Columba Stewart, *“Working the Earth of the Heart”: The Messalian Controversy in History, Texts, and Language to A.D. 431* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). Marcus Plested, *The Macarian Legacy: The Place of Macarius-Symeon in the Eastern Christian Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). For Cassian, see pp. 55, 95, 112, 232. For “The Heart,” see “The Asceticon of Abba Isaiah,” pp.199-202 and “Macarius the Confessor,” pp.239-242.

⁴⁵⁴ Conf.10.11.

⁴⁵⁵ Psalm 70:1, cited in Conf.10.10.2 and throughout Conf.10.10.

⁴⁵⁶ Conf.10.12.

dispositions of every prayer in a brief phrase” (*affectus orationum cunctarum breui sermone*) and “takes up all the emotions that can be applied to human nature and with great correctness and accuracy it adjusts itself to every condition and every attack” (*recipit enim omnes adfectus quicumque inferri humanae possunt naturae et ad omnem statum atque uniuersos incursus proprie satis et competenter aptatur*).⁴⁵⁷ It is, for Cassian, a one-size-fits-all Psalm, with beneficial application to any scenario: if it’s a challenging scenario, it is meant to have God come to one’s aid; if it’s a virtuous scenario, God is invoked to preserve one in such a virtuous state.⁴⁵⁸ Persevering in this recitation can lead to constant *meditatio*, to the extent that Cassian exclaims: “You should not stop repeating it when you are doing any kind of work or performing some service or are on a journey. Meditate on it while sleeping and eating and attending to the least needs of nature” (*hunc in opere quolibet seu ministerio uel itinere constitutus decantare non desinas. hunc et dormiens et reficiens et in ultimis naturae necessitatibus meditare*).⁴⁵⁹ One’s whole life is to become a continual exulting of this Psalm; the continual reflective background asks for divine aid and one is so shaped by this Psalm that this Psalm becomes a habituated part of one’s disposition.

Such *affectus*-shaping reading practices do not involve mere blind repetition of the scriptural figures’ actions; rather, there are two different elements at play. First is the process of making the texts one’s own, integrating the scriptural figures’ experiences into one’s own experiences. This process requires not just the mimicking of scriptural figures’

⁴⁵⁷ *Conf.*10.12; *Conf.*10.10.3.

⁴⁵⁸ *Conf.*10.10.

⁴⁵⁹ *Conf.*10.10.14.

actions; instead, one cultivates the dispositions to action and affect that reflect an internalization of the character of the figures within one's own historically and geographically removed context. As one recites the passages, one needs to imaginatively take the place of the scriptural figure, feeling as he feels and gaining the sense for what it is to feel such emotions. As discussed above, the Psalms were notable for having all human dispositions within them, and Psalm 70:1, in particular, addresses all human emotions.⁴⁶⁰ By encountering scriptural figures who evince positive character, in particular, one learns what kinds are appropriate responses to given situations. Through this training in which emotions to foster in a given situation, one learns to anticipate a certain emotion when reading the scriptural stories, to the point where one anticipates a textual figure's affects *as one's own*.⁴⁶¹

As one renders oneself increasingly transparent, transforming the self ethically as a monastic subject, one gains deeper understanding of the scriptural narratives in a way that allows for greater assimilation. Only those who practice assiduously and who have made progress in the ascetic life can “penetrate the depths of Scripture and the secrets of spiritual meanings” (*ceterum scripturarum uenas et arcana spiritalium sensuum intrare*), as “[t]rue knowledge is possessed only by true worshipers of God” (*etenim uera scientia non nisi a ueris dei cultoribus possidetur*).⁴⁶² However, in order to know how to read scripture properly, one needs to be first shaped ethically: “For it is impossible for the impure soul, with whatever effort it may have toiled in reading, to acquire spiritual

⁴⁶⁰ Conf.10.11.6.

⁴⁶¹ Conf.14.10.2-3.

⁴⁶² Conf.14.16.

knowledge” (*impossibile namque est inmundam animam, quantalibet desudauerit lectionis instantia, adipisci scientiam spiritalem*).⁴⁶³ Cassian attributes “spiritual knowledge” (*scientia spiritalis*) “solely to purity of heart” (*solī cordis tribuit puritati*) as one needs to engage cleansing practices to make oneself receptive to the message of scripture.⁴⁶⁴

Describing Cassian’s *lectio divina* as a meditative practice where the interaction between reader and scripture mutually shape each other, Duncan Robertson states: “Cassian discusses the reading of the Scriptures as a spiritual discipline inseparable from the way of life which surrounds it.”⁴⁶⁵ For Cassian, “the face of Scripture” changes depending on how the reader approaches it—only “the one who is singing the Psalm, who is moving forward in the undefiled way with the stride of a pure heart, will understand what is sung” (*ille enim psallens intellet quae canuntur, qui in uia immaculata gressu puri cordis innititur*).⁴⁶⁶ It is not enough to read scripture repeatedly, hoping to gain intellectual comprehension of the texts. As Hollywood economically describes Cassian’s view, one must, instead, learn *to live* the scriptures: “For Cassian, the entire body and soul of the monk is affected; he is transformed by the words of the Psalms so that he lives them and through this experience he comes to know, with heart and body and mind, that God is great and good.”⁴⁶⁷ To live the scriptures involves what

⁴⁶³ Conf.14.14.2.

⁴⁶⁴ Conf.14.13; Conf.14.15.

⁴⁶⁵ Duncan Robertson, *Lectio Divina: The Medieval Experience of Reading*, 82.

⁴⁶⁶ Conf.14.11.1; Conf.14.9.3.

⁴⁶⁷ Hollywood, “Song, Experience, and the Book in Benedictine Monasticism,” 68. Robertson says more generally of the practice: “The text is assumed by the reader individually

Robertson refers to “ethical internalization” of scripture through *meditatio*, where one repeats scripture until the texts are part of the person.⁴⁶⁸ This even extends to how

Cassian describes the person’s mind being formed in the likeness of the scriptures:

Do this until continual meditation fills your mind, and as it were forms it in its likeness, making of it a kind of ark of the covenant, containing in itself two stone tablets—that is, constant steadfastness under the aspect of a twofold Testament.

*donec continua meditatio inbuat mentem tuam et quasi in similitudinem sui formet, arcam quodammodo ex ea faciens testamenti, habentem scilicet in se duas tabulas lapideas, id est duplicis instrumenti perpetuam firmitatem.*⁴⁶⁹

In this passage, Cassian focuses on the ark of the covenant as metaphor for the relations between the two testaments that constituted the Christian scriptural canon. The cultivation of “constant steadfastness” in relation to the scriptures indicates that one form oneself continuously with reference to the scriptures (a forming enabled by reading, recitation, and reflection).

With spiritual knowledge attributed “solely to purity of heart” and *puritas cordis* as enabled only by rigorous commitment to physical practices, these practices alone enable the development of *theoretike*; so physical practices are the necessary and ongoing basis for development of contemplative knowledge.⁴⁷⁰ The physical practices discussed

and personally. It is a ‘living word’ spoken by God as well as to him. God takes the initiative and inspires the reader to respond; the prayer flows through the text, as it were, in both directions. It has a sacramental efficacy—a capability of placing the reader in a live presence and in communion with the church—on the same level as participation in a full ‘ecclesial’ liturgy.” (Robertson, *Lectio Divina*, 132.)

⁴⁶⁸ Robertson, *Lectio Divina*, 88, 101.

⁴⁶⁹ *Conf.*14.10.2-3

⁴⁷⁰ *Conf.*14.15

in Chapter 2 are the precondition for fighting against vices and working to cast out worldly cares, and constitute the necessary support for committing oneself to “sacred reading.” *Meditatio*, as it increasingly becomes the *affectus* towards God and continual prayer, attends all daily practices—whether of manual labor or eating or directly at prayer. What’s striking here is the physicality of this narrative practice and the ways that *praktike* and *theoretike* are fully imbrecated. Columba Stewart affirms the centrality of physical practices to ascetic advancement in Cassian; however, he stratifies and separates narrative practices over physical ones, claiming: “More important than physical disciplines are the spiritual ones of reading, meditation, and unceasing prayer.”⁴⁷¹ Stewart’s distinction between practical and contemplative practices should be undermined, however, since as I have been arguing, “spiritual practices” are not distinct from “asceticism” in Cassian’s texts.

To extend this reading further, I argue that scriptural *meditatio* becomes central to Cassian’s account of ethical agency. One extends these dispositions to one’s own life, responding to situations with the types of emotions that they imagine scripturally exemplary figures would. Cassian describes this process throughout *Conference* 14, where he invokes all the aspects of the person in nearly the same breath. This is really a fascinating imaginative exercise in the incorporation of dispositions and projection of responses to particular contexts.

Emotional Dispositions and How to Read Cassian's *Conferences*

The first section focused on common practices of scriptural imitation—what I will

⁴⁷¹ Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 73.

refer to as the first register of reading practices. In this section, the *abbas* themselves become figures for imitation, both in the narratives told by *abbas* about other *abbas* (which I will call the second register) and in Cassian's literary framing of his younger self and Germnaus as models for how to try to imitate the *abbas* (the third register). *Abbas* are worthy of imitation, like scriptural figures, first, because of their exemplary virtue and because there were no *abbas* local to Gaul.⁴⁷² Secondly, Cassian figures the *abbas* as in a continuum with other scriptural figures, thereby incorporating the *abbas* into the canon of sacred texts, implicitly showing the production of new scriptural figures.⁴⁷³

⁴⁷² Cassian's ventriloquism was engaged in part because there was no local ethical guidance: "However, there were no *abbas* in Gaul to whom novices could turn for guidance. The example of Martin of Tours (d. 397) was not acceptable because his biography was too cluttered with stories of the miraculous to be practically beneficial. Martin had founded monasteries in Liguge, Tours, and Marmoutier, but evidence seems to suggest that they may have been lacking in austerity and discipline. Instead, Cassian needed a way to transplant those masters nurtured and tried in the desert from Egypt to Marseille, Lyon, and Lérins. First and foremost, this could be accomplished by reading the scriptures, because they lay at the heart of the monastic endeavor. Additionally, though, the *Conferences* itself could take the place of the Desert Fathers; it could embody the wisdom and discipline of the holiest men of reknown in literary form. Constant / engagement with and the *Conference's* mimetic exegesis of scripture would then, in time, create new *abbas* as they began to embody the texts in the same way as their desert counterparts." (Kelly, *Cassian's Conferences*, 6-7.)

⁴⁷³ "So too Cassian repeatedly stresses the notion that the Egyptian institutes he is reporting stemmed from 'ancient' teachings. He thus creates a relationship between past (biblical) foundations, past and present Egyptian *abbas*, and present Gallic readers, who are 'inserted' into this relationship. In this way, the monastic reader is formed through the text, which is constructed with a newly imagined reader in mind." (Krawiec, "Monastic Literacy," 776.)

See also, Goodrich, *Contextualizing Cassian*; Stephen Driver, *Cassian and the Reading of Egyptian Monastic Culture*; Augustine Casiday, *Tradition and Theology of St. John Cassian*. On how Cassian presents himself as a model for others, note Stephen Driver's argument that Cassian puts his own reader into his younger self's position (Stephen Driver, *Cassian and the Reading of Egyptian Monastic Culture* [London: Routledge, 2003]). However, he does not explore the ethical dimensions of this move nor how the role of affect is central to it.

This extends from Kelly's reading of Cassian's *abbas*, where intimacy with God was a privilege only for scriptural figures. However, we can invert this logic here, noting that intimacy with God that does characterize the *abbas* renders them like scriptural figures. "As an *abba*, however, he reifies the patriarchal ideal for the community and represents the possibility of an

In his works, Cassian paints exemplary figures presented within the narratives for the reader's imitation; these figures include both historical elders as exemplars and the young Cassian and Germanus as a literary *topos* through which Cassian figures responses of the exemplary reader. These textual examples enact *how*, exactly, *meditatio* engages the emotions, tutors the emotions, and shapes certain selves. Reading Cassian's texts, we'll see, has analogous effects to reading scriptural texts—by analyzing Cassian's own texts, we get a sense of the mechanics behind affective scriptural *meditatio* and how it is so central to shaping the self.⁴⁷⁴

Desert Elders in Cassian's Rhetorical Presentation

In the *Institutes*, Cassian stresses that it is necessary “to set out by way of example some of the deeds of the elders in which they shone forth in virtue.”⁴⁷⁵ Looking at elders both motivates the younger towards the “perfect life” and shows the crucial features of the ascetic life, providing an “outline of their chosen orientation.”⁴⁷⁶ There are three types of narratives featuring the elders. First, in the frame of certain *Conferences*, Cassian the writer will reflect on the biography of the elder hosting the conference—indicating exemplary virtue. Such sensational stories serve to both authorize the elder's wisdom and

intimacy with God heretofore relegated to characters in the closed scriptural canon.”(Kelly, *Cassian's Conferences*, 90.)

⁴⁷⁴ This argument stems, in part from scholarship that emphasizes the increasing availability of these narratives around the Mediterranean. Guy Stroumsa, for example, notes that monasticism produced a “new culture of the book” focused on reading the Bible and writing as a “transmission of knowledge.”(Stroumsa, “Scriptural Movement,” 68, 70.) Noting how “book conscious” monastic Christianity became in late antiquity, see Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority, and the Church in the Age of Jerome and Cassian*, 222.

⁴⁷⁵ *Inst.*4.23.

⁴⁷⁶ *Inst.*4.23.

show an example of how to act. Second, there are hortatory examples of *abbas* discussed by the elders internal to the conference dialogue; these figures behaved heroically and virtuously, providing further positive examples for how to act. Third are the cautionary tales of monastics who went awry, also told by the *abba* hosting the conference. In all three types, elders teach the reader how to feel, act, and think, showing how to negotiate the salience of emotion by orienting them in a way that helps foster a virtuous disposition.

The narrative description by desert elders, either on their own story or reflecting on other *abbas*, is folded into the broader dialogical presentation of the *Conferences*. Therefore, both the genre and structure of Cassian's *Conferences* is relevant when thinking about the relationship between textual engagement and ethical formation.⁴⁷⁷ As I described in the introduction, the format of the *Conferences* takes the following shape:

Level 1: Preface to the text where Cassian addresses the intended recipient of the following writings. He extols their virtue and desire for knowledge, and he expresses humility when faced with the task of contributing his own words (a standard rhetorical move in antiquity). Cassian-as-author describes the recipient monastics in southern Gaul, extolling their virtue.

Level 2: Conference unit where a young Cassian and Germanus are the protagonists, traveling around to various *abbas*, encountering one *abba* who is the primary speaker in each conference. Each *abba* is the subject (i.e. from whose

⁴⁷⁷ As noted in the Introduction, Cassian engages the classical Greek rhetorical technique of dialogue or *erotapokriseis*, or «quaestiones» in Latin, where elders answer questions posed by novices. Kelly, *Cassian's Conferences*, 14. Annelie Volgers, Claudio Zamagni, *Erotapokriseis: Early Christian Question-and-Answer Literature in Context. Proceedings of the Utrecht Colloquium, 13-14 October 2003*. Leuven: Peeters, 2004). Cassian uses the philosophical dialogue to capture the esteem of the Roman elites he addresses in Gaul.

Kelly argues that Cassian chose a dialogue format for two reasons: "1) it was a realistic portrayal of how monastic instruction occurred, and 2) in the absence of actual desert fathers in Gaul, he wanted his monastic audience to relate to the *Conferences* as portable *abba* in book form. The *Conferences* was to stand as an authoritative text, a guide and corrective. As such, Cassian utilized archetypes after whom novices ought to model their behavior, attitude, and orientation." (Kelly, *Cassian's Conferences*, 14.)

point of view the conference is narrated) and his interlocutors are a young Cassian and Germanus.

Level 3: The host *abba* holds forth on a number of topics to address the questions asked by the young companions. Common levels of concerns treat a. monastic life, in particular, b. doctrinal orthodoxy for faith broadly, c. historical events, like the Anthropomorphite controversy in *Conference* 10.

Level 4: Abba introduces story of another *abba* as an illustration of what is discussed; sometimes from direct encounter, sometimes from hearsay. The subject is the *abba* and the object is another *abba*.

Level 5: Germanus interjects something; *abba* clarifies his response to some issue.

Level 6: Young Cassian & Germanus react to the splendor of the *abba*'s wisdom.

The heroic way the *abbas* are typically portrayed by Cassian reflects the esteem with which he holds them and their teachings. The *abbas*' stories and prescriptions suggests another set of figures to be emulated (in addition to the scriptural sources).⁴⁷⁸ I will argue this by considering first the terms with which Cassian's texts describe the *abbas*, and second the narrative presentations of the *abbas* of themselves or other *abbas* that illustrate both cautionary tales for how not to act or shining examples of how to act. Considering both how the *abbas* are narratively depicted and how the *abbas* describe themselves or other *abbas* gives insight into how the *abbas* themselves become exemplars for imitation by the reader of Cassian's texts.

- Exemplary Elders

⁴⁷⁸ As Rousseau makes clear in his influential *Ascetics, Authority and the Church in the Age of Jerome and Cassian*, discussing one's experience of the desert authorizes one as a spiritual authority. Leyser points out that Rousseau's work presages interest in "the power and poetics of travel narrative" not only in antiquity in other periods as well. (Conrad Leyser, "The Uses of the Desert in the Sixth-Century West," in *The Encroaching Desert: Egyptian Hagiography and the Medieval West*, Jitse Dijkstra and Mathilde van Dijk, eds., [Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2006], 115.)

In nearly all characterizations of the *abbas* by Cassian on the narrative level 2, positive characteristics prevail. Cassian is, after all, presenting the credentials and character of the elder in order to show the *abba's* spiritual and practical authority to discuss the issue at hand in a given conference. Cassian introduces *abba* Serenus, the protagonist of *Conference* 7, for instance, as “a man of the greatest holiness and abstinence and one who reflected his own name, whom we admired with a unique veneration more than we did the others.”⁴⁷⁹ Cassian-as-author proceeds to discuss how *abba* Serenus managed to attain such purity through the ascetic exercises described through the *Institutes* and *Conferences* in synergistic relationship with God and “[w]ith prayers day and night, then, and with fasting and vigils, he pleaded tirelessly for internal chastity of heart and soul.”⁴⁸⁰ In a different account, Abba Theonas, the host of *Conferences* 21, 22, and 23, is introduced by Cassian in *Conference* 21 with the “beginning of his conversion” to the ascetic life.⁴⁸¹ While he was married at his parents’ insistence, hearing the words of Abba John, he became increasingly “inflamed with an inextinguishable desire for gospel perfection,” and he renounced secular life leaving his wife.⁴⁸²

Abba Pinufius, as the host of *Conference* 20, is introduced by Cassian via the narrative by which the young Cassian and Germanus came to find him in Bethlehem. In short, Pinufius fled the large cenobium near Panephysis he presided over and, rendering

⁴⁷⁹ *Conf.*7.1.

⁴⁸⁰ *Conf.*7.2.1-2.

⁴⁸¹ *Conf.*21.1.1.

⁴⁸² *Conf.*21.8.1.

himself anonymous, submitted himself as a novice to a cenobium in Tabenna where he was received with much derision due to his age.⁴⁸³ Although the *Institutes* are not framed with *erotapokriseis*, Cassian does present Pinufius as an exemplary interlocutor who inspired Cassian and Germanus to seek out wisdom in the Egyptian desert.⁴⁸⁴ Pinufius, who evinced “obedience characterized by utter simplicity and faith,” is described as the heart of Cassian’s monastic writings.⁴⁸⁵

- Elders, Heroic and Cautionary

Not only are Cassian’s broader descriptions of the *abbas* central to how they are clearly figured as exemplars—the *abbas* themselves describe other *abbas*, as salutary examples or, in fewer cases, as cautionary tales. Each case showcases a particular virtue that corresponds to the theme of the *Conference* at hand and it is fascinating to see the rhetorical negotiation between a central theme and rather bizarre behavior.

In *Conference* 8, Abba Serenus folds into his narrative reference to Abba Antony whose figuration by Athanasius of Alexandria in the *Life of Antony* was widely read through the Mediterranean. He refers to Antony’s prevailing over a multitude of demons

⁴⁸³ *Conf.*20.1. This same story is told in *Inst.*4.30. Ramsey notes that this story could be modeled on a similar one told of Macarius of Alexandria (*Hist. laus.* 18.12). Ramsey, *Conferences*, 687.

⁴⁸⁴ *Inst.* 4.30-32. “This, then, was the old man whom we most eagerly sought out afterwards in Egypt by reason of the confidence that we had in him in our own monastery. It was he who gave the exhortation to a brother whom he received into his cenobium in our presence and that it is my intention to introduce into this little work, because I think that some instruction can be gained from it.”(*Inst.*4.32.)

⁴⁸⁵ *Inst.*4.41.3. Ramsey, *Conferences*, 5. Book 4 of the *Institutes* reflects the “epitome of monastic spirituality” giving a concentrated account of the Egyptian monastic ethos; Pinufius in this one book summarizes the main points that the 24 books in the *Conferences* develop in more detail.

sent by two wicked philosophers tutored in magic.⁴⁸⁶ However, this story is not meant to simply impress the reader with miracles and fantastic feats, but rather to prove his doctrinal point that “demons are utterly unable to get into a person’s mind or body.”⁴⁸⁷ The authority of Antony figures also into *Conference* 2, where Abba Moses refers to his childhood spent in the Thebaid where Antony would teach on perfection and discretion.⁴⁸⁸

There are also references to *abbas* extolled for their virtue, and yet whose behavior might give the reader pause. Consider, for example, Abba Paternutus, whose entrance into a cenobitic community with his young son posed a huge obstacle to the injunction to disavow worldly cares. However, he was so obedient to his elders and followed so closely this injunction that he no longer recognized his son as his own. Even when the other monastics mistreated the child and physically abused him, by the orders of the spiritual elder, “the father’s heart nonetheless remained ever stern and unmoved out of love for Christ and by the virtue of obedience” and when commanded to throw his son in the river, Paternutus complied “as if he had been ordered to do so by the Lord.”⁴⁸⁹ For this, *abbas* refer to Paternutus as exemplary. Consider also Abba John who waters a stick stuck in the ground everyday, drops and breaks a vessel of precious oil, and rolls a

⁴⁸⁶ *Conf.*8.18-19.

⁴⁸⁷ *Conf.*8.19.2. As Harmless notes: “But he is equally convinced that ‘reading such things produces nothing more than wide-eyed wonder and instills nothing toward instruction in perfect living.’ Cassian’s sobriety should not be mistaken for modern skepticism. His concern is spiritual progress, and gaping at miracles, he believed, was a distracting irrelevancy.”(William Harmless, *Desert Christian*, 379.)

⁴⁸⁸ *Conf.*2.2.

⁴⁸⁹ *Inst* 4.27.3, 4.

rock around and around and around, all because commanded by his elder.⁴⁹⁰ For his actions, he is extolled: “And so the youth, trained every day in exercises of this kind, matured in the virtue of obedience and shone with the grace of humility, and the sweet odor of his obedience spread through all the monasteries.”⁴⁹¹

Negative examples are also present, as with Abba Heron, whose extreme asceticism led him to the ascetic vice of pride. Considering himself already amongst the angels and able to fly, Heron fell down a well instead and soon thereafter died from his injuries.⁴⁹² Abba Moses also refers to two brothers who foolishly vowed only to eat what appeared before them, as they delivered figs to friends across the desert. Upon getting so lost and nearing death by starvation, one brother ate a fig and so lived until he was rescued, while the other one perished instead of consuming the fruit meant for another—Cassian thereby warns against the extremes of obedience.⁴⁹³ Larger issues of orthodoxy are also painted through the example of monastics, such as when Cassian refers to the Anthropomorphite controversy prompted by Theophilus, Bishop of Alexandria, who expelled ascetics from the desert whose view of Christ was too anthropomorphic. Serapion, said to be ensnared in the error of Anthropomorphites, woefully cries, in Cassian’s account, “They have taken my God from me, and I have no one to lay hold of, nor do I know whom I should adore or address.”⁴⁹⁴ Serapion is portrayed in a pitiable

⁴⁹⁰ *Inst* 4.24.2-4, 25, 26.

⁴⁹¹ *Inst* 4.25.

⁴⁹² *Conf*.2.5.

⁴⁹³ *Conf*.2.6.1-3.

⁴⁹⁴ *Conf*.10.3.5.

light, but as he is required to quickly adopt the orthodox position or risk expulsion (and eternal damnation), so too is the reader cautioned to tow the doctrinal line.

Throughout the two ascetic works of Cassian, then, the reader is introduced to a vibrant cast of characters, most of whom are exemplary elders whom all should strive to emulate, some of whom are examples of how imbalance and excess itself reflect discord. Either way, the elders become extra-biblical sources of wisdom, and their stories reflect on what it is to be an ascetic and a Christian in a time when these categories in the west were still be worked out. With a set of both hortatory and cautionary tales, Cassian culls stories from *abbas* and presents them in his *Conferences* in a format that is distributable and that can take on a canonical status in the style of Athanasius' *Life of Antony* and compilations like the *Apophthegmata Patrum*.⁴⁹⁵ So here we see who the reader is supposed to emulate—both scriptural exemplars and more recent historical *abbas* as exemplars.

Such exemplarity also promotes the authorizing narrative key to Cassian's texts: the elders stand in a continuum with scriptural figures, they are the "living exemplars" preserving ways of life described in the sacred scriptural record. Cassian, for example, describes Elijah and Elisha as the inaugurators of monasticism.⁴⁹⁶ John the Baptist is described as the first anchorite by Cassian, as Jerome similarly does. Establishing this noble lineage, Cassian both justifies monastic practices through its scriptural origin and promotes monasticism as a scriptural ideal to be continuously maintained in southern

⁴⁹⁵ Cassian's *Collationes* are considered parallel to the *Sayings*, also Evagrius's *Praktikos*, Palladius's *Historia Lausiaca*, *Vita Antonii* of Athanasius and Socrates's *Historia Ecclesiastica* (Burton-Christie, *Word in the Desert*, 93.).

⁴⁹⁶ *Conf.*14.4.1, 18.6.2; 21.4.2.

Gaul. In *Conference* 24, for example, Cassian explicitly links the addressees of his *Conferences* as monastics to themselves be emulated, provided that “the precepts of the greatest and most ancient fathers confirm what you yourselves teach by your living example, not by the dead sound of words.”⁴⁹⁷ He thereby puts these Gaulish monastics in continuum with the elders of the Egyptian desert *insofar as* they themselves follow and conform to the practices and orientation of their esteemed elders. Cassian not only authorizes these monastics to read the elders, but authorizes the monastics themselves as potential elders, to future readers and to the members of their respective cenobia.

Dispositions to Cultivate, Modeled by a Young Cassian & Germanus

The second register, as I refer to it, involves Cassian’s textual production of desert elders as figures of canonical wisdom and orthodox advice. However, we do not see *how* the process of imitation and emulation is supposed to operate until we reflect on how Cassian’s texts figure the young Cassian and Germanus, the test subjects who show the reader how to respond to such exemplary figures.⁴⁹⁸ The third register, therefore, turns to

⁴⁹⁷ *Conf.*24.26.18.

⁴⁹⁸ “This goal led some ascetic writers to renounce agency in their act of writing. ...Appropriately, the author of this work remained intentionally anonymous, erasing his identity just as the subject of his writing had.”(Kruger, *Writing and Holiness*, 226.) This is importantly not the case in Cassian’s texts. Instead of anonymity, Cassian affirms his authorial voice in a double register—both as author of the texts (indicated in his prefaces and sometimes framing the beginning and ends of his conferences) and also as a protagonist in his texts. We need to understand the centrality of Cassian as literary figure and as author as a self-authorizing move that shows Cassian to be a legitimate authority on the elders and Egyptian asceticism more broadly. This authorizing move requires an affirmation of his self, as he is neither intentionally anonymous nor erasing his identity.

While scholars have commented on how little personal detail Cassian gives about himself as a surprising omission for someone purportedly invested in the “interior life” as indicated in this dissertation’s Introduction, I find it more interesting that Cassian features himself as a central figure at all (even without details that would render him and his character central to his narratives in the way that Augustine does in his *Confessions*). This view of Cassian affirms his agency over

Cassian's textual production of his ideal reader through his portrayal of his younger self and Germanus' engagement with these elders. Cassian, in other words, promotes certain emotional dispositions in the way that he paints himself and Germanus on Level 6 of the narrative structure—the types of emotions he describes the young Cassian and Germanus as showing are the ones that future readers should cultivate, an affirmation clarified by the *abbas*' enthusiastic responses to such emotions. This section will focus on the innermost force of Cassian & Germanus' responses as the appropriate responses that any reader of these texts should have as well—the stories in the *Conferences* meant to provide “direct” access to a geographically and temporally removed set of figures and practices.

I will argue this reading addressing Level 6 in three steps: first, I will consider the rhetorical salience of painting the young Cassian and Germanus in a rather one-dimensional way; second, I will analyze in more depth the textual passages that show which emotions young Cassian and Germanus experience; third, I will call attention to how the young Cassian and Germanus's enthusiastic responses of the *abbas* affirms the necessity of both approaching the teaching with a set of emotions and processing the teaching in the most enthusiastic of ways. In these ways, Cassian's texts suggest an analogy between the way that readers are to approach scriptural *meditatio* and the way that future readers of Cassian are to approach the examples of the desert *abbas* in Cassian's texts.

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and against Foucault's reading of him. Cassian, instead, renders his relationship to the elders as analogous to that of Athanasius' relationship to Antony.

A foil for my reading, Boniface Ramsey notes that the model behavior that the young Cassian and Germanus exhibit reduces their characters to a “pallid characterization” who do not have “personalities” of their own (at least, not in the way the *abbas* do) nor hardly have any existence outside the texts.⁴⁹⁹ Reflecting further, Ramsey states: “Furthermore, the periods of time preceding and following the conferences are given over entirely, on the part of the two friends, to anticipatory emotions and to feelings of wonder, gratitude, sadness, or compunction, based on whatever they may have heard.”⁵⁰⁰ In other words, young Cassian and Germanus are figures characterized primarily by the emotions that inspire them to seek out the *abbas* and the emotions they have on hearing the wisdom of the *abbas*. Ramsey suggests that this reduces the young Cassian and Germanus to merely passive figures who are affected by the *abbas* but who have no life of their own, outside of the *Conferences*.⁵⁰¹ In this reading, young Cassian and Germanus are characterized as not having any of their own ideas or challenging of the *abbas* in any way—they merely react to what is presented.⁵⁰²

What Ramsey notes as a negative feature of the text, however, I read as an

⁴⁹⁹ Ramsey, *Conferences*, 13.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁰¹ Even when the biographies of the two men are raised in the *Conferences*, and we learn something of what brought them to the Egyptian desert (especially in *Conference* 17) and on their friendship (especially in *Conferences* 16 and 1) this is in the service of gleaning a broader lesson about how to negotiate promise-making or how to have a spiritual friend. The practical generalizable lesson always determines the presentation of the material—we learn nothing superfluous about the lives of Cassian and Germanus; there is no biographical excess, and despite Germanus’ probable passing in the decade before Cassian wrote his works, there is no hint of nostalgic reminiscence. Even when Germanus is described in virtuous terms, Cassian keeps these virtues broad Christian virtues, describing him with no more personal a slant than any other *abba*.

⁵⁰² The reactions of the young monastics serve as a foil for the elder—to clarify any obscurities in a given position the idea is not to challenge the elder, but to have the elder clarify how to act through this challenge.

essential part of his narrative strategy; a strategy that, in turn, is central to his ethical program—in both direct description and indirect prescription. Cassian does not present young Cassian and Germanus as historical figures with rich histories and experiences, but as textual figures who behave like monastics *should*. Such ideal responses include approaching *abbas* with the appropriate reverence and reacting to the *abbas*’ wisdom with the appropriate wonder. To argue this position, I will treat three different types of emotional responses on the part of the companions: 1. joy and enthusiasm for the ascetic life, 2. sadness and despair over its difficulty, and 3. a complex set of both positive and negative emotions that reflect advancement in the ascetic life.

Looking at some examples of how Cassian and Germanus respond in terms of affective experience, most striking, at first, is Cassian’s depiction of his younger self and Germanus’s awe and joy as responses to the desert elders encountered. Cassian highlights the affective phenomenology of the young Cassian and Germanus, “tearfully beginning for an edifying word from that *abba*.”⁵⁰³ Listening to Moses’ words in *Conference* 1, the friends are struck by “amazement” and “greatly stirred,”⁵⁰⁴ gradually becoming “inflamed with an insatiable love” and only going to bed “burning with joy” and anticipating the following day’s conference.⁵⁰⁵ *Conference* 2 produces enthusiastic spirit and zeal as Abba Moses continues to discuss discretion.⁵⁰⁶ *Conference* 3 closes with Cassian’s reflection on the conference on the three renunciations, “not so much cheerful

⁵⁰³ *Conf.*1.1.

⁵⁰⁴ *Conf.*1.9.

⁵⁰⁵ *Conf.*1.23.1, *Conf.*1.23.4, *Conf.*1.4.3.

⁵⁰⁶ *Conf.*2.26.4.

as moved with compunction in our hearts.”⁵⁰⁷ *Conferences* 7 and 8 close with descriptions of the great enthusiasm of the two friends (which was so great that Abba Serenus forces the two to rest their bodies in sleep) with “greater spiritual ardor.”⁵⁰⁸ *Conference* 9, like *Conference* 7, closes with an *abba* (this time Isaac) forcing the young companions to sleep despite their extreme rejoicing.⁵⁰⁹ Closing *Conference* 16, on friendship, Cassian reflects on how Joseph inspired the young Cassian & Germanus to “all the more ardently to make enduring the love of our companionship.”⁵¹⁰ Abba Piamun in *Conference* 18 likewise “inflamed more ardently” the friends’ desire to investigate the anchorite’s life in more depth, continuing to seek out Egyptian ascetics.⁵¹¹

While awe and joy are the appropriate responses to the wondrous wisdom the desert elders impart, the young Cassian and Germanus also notably respond with the sadness, anxiety, and dejection felt at the impossibility of achieving such ascetic virtues and overcoming such trenchant vice. *Conference* 12 closes, for example, with Abba Chaeremon persuading sleep for the young Cassian and Germanus who are “stupefied and anxious” concerning their own chastity. *Conference* 9 sees the two as “shaken” by the Christological controversies on desert figures like Abba Serapion, despairing that despite the *abba*’s “great labors” he runs “the risk of everlasting death” for the doctrinal error—and by extension we can see the companion’s fear that doctrinal orthodoxy has

⁵⁰⁷ *Conf.*3.22.4.

⁵⁰⁸ *Conf.*7.34.1, *Conf.*8.25.5.

⁵⁰⁹ *Conf.*9.36.3.

⁵¹⁰ *Conf.*16.28.

⁵¹¹ *Conf.*18.16.15.

real repercussions when the ecclesial powers mandate it.⁵¹² In *Conference* 17, the young friends “bore witness by groans alone to the distress of our most difficult situation”; the “wretched condition” here being the promise that the companions had made to return to Bethlehem right away and not spend too much time in Egypt.⁵¹³ Germanus ultimately uses fear of the gospel command to justify staying in Egypt and for the two to postpone their return to Bethlehem.⁵¹⁴

Conference 20 returns us to Abba Pinufius: having met with such illustrious elders and having learned from the concentrated conferences, the young Cassian and Germanus start to lose hope that they themselves could attain such blessed states, and Cassian describes himself as “cast down in desperation, then, and showing by our very looks the profound bitterness of our thoughts, we hastened back to the blessed old man in a very anxious state.”⁵¹⁵ Abba Pinufius, however, gives the consolation needed, stating both the difficulty of this way of life and the strategies employed in order to advance, inclining “to true humility and contrition of heart.”⁵¹⁶ It is this consolation that is needed in order for the sadness and dejection to be put in check, so that the companions do not succumb to the vices of sadness and acedia.

Tempering the friend’s joy with the real difficulties inherent in the ascetic life, these *abbas* nevertheless give the young Cassian and Germanus both hope and the means

⁵¹² *Conf.*12.16.4, *Conf.*10.3.5, *Conf.*10.4.1-2.

⁵¹³ *Conf.*17.2.3, *Conf.*17.2.1.

⁵¹⁴ *Conf.*17.10.

⁵¹⁵ *Conf.*20.2.3.

⁵¹⁶ *Conf.*20.6.2.

of advancing in this profession. *Conference* 24, finally, sees the two companions put into practice the strategies discussed in the preceding conferences by Abbas Pinufius and Theonas—not allowing themselves to be dispirited, but to work even more ardently for purity of heart. Central to this pursuit is the act of confession, where with “an anxious confession we laid before this Abraham the struggle of our thoughts,” including the devotion and love extended to their families.⁵¹⁷ Knowing the good end of chastity and not being able to get there, *Conference* 6 returns us to the dissertation Introduction with reflection on the “melancholy mood” of the young Cassian and Germanus “touched with sadness” occasioned by the slaughter of monks in Palestine, which yet turns to “joy of soul” produced through the “boundless delight” Abba Theodore effects through his instruction.⁵¹⁸ *Conference* 10 includes a complicated set of emotions, where amazement at the beautiful pictures of perfection Abba Isaac paints in *Conference* 9 is coupled with despair that such perfection is unreachable to them is met with greater desire to behold such sublime blessedness.⁵¹⁹ *Conference* 13 presents another response to the doctrinal views on chastity and perfection, with young Cassian and Germanus “bewildered” about the relevance of human effort.⁵²⁰ In *Conference* 14, young Cassian identifies one of the primary roadblocks for pursuit of chastity—education in pagan literature, whose images continue to populate his mind’s eye, even when he is singing songs and or praying—his

⁵¹⁷ *Conf.*24.1.2.

⁵¹⁸ *Conf.*6.1.2, *Conf.*6.27.3, *Conf.*6.27.3.

⁵¹⁹ *Conf.*10.8.1.

⁵²⁰ *Conf.*13.1.

compunction ties to his despair over being able to advance in chastity.⁵²¹ The companions thus evince the required emotional motivations and commitments where in *Conference* 21, the two friends impress Abba Theonas with their “zealous desire to attain to the way of perfection, not merely for a while but fully and perfectly,” and in *Conference* 22, Abba Theonas impressed by the “ardent zeal” “ardor” and “anxiety” of the two friends.⁵²²

Thus, we can see that from one perspective, young Cassian and Germanus are not given multiple dimensions in the texts in order to keep the focus on the *abbas* who should be larger-than-life exemplars (like discussed in the previous section). The strategy goes even deeper, however, if we consider that young Cassian and Germanus are meant to tutor the reader of Cassian’s texts to approach the texts themselves, and definitely the wisdom of the elders, in the fashion Cassian narrates. The example of young Cassian and Germanus, in other words, shows readers how the process of imitation through affective response works. Far from passive to their experience, the young Cassian and Germanus model precisely how appropriate emotional dispositions are cultivated—with the precondition that one have certain emotions going into the conference and should anticipate certain emotions throughout the conference.⁵²³

It is crucial here that the elders transmit wisdom in proportion to the commitment

⁵²¹ *Conf.*14.12.

⁵²² *Conf.*21.36.1. *Conf.*22.1.1, 3. This conference on nocturnal emissions also features Germanus experiencing embarrassment while questioning the *abba* on this enduring problem. (*Conf.*22.4.)

⁵²³ Much more could be said about the attitudes with which the young Cassian and Germanus approached the *abbas*. Only because they were “eager to be thoroughly instructed by him” did Abba Moses even begin his conference, claiming that he remains mute when the desire of the suppliant is not sufficiently sincere (*Conf.*1.1.). *Conference* 9, presenting the ideal way to respond to the *abbas*, sees the young Cassian and Germanus as “Amazed by these words of the holy Isaac rather than satisfied by them”(*Conf.*9.36.3.), “rejoicing” equally in the insight gained and in the greater understanding to come in the following *Conference* 10.

shown by the suppliant. In order to gain true practical knowledge and theoretical knowledge alike, one needs to be fully receptive to the exhortations and experiences of the figures one imitates; this is illustrated with Abba Moses. The young Cassian and Germanus thus show how one *needs* to feel in response to the *abbas* as exemplars in order to elicit further response. Cassian gives, through his own earlier example, a model for how a reader needs to read his very texts. One has to be charged and enlivened by the conceptual and affective dimensions of these stories, engaging reading practices with bodily rigor, affective fervency, and conceptual orientedness towards these ideal iterations of the monastic life.

Not only is the reader of Cassian's texts meant to adopt the Psalmic practice common to monasticism but also to assiduously commit to reading the desert elders brought to Gaul through his texts. Just as one adopts and makes one's *own* the emotions of the Psalmist and the elders, so too does one adopt and make one's *own* the emotions of the young Cassian and Germanus. Cassian thus presents himself and Germanus as models for imitation by monastics in Gaul, whose disposition towards the elders must be that of reverence with an element of sincere exigency. This has a pronounced authorizing effect for the desert elders: Psalmic recitation was already the backbone of early Christian monastic practice, so Cassian drops the desert elders into this wagon, attributing similar authority to their views and experiences—they *too* are exemplary models and need be imitated in the affectively hyperbolic fashion of the young Cassian and Germanus to most fully realize the ethical function of narrative reading practices.⁵²⁴

⁵²⁴ Driver, *John Cassian and the Reading of Egyptian Monastic Culture*, 65-72. Cassian's text "'becomes the Master *abba*,' a portable storehouse of eremitic wisdom. In this way, the *abba*-novice relationship, an essential component in Egyptian monastics, is preserved as part of the legitimate line of succession originating in the Hebrew Bible.'" (Kelly, *Cassian's Conferences*,

Translating the “wisdom of the Egyptian desert” to the burgeoning monastic communities in Gaul thus involves the creation of a tradition of exemplarity so that these new communities are both connected to doctrinally orthodox practices *and* so that they have models to imitate and adopt to their own context. Readers—from the Gaulish monastics for whom Cassian writes his books to Benedictine monastics who have continued through the ages to read Cassian’s texts—thus have access to multiple levels of imitation. They imitate the Psalmist in recitation at daily offices, as the *abbas* prescribed; they imitate the elders who struggled with spirits of vice to transform their emotions into elements that fortify their *affectus*; they imitate the young Cassian and Germanus’ feelings of awe and motivation. These features reflect, in part, the historical challenge Cassian faced in his “importing” of Egyptian desert wisdom to Gaulish monasticism. During a time when affirming a central tradition is imperative, the other writings and accounts of the elders and “orthodox” figures takes on a canonical and vital status—Cassian’s texts suggest this in discussions on the necessity of experience in the teacher, the priority given to experience over abstract knowledge, and the accounts of his own ascetic progress through the encounter with these figures as he chronicles decades later with the expressly pedagogical intentions.⁵²⁵

Both Cassian’s literary genre of the *Conferences* and the narrative content therein

99.) “Cassian is not just telling stories; he is inviting his audience into them. ... the real creativity of the *Conferences* lies in its ability not only to present Cassian’s understanding of the monastic ideal but also to provide a means of participating in that ideal.”(Kelly, *Cassian’s Conferences*, 98.)

⁵²⁵ “Because there was so much emphasis in the desert on practice, on living with integrity, the monks interpreted Scripture primarily by putting it into practice. In the desert, Scripture’s surplus of meaning endured not in the form of commentaries or homilies but in acts and gestures, in lives of holiness transformed by dialogue with Scripture.”(Burton-Christie, *Word in the Desert*, 20.)

promote the necessity of imitation and describe the emotions that one needs to adopt in order to best imitate these exemplary figures. Cassian actively produces his readership by telling people that they ought to be reading both the wisdom of scripture and that of the *abbas*. He not only prescribes this imitation but also shows the reader *how* to best imitate these exemplars by adopting the appropriate emotions and, over time, inculcating similar dispositions. He therefore links up practices of scriptural *meditatio* common to late antique Christian asceticism with his own texts in southern Gaul—showing how these practices of imitation need extend not only to scripture, nor even just to the *abbas* (as was common), but also of the young Cassian and Germanus who model appropriate junior ascetic behavior. To adopt the behavior and emotions of the young Cassian and Germanus is the best model that ascetics in southern Gaul have for how to approach the wisdom of scripture and of the *abbas* alike. Cassian thus shows us again how being an effective pedagogue requires showing people how to establish these skills, not just telling them that they ought do it.

Format and genre of Cassian's *Conferences* prove to be relevant when thinking about the relationship between textual engagement and ethical formation. Cassian sets up both *models* for imitation and *shows* the means of imitation by figuring both *abbas* as exemplars and the young Cassian and Germanus as enacting the process of imitation. He, therefore, effectively produces his new reader by showing who to imitate and how to do it. To cap it off, he suggests to his own reader that one will join this illustrious legacy if one engages the practice properly.

To tie the three registers together: the reactions of Young Cassian and Germanus (as the third register discussed above) teach the reader of Cassian's texts how to respond

to the wisdom of the elders' own examples (second register) and, as the elders prescribe, to engage in scriptural *meditatio* (first register). Young Cassian and Germanus's reactions to the elders enact the kind of emotional responses that the elders describe in more abstract and prescriptive terms when discussing how to engage scriptural exemplars in *meditation*—in other words, just as monastics are urged to imitate the emotions and behaviors of exemplary scriptural figures in *meditatio*, so too are monastics reading Cassian's texts invited to imitate the emotions and behaviors of the *abbas* precisely through the example of young Cassian and Germanus. With the young Cassian and Germanus, we therefore see how their emotional responses can be seen as exemplary responses to the encounter with desert wisdom in addition to scriptural *meditatio* shared by monastics far and wide.

Role of *Affectus* as Shaping the Person

Cassian's texts are exceptionally rich in both direct prescriptions for how to relate to scriptural texts and indirect tutoring in how to relate to the *abbas* (with young Cassian and Germanus as one's guides) and, by extension, scriptural exemplars. By analyzing Cassian's presentation of the characters of young Cassian and Germanus, and their emotions and attitudes towards the *abbas*, we see how Cassian presents the steps by which imitating exemplars helps shape the person. We thus get a lived sense of how *meditatio* and *imitatio* work to shape the ascetic on the daily level through daily transformations engaging the bodily, affective, and intellectual aspects of the person together. This, in turn, highlights how central these narrative practices are to ethical formation as a whole in Cassian's program.

Cassian thereby merges his focus on emotions with a sophisticated account of imitation as central to narrative practices. In short, one reads sacred scripture, in part, in order to learn how to feel and how to act by imitating scriptural exemplars. It is a challenge, however, to discern what should be imitated and what should be proscribed—a challenge that can only be met by having the appropriate hermeneutical key to reading scripture. Narrative practices, therefore, reflect how mutually bound are human emotions and the practice of imitation. These features of narrative practices, then, elucidate salient mechanisms by which people transform themselves in Cassian’s texts. This, in turn, calls attention to the pedagogical and therapeutic dimensions of Cassian’s ethics.

Being so affected, then, provides the motivation to transform one’s dispositions for the better. Scriptural *meditatio* thereby provides the therapeutic means to overcome *akrasia* and reach integral health, by affectively motivating the person to reorient one’s attention to producing (and becoming habituated in, over time) good action. Bodily practices, emotional cultivation, and representational attention are all required to successfully shape one’s self in the textual images assigned a canonical status in the tradition. All human faculties—reason, the emotions, and the body—are, in other words, necessarily taken together in meditation, thereby exemplifying the means by which ethical dispositions are shaped in a particularly Christian image.

Cassian accordingly shows Gaulish monastics of his time living examples of how one can shape one’s dispositions through the tempering of emotions that enable bad action and fortifying emotions that facilitate the production of virtue.⁵²⁶ Cassian’s texts

⁵²⁶ “For Cassian, the fullest expression of this ideal involves the renunciation of self and the revitalization of scripture in living form. Hence, scripture becomes a common denominator between the vastly differing topographies and traditions of Egypt and Gaul. By recognizing the authority of the *Conferences* and becoming fully engaged with its contents, one identifies with

present living examples for imitation of how one must engage in demonic struggle and channel one's emotions in ways that enable the best possible ends. Cassian's demonology interestingly ties directly to his view of *affectus* and ethical formation. Humans have emotions, and the question is *how* they are directed, *how* they are focused, and to what *end* they are enabled—questions of orientation, goal, and end that Cassian frames in *Conference* 1. Emotions are not to be muted or renounced, but directed in a way that enables ethical flourishing.

Striking here is how Cassian understands narrative practices as simultaneously bodily practices, engaging the body just as in the practices of manual labor and fasting. What is distinctive about his narrative practices is his foregrounding of the centrality of the emotions, notably through his literary presentation of his younger self and Germanus. Cassian's affective reading practices, in short, promote the imaginative imitation of both scriptural and historical figures, so that one eventually adopts the dispositions of these exemplary figures by first imitating and learning their emotions. For Cassian, the emotions are central to narrative practices, which are, in turn, central to ethical formation. Cassian's works suggest a view of human ethical potential where affective awareness integrates the bodily and intellectual activities of the person, which in turn, enables the cultivation of ethical dispositions that inform the religious self.

- *Contre Foucault's Reading*

This focus on Cassian's reading practices counter key elements of Foucault's reading of Cassian. Without recognizing the central role that affect and the heart play,

and participates in a desert legacy that, in turn, provides the correct orientation for authentic immersion in scripture. The result is that the experience of Abraham and the experience of Antony are brought to life on the fertile shores of Gaul."(Kelly, *Cassian's Conferences*, 100.)

Foucault renders Cassian's subject inaccurately focused on the intellect and will. In "The Battle for Chastity," Foucault gives a lengthy analysis of Cassian's notion of "constitution" and the practices through which the ascetic gives form to his/her life. However, Foucault repeatedly refers to Cassian's understanding of "*la volonté*" (the will) as primary in the ethical practice, thereby undercutting Cassian's actual emphasis on *cor* (the heart). Cassian was influenced by Origen and Evagrius—two very intellect-centered theologians—but he also incorporated the practical elements of Macarius and the tradition of the heart-centered *askēsis* common to the desert tradition. This emphasis on the "heart" implies a type of relation to God that does not translate into the "will," as Foucault's reading has it. For Cassian, working in the tradition of Macarius, it is the heart that is the locus of the person (in contradistinction to the mind [*âme*]). The heart also always implies the presence of the other—the Christian God as the one who is loved as well as the determinative factor in establishing an ethical program.

While seemingly a minor point, larger implications can be drawn from Foucault's focus on the will instead of the heart in his assessment of Cassian's ethics. For one, using the will implies that ethical work was a much more cerebral activity for the ascetics than is actually the case. Furthermore, there is no unmediated action of the self on the self. Rather, the self only works on the self insofar as one recognizes the mode of subjection to be not just an abstract upper limit that offers rationalization for the work of *askēsis*, but an independent agency of its own. God as this "Other" is conceived as a sentient agency in Christianity, with whom the individual necessarily relates and to whom the individual is held accountable.

This chapter has thereby considered how the emotions constitute the disposition of the whole person, by choosing to direct one's attention in a framing orientation not as an intellective faculty but a fully embodied, affective, and inter-relational whole. Only by focusing on the multivalence of affectus—as immediate affect, emotional engagement, and cultivated disposition—can we understand Cassian's ethical program without distorting it by assuming categories that do not apply. The centrality of affectus puts the lie to readings of Cassian, typified by Foucault in his writings on pre-modern ethics, which privilege the intellectual and interior dimensions of the human person as the locus of "the self." This treatment of Cassian's complex figuration of reading practices—that are both culled from the Egyptian desert and also expanded upon in his own writings—highlights significant aspects of ethical agency.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen the vital role that narrative texts play for Cassian; texts that include not only the recently canonized sacred writings of scripture but also his own collections of desert conferences. Cassian's narratives depict scriptural sources as recited aloud in spiritual *meditatio* and replete with exemplary figures to be imitated. Scriptural texts like the Psalms depict the whole range of human emotion, and tutor the reader/reciter to follow positive examples and shirk negative ones through the affects evoked.

Considering Cassian's affect-evoking reading practices in three different registers helps us to grasp the dynamics of his integrated paradigm of the human person. The relationship that one has with texts and its exemplars informs the way that one is shaped

as a person through imitation of exemplars' actions and emotions, attention oriented in the desired direction without splintered foci, and identification with a tradition of figures, practices, and narratives that situates the individual in a broader social and soteriological framework.

The first register treats how reciting canonical scriptural texts affectively tutors the individual's own experience of the texts; one anticipates the emotional responses of scriptural exemplars, notably figures from the Psalms. The second and third registers treat two other levels of engagement in Cassian's own texts. Internal to Cassian's own *Conferences* is the narrative description of desert elders who relay stories and counsel discretion to a young Cassian and Germanus who are both moved with incredible delight, anxiety, wonder, and compunction by their interlocutors. The second register, then, is to see the elders' stories and prescriptions as themselves presenting the kinds of examples that the listener should follow. By seeing the elders as sources of extra-biblical wisdom, their stories both hortatory and cautionary, the tradition of desert wisdom takes on a canonical status through Cassian's presentation—a genre that has its roots in earlier hagiographies like Athanasius' *Life of Antony* and compilations like the *Apophthegmata Patrum*.

The reactions of young Cassian and Germanus, thirdly, teach the reader of Cassian's texts how to respond to the wisdom of the elders' own examples (second register) and, as the elders prescribe, to engage in scriptural *meditatio* (first register). Cassian's presentation of his younger self and Germanus also, interestingly, models how he wants his contemporary readers to engage such imitation. Cassian thus produces a series of exemplars and imitators—where this relation plays out not only between

scriptural figures and the *abbas*, but between *abbas* and other ascetics in training, and also the young Cassian and Cassian's readers. Cassian suggests to the reader that one joins this legacy if one engages the practices properly.

This section makes explicit Cassian's subtle but bold strategies to figure his own texts as analogous to scriptural texts, thereby authorizing his own authority, and the way that this analogousness elucidates the mechanisms of transformation possible in both. While scriptural *meditatio* is widely prescribed in early Christianity, precisely how it is so effective in shaping the person remains rather unstated. In order to know *how* imitation shapes the person as a daily practice—how one habituates oneself to act, feel, and think in similar ways as the exemplar—it is necessary to look at Cassian's literary presentation of his younger self and companion. Cassian's literary strategies, in addition to his direct prescriptions, show in his own literary character how the formation of habitus occurs on the daily, bodily, affective, and intellectual registers.

I have shown how Cassian's *Conferences* (and the *Institutes* to a more limited extent) perform the ethical relationship between reader and text (central to scriptural *meditatio*) using the engagement between the young Cassian and Germanus and the *abbas* as a model for how Cassian's own reader is to engage his texts, the *abbas*, and the narrative practices therein. Through both direct prescriptions in the mouths of his *abbas* and indirect literary characterizations of his central figures, Cassian gives insight into how reading practices engage, tutor, and shape affective selves.

CHAPTER 5

Lived Communities: Liturgy, Confession, and Friendship

In Chapter 4, we analyzed the centrality of reading practices to ethical formation. On the prescriptive level within Cassian's texts, the *abbas* directly exhort the recitation of the Psalms and meditation on scripture. On the literary level of Cassian's texts themselves, the examples of the young Cassian and Germanus—as well as their wise *abba* interlocutors—enact this narrative formation. We get a rich sense in deed of how bodily, affective, and deliberative aspects are necessarily engaged and integrated—increasingly as one progresses in ethical formation.

While the physical and reading practices show how these other forms of awareness are engaged—and, accordingly, the mechanisms of transformation in the individual enabled—every practice here occurs within a matrix of relations with other people, places, and traditions. In order, then, to assess the mechanisms of transformation, we need to get a fuller sense of how inter-relationality shapes not only the possibilities for individual transformation in a social and structural sense (i.e. what practices and forms of life are available to you given your class, geography, social status, gender, etc.), but also in relation to burgeoning traditions of western monasticism. Cassian, after all, writes to other monastics in southern Gaul in order to share his expertise of desert asceticism and the relations that shape, support, and enable such extreme feats of self-transformation and social-production. His writings and influence, in turn, both construct

the desert tradition as authoritative for Gaul and help construct the burgeoning monasticism within Gaul that would find its most famous expression a century later in Benedict of Nursia's *Rule*.

All practices already discussed—physical and reading—require nested social relations, and Cassian's texts present this nesting through both the *abba*'s direct prescriptions and the literary dramatizations of these relations. Cassian speaks to the particularity of the individual while recognizing that all ascetics need to be shaped through the Christian social formations and traditions that he is instrumental in shaping. Cassian's texts are particularly fascinating not only for their historical time and place, but for the way they self-consciously shape the monastic tradition in the west. Monasticism, in Cassian's texts, foregrounds the communal body as a company of people bound together in a common pursuit of virtue—a figuration that extends the intimacy of friendship more broadly to the whole community, while yet allowing for particularity in community as we see with Cassian and Germanus's own friendship.

Ethical formation requires complex dynamics between multiple people, and this chapter will highlight three central social relations constitutive of the ascetic occupation in Cassian. First, I will describe Cassian's accounts of communal practice and social gathering, describing liturgical ritual and the regulation of communal activities through established liturgical offices that shape both individual and corporate identities. Second, I will treat Cassian's account of "discernment" and the practice of confession that inheres in a relationship between an advanced elder and a younger ascetic. Third, I will treat Cassian's sustained treatment of friendship both through his theoretical musings on its importance and through his relationship with Germanus, so central to his texts. Inter-

relationality enables ascetic formation and constitutes ascetic identities in Cassian's texts in these three notable ways, and I will treat both Cassian's direct prescriptions for such social relations in the *Institutes* and his indirect presentation of these relations dramatized in the literary structure of the *Conferences*.

Liturgy as Communal Practice and Social Gathering

Cassian embraces community and sociality as central to asceticism, and part of his distinctive contribution to western monasticism comes from his figuration of liturgy.⁵²⁷ Cassian directly addresses the liturgical offices in Egypt, Palestine, and Mesopotamia, although he shows clear preference for the rigors of Egyptian asceticism. I will discuss his compelling account of liturgy in two central ways, through direct prescription in the *Institutes* and through literary enactment in the *Conferences*—two different accounts that I argue are mutually-illuminating.

Institutes 2 is wholly dedicated—as its title reflects (“The Canonical Method of the Nighttime Prayers and Psalms” (*De Canonico Nocturnarum Orationum et Psalmorum Modo*))—to describing the liturgical services celebrated by Egyptian ascetics.⁵²⁸ In this book, Cassian directly prescribes the correct number of offices and their features. These “services, which they call *synaxes*” (*sollemnitates, quas illi synaxis uocant*), include an evening gathering and the night vigil as the two services when all ascetics in the community come together.⁵²⁹ These two services Cassian designates as *vespertinus*

⁵²⁷ Lawrence J. Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church: An Anthology of Historical Sources*, Volume 3 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010), 159-175.

⁵²⁸ *Inst.* 2.

⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*

(evening) and *nocturnis* (night).⁵³⁰ *Vespertinius*, like Vespers in the Liturgy of the Hours, takes place in the beginning of evening, around 6pm. *Nocturnis*, corresponding to Matins, takes place sometime during the night, perhaps at midnight.⁵³¹ Cassian is clear to authorize the sanctity of these practices in Egypt and the Thebaid that “remain through a succession of elders and their traditions even to the present day and are founded to stay” (*per successiones ac traditiones maiorum usque in hodiernum diem uel permanent uel mansura fundantur*).⁵³²

Cassian describes how these offices were temporally regulated, day to day, prescribing how the person in charge of waking the community for the liturgical offices, or “the daily vigils” (*cotidianas uigilias*), must carefully watch the stars in order to determine “the time appointed by the community and calls them to their service of prayer” (*congregationis tempus explorans ad orationum eos inuitat officium*).⁵³³ To ensure the correct ritual hour for this night office, which concludes “after cockcrow and before dawn” (*post gallorum cantum ante auroram*), this monastic may neither oversleep nor rush the timing of the service in order to return quickly to sleep.⁵³⁴

These *synaxes*, then, center around the singing of psalms and maintaining constant prayer, and Cassian is keen to note the “correct” way of performing the liturgy.

⁵³⁰ “....we see that the correct number of prayers is maintained in the evening gatherings and at the night vigils.” (*legitimum orationum modum in uespertinis conuentibus seu nocturnis uigiliis uidimus retentari*.) (*Inst.2.3.1.*)

⁵³¹ Chadwick, *John Cassian*, 70, 76. Chadwick also notes that offices that start with Psalm 70:1 show Cassian’s direct influence.

⁵³² *Inst.2.3.1.*

⁵³³ *Inst.2.17.*

⁵³⁴ *Inst.3.6, Inst.2.17.*

This is, in part, Cassian's response to the lack of monastic standards for liturgical practices in Gaul, and his influence on the next century of Gaulish monasticism largely stems from the combination of his prescribed practices and his authorization of those practices as continuous with the Egyptian desert tradition. He appeals to "when the perfection of the primitive Church remained inviolate and was still fresh in the memory of succeeding generations" as the foundation for "what form daily worship should take throughout the whole body of the brotherhood."⁵³⁵ Even exemplary asceticism in these early stages, however, contended with a similar disagreement about how many psalms should be sung.

To advocate for the "traditional" practice of singing twelve psalms, Cassian tells the story of an angel joining a community of ascetics, singing twelve psalms, and disappearing from the gathering. The rest of this description also includes several components of a *synaxis* so bears mention:

And when all were seated, as is still the custom throughout Egypt, and had fixed the full attention of their hearts upon the cantor's words, he sang eleven psalms that were separated by the interposition of prayers, all the verses being pronounced in the same tone of voice. Having finished the twelfth with an Alleluia as a response, he suddenly withdrew from the eyes of all, thus concluding both the discussion and the ceremony.

*cum que sedentibus cunctis, ut est moris nunc usque in Aegypti partibus, et in psallentis uerba omni cordis intentione defixis undecim psalmos orationum interiectione distinctos contiguis uersibus parili pronuntiatione cantasset, duodecimum sub alleluiae responsione consummans ab uniuersorum oculis repente subtractus quaestioni pariter et caerimoniis finem inposuit.*⁵³⁶

⁵³⁵ *Inst.*2.5.3.

⁵³⁶ *Inst.*2.5.5.

This passage indicates that the community members are seated and devote their attention to the cantor, who alone stands and sings the psalms.⁵³⁷ This is not to suggest that the community members are passive, rather each was called to reflect intensely on the words of the psalms as the cantor sang them. What Susan Harvey describes in relation to liturgical celebrations including lay people applies as well to the ascetics: “Thus listening required attention, discernment, and a conjoining of purpose to that of the homilist, so that both preaching and listening should become one and the same act of offering thanksgiving to God.”⁵³⁸

Cassian uses this story of the angel who established “a universal rule” (*generalem canonem*) through authority granted by God, to set twelve psalms as the absolute standard for “both the evening and the morning assemblies” (*in uespertinis quam in nocturnis conuenticulis*).⁵³⁹ Two readings from “Holy Scripture” (*diuinarum scripturarum*) then follow the singing of the psalms, in order to best enable scriptural *meditatio*.⁵⁴⁰ During the weekdays, these readings are drawn “one from the Old and another from the New Testament” (*unam ueteris et aliam noui testamenti*), but on Saturday and Sunday, both readings come from the New Testament (“one from the Apostle or the Acts of the Apostles and another from the Gospels” [*unam de apostolo uel actibus apostolorum et*

⁵³⁷ Of the fourth century, Denis Crouan notes: “During this time the assembly remained mute, so to speak: its ‘active participation’ consisted first and foremost in keeping themselves in the presence of God and in listening to his Word—an attitude that seems to be essential and liturgy and that we would often do well to discover.” (Denis Crouan, S.T.D., *The History and the Future of the Roman Liturgy*, trans. Michael Miller [San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2005], 52.)

⁵³⁸ Susan Ashbrook Harvey, “Liturgy and Ethics in Ancient Syriac Christianity: Two Paradigms,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 26.3 (2013): 300-316, 310.

⁵³⁹ *Inst.* 2.6.

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

aliam de euangeliis]).⁵⁴¹ Cassian does not, however, develop any additional content for the liturgy—either in the form of specific homilies, nor developing a reading of particular psalms.⁵⁴²

Cassian briefly references ancient psalmody as concluding with Psalm 148, 149, and 150 at the conclusion of the nighttime vigil, after cockcrow and before dawn.⁵⁴³ What, then, is the tone expressed in these psalms? The beginnings of each give a sense of the exultant and panegyric tone of the whole, exhorting the listener to praise the greatness of God. Psalm 148 begins “Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the heights!” Psalm 149 begins “Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise in the assembly of his faithful people.” And Psalm 150 begins with “Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty firmament!” and ends with “Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!”⁵⁴⁴ These three psalms express exultant praise for God, as creator and as triumphant. Psalm 150 develops the many ways one ought to praise God, with reference to the tools of praise: “3 Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! 4 Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! 5 Praise him with clanging cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals!” The cycle of three psalms sees the

⁵⁴¹ Ibid. Additional changes for observance of the Sabbath include not kneeling and not keeping to rule of fasting from Saturday evening through dawn on Sunday morning until the following evening, as well as for the entirety of Pentecost. *Inst.*2.18.

⁵⁴² This contrasts with many genres of documentation that treat the liturgical institutions of the fourth and fifth centuries, that Metzger notes as “church order, homilies, catecheses, letters, stories. These documents complement one another and allow us to reconstruct almost entirely the rituals in use for several churches.” (Marcel Metzger, *History of the Liturgy: The Major Stages*, trans. Madeleine Beaumont [Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1997], 67.)

⁵⁴³ *Inst.*2.6. Cassian mentions the singing of Psalms 50, 62, and 89 during this service as an innovation.

⁵⁴⁴ *New Revised Standard Version*, Psalms 148:1, 149:1; 150: 1, 6.

intensification of praise, culminating in the lively, exultant, and sonic feast of Psalm 150. As Harvey notes of the importance of sound for Jacob of Sarug, perhaps we can think through the experience of meditating on these psalms every day, participating in its delightful affective mood within the celebratory gathering of synaxis.⁵⁴⁵

These psalms are sung as the daylight breaks, and Cassian suggests that this greeting of the sun while in song best shapes the ascetics, “so that when daylight breaks it finds them more fervent and careful, maintaining them in readiness for the conflict and, thanks to the practice of the nighttime vigil and spiritual meditation, fortified in the face of the daytime struggle with the devil” (*ut eos superueniens lux matutina in hoc feruore spiritus repperiat constitutos ac per totum diei tempus feruentiores sollicitiores que custodiat, praeparatos eos suscipiens ad conflictum et contra diurnam conluctationem diaboli nocturnarum exercitio uigiliarum ac spiritali meditatione firmatos*).⁵⁴⁶ Cassian’s passing mention of these psalms can signal how these psalms shaped ascetic subjectivity everyday—where each day, the ascetic is exhorted to praise God and is roused to do so with fervent spirit that they then carry throughout the day. The ascetics, reflecting on the glories of God and exulting in his greatness, are shaped through the imaginative accompaniment of cymbals, tambourines, and dancing. Instead of these tools, the cantor’s singing voice and each participant’s fervency of spirit communicate a comparable affective experience. With this fervor, experienced communally as a celebration, one fortifies one’s strength and resolve, enabling one to take on the challenges of the day.

The psalmody receives further specification by Cassian. A psalm is not sung in its

⁵⁴⁵ Harvey, “Liturgy and Ethics in Ancient Syriac Christianity: Two Paradigms,” 309.

⁵⁴⁶ *Inst.*3.5.2.

entirety, but is broken up “into small and separate parts, in two or three sections, interspersed with prayers, in accordance with the number of the verses” (*eos pro numero uersuum duabus uel tribus intercisionibus cum orationum interiectione diuisos distinctim particulatim que consummant*).⁵⁴⁷ This explains the “interposition of prayers” from the earlier passage, as the psalm is sung with a different number of arrangements, where a longer psalm is broken up into more sections, providing more discrete opportunities for prayer. The twelve psalms sung in each service are, furthermore, divided up amongst the participants of the *synaxis*. Cassian notes that “if there are two brothers they sing six each; if three, four; and if four, three. ... [n]ever more than four brothers sing during the *synaxis*” (*si duo fuerint fratres, senos psallant, si tres, quaternos, si quattuor, ternos. ... numquam amplius psallunt in synaxi quam quattuor fratres*).⁵⁴⁸ The twelve psalms are divided up evenly, with no more than four brothers sing the psalms in any given service. Cassian’s prescription here also reflects directly how small these gatherings could be—as few as two—in the Egyptian desert. The brother singing, then, needs to take great care to communicate the meaning and significance of the psalm, and Cassian chastens ascetics against sloppy and half-hearted performances.⁵⁴⁹ In response, the other brothers are compelled to be really silent, not only for the cultivation of their own attention but so that they will not be a distraction for someone else.⁵⁵⁰ Once the *synaxis* is complete, and the psalms finished, the ascetics immediately goes back to their cell and their work, and

⁵⁴⁷ *Inst.*2.11.1.

⁵⁴⁸ *Inst.*2.11.3.

⁵⁴⁹ *Inst.*2.11.2.

⁵⁵⁰ *Inst.*2.10.1, *Inst.*3.10.2.

“none of them dares to linger or to chat for a while with anyone else” (*absoluta nullus eorum uel ad modicum subsistere aut sermocinari audet cum altero*).⁵⁵¹

Cassian does prioritize the practices of Egyptian ascetics over those of Palestine and Mesopotamia, extolling “the perfection of the Egyptians and the inimitable rigor of their discipline” (*perfectionem Aegyptiorum et inimitabilem disciplinae rigorem horum institutis moderantes*).⁵⁵² This preference derives from a liturgical sensibility that Cassian associates with the Egyptian ascetics who do not *require* set offices during the day—instead, they dedicate themselves constantly to prayer, as we have discussed in prior chapters.⁵⁵³ However, these day-time services are also significant for how they develop communal liturgical subjectivities against a soteriological backdrop. “[I]n the monasteries of Palestine and Mesopotamia and the entire Orient” (*in Palaestinae uel Mesopotamiae monasteriis ac totius Orientis*), three additional day-time services are practiced, designated by the “services of terce, sext, and none” (*de sollemnitatibus tertiae, sextae*

⁵⁵¹ *Inst.*2.15.

⁵⁵² *Inst.*3.1.

⁵⁵³ As discussed in Chapter 3, Cassian differentiates the cenobites who observe “the offices that we are obliged to render to the Lord at different hours and at intervals of time, at the call of the summoner” from the Egyptian ascetics where prayer is “celebrated continuously and spontaneously throughout the course of the whole day.”(*Inst.*3.2.)

Egyptian ascetics, including the esteemed elders who are the interlocutors for the *Conferences*, do not have to have offices set aside for prayer. Instead, they pray continuously throughout the day as “they add entreaties and prayers at every moment, taking up the whole day in offices that we celebrate at fixed times.”(Ibid.)

From Egypt, Cassian brings to the west this aspiration towards rendering prayer the backbone of one’s entire life, “entreaties and prayers” constitute one’s whole day. He goes on to evaluate this difference on the basis of its unceasing and voluntary nature: “For what is unceasingly offered is greater than what is rendered at particular moments, and a voluntary service is more pleasing than functions that are carried out by canonical obligation.”(Ibid.) Cassian sees a similar quality of ritual observance extended by these *abbas* to all of their activities, effecting a liturgization of everyday life.

nonae).⁵⁵⁴ Terce corresponds roughly to 9am, Sext to 12pm, and None to 3pm; each service includes the singing of three psalms.

The three times, Cassian argues, are significant “since in them was accomplished the fulfillment of the promises and the whole of our salvation” (*in his siquidem promissionum perfectio et summa nostrae salutis est adinpleta*).⁵⁵⁵ Cassian dedicates much of *Institutes* 3 to providing the soteriological backdrop for these three times, where each time corresponds to a particular moment in the salvific narrative of the *vita Christi*. The third hour, Terce, was the hour of Pentecost where the Holy Spirit “came down for the first time upon the apostles as they were gathered for prayer.”⁵⁵⁶ The sixth hour, Sext, saw the crux of salvation history, where the crucifixion of Christ “freed all of us who were subject to and burdened by the record of our unpayable debt.”⁵⁵⁷ At the ninth hour, None, Christ descended into hell.⁵⁵⁸ Cassian’s discussion of the significance of these three times is the closest analysis he gives of specific narrative content in liturgical practice, and his scriptural and Christological justifications are notable. They suggest the way that Cassian exhorts ascetics to come to each service, fostering the appropriate dispositions that reflect the cosmic significance of each gathering. Like the apostles who received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and spoke the truth of Christ to the unbelieving,

⁵⁵⁴ *Inst.3.3.1.* “[I]n the monasteries of Palestine and Mesopotamia and the entire Orient the services at the aforesaid hours are done every day with three psalms” (*in Palaestinae uel Mesopotamiae monasteriis ac totius Orientis supra dictarum horarum sollemnitates trinis psalmis cotidie finiuntur*). (*Inst.3.1.*)

⁵⁵⁵ *Inst.3.3.1.*

⁵⁵⁶ *Inst.3.3.2.*

⁵⁵⁷ *Inst.3.3.3.*

⁵⁵⁸ *Inst.3.3.6.*

monastics are exhorted at Terce to imitate the apostles and cultivate an attitude of openness to the presence of God. At Sext, the suffering and death of Christ crucified calls each monastic to recognize their debt dissolved through the work of Christ, and to follow the Gospel message as “divinely revealed to Peter” at this very hour.⁵⁵⁹ At None, Christ broke the doors of Hell, effecting the freedom from death for all humans, and monastics are to come to this service with a sense of gratitude for their liberation.

Collective liturgy is central to Cassian’s ascetic program in both symbolic and social ways. The community of ascetics symbolically constitutes the body of Christ against a soteriological backdrop, as we see in Cassian’s analysis of daytime services. As Harvey describes of Christian lay communities, the drama of salvation can be seen played out with these services, as “[t]he believing community sounded forth a performance that proclaimed God’s salvific work enacted within their own midst, in them, through them, and by them.”⁵⁶⁰

The discursive formations of liturgy also fashion individual subjectivities through its ritualized and communal practices. As discussed in Chapter 4, the Psalms were chanted not only continuously by ascetics, but were concentrated in these liturgical gatherings, where Cassian prescribes a set number of Psalms. The daily chanting of psalms in communal gatherings amplifies the sense of stability that Paul Kolbet discusses where the Psalter progressively “counters the instability of selfhood” and where the Psalter “becomes a second nature when it is written in the soul.”⁵⁶¹ The same

⁵⁵⁹ Inst.3.3.4.

⁵⁶⁰ Harvey, “Liturgy and Ethics in Ancient Syriac Christianity: Two Paradigms,” 316.

⁵⁶¹ Kolbet, “Athanasius, the Psalms, and the Reformation of the Self,” 101.

mechanisms of affective recitation and reflection are experienced, but here it is through the coordination of the entire community. As one person sings the Psalm, Cassian notes, everyone else diligently reflects on what is being said, who the characters are, and what they are feeling—through this reflective engagement, one comes to adopt the Psalmic characters as a corporate body.

We can read the communal gatherings as forging communal identification and Christian identity, where everyone's attention, heart, and body are well-ordered as a harmonious whole. Here, it is helpful to note how John Alford describes the dynamics of individual and communal formation: "They tended to see themselves less as individuals than as individual manifestations of well-known and codified forms of behavior—in short, as adapted stereotypes."⁵⁶² These ascetics, when joined in communal praxis, together adopt the dispositions of the Psalter and affectively experience it together, becoming united in affect and joined together with meditative reflection and bodily stillness. This suggests why it is so important that people do not become distracted during these services—it not only proves distracting for other ascetics, but it prevents group ritual identification and subject formation.

We can read Cassian's discussion as presenting a particular liturgical technology of the self that is fundamentally communal, as an instance of formulating the "techniques that human beings use to understand themselves."⁵⁶³ In *Institutes* 3, Cassian suggests how a specific Christian ascetic subjectivity is shaped through not only the practices one

⁵⁶² John A. Alford, "The Scriptural Self," in *The Bible in the Middle Ages: Its Influence on Literature and Art*, ed. Bernard S. Levy (Binghamton, NY: State University of New York, 1992): 1-22, 20.

⁵⁶³ Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," 249.

engages on one's own, but also through how a community comes together. What Nathan Mitchell describes can apply to Cassian's texts: "But if self-care is personal, it is also, for Christians, inherently and decisively social. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the ascetic practices of *cura animae* inevitably involve ritual. Thus, technologies of the self include both the 'rites' practiced by individuals and the 'ritual construction' of the whole social order."⁵⁶⁴

Cassian suggests a dilution of the intensity of Egyptian asceticism with this additional liturgical schema (the Egyptian, he thinks, did not require these additional offices to ensure their prayer), while recognizing its necessity for regulating monasticism in Gaul and for shaping subjectivities. Communal liturgy is still important, if not as necessary even for the Egyptians, however. Common to Egyptian practices, and Palestinian and Mesopotamian practices, is the celebration of public services on Saturday and Sunday, where people "gather at the third hour for Holy Communion" (*in quibus hora tertia sacrae communionis obtentu conueniunt*).⁵⁶⁵ All communities, then, celebrate the Eucharist at Terce on Saturday and Sunday.⁵⁶⁶

⁵⁶⁴ Nathan D. Mitchell, *Liturgy and the Social Sciences* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 65.

⁵⁶⁵ *Inst.*3.2.

⁵⁶⁶ Consider also how certain observances of the "nighttime vigils" in Egyptian practice become part of the "morning service" (*matutinam sollemnitatem*) in Palestine and Mesopotamia: "our elders, who decided that this same morning service should be added, changed nothing with respect to the ancient custom of the psalmody; rather, the office was celebrated in the same way as had always been done before in the nighttime gatherings. For today as well they chant the hymns (which they used in this region at the morning service) in similar fashion at the end of the nighttime vigil, which they are accustomed to concluding after cockcrow and before dawn" (*nihil a nostris senioribus, qui hanc eandem matutinam sollemnitatem addi debere censuerunt, de antiqua psalmorum consuetudine inmutatum, sed eodem ordine missam quo prius in nocturnis conuentibus perpetuo celebratam. etenim hymnos, quos in hac regione ad matutinam excepere sollemnitatem, in fine nocturnarum uigiliarum, quas post gallorum cantum ante auroram finire solent*). (*Inst.*3.6.)

On a final note, Cassian explains a special accommodation for Egyptian ascetics whose physical exhaustion induces them to sit down during this *synaxis*:

When celebrating these same services in their gatherings according to custom, all settle down on very low seats, apart from the one who has gotten up in their midst to sing the psalms, and they give their heart's undivided attention to the cantor's voice. For they are so worn out from fasting and from working the whole day and night that, if they were standing and were not helped by this kind of rest, they would in fact be unable to get through the number in question.

*ut has easdem congregationum sollemnitates ex more celebrantes absque eo, qui dicturus in medium psalmos surrexerit, cuncti sedilibus humillimis insidentes a uoce psallentis omni cordis intentione dependeant. ita namque ieiuniis et operatione totius diei noctis que lassescunt, ut, nisi huiuscemodi refectioe adiuuentur, ne hunc quidem numerum stantes explere praeualeant.*⁵⁶⁷

We learn a number of things from this passage. Egyptian ascetics sit on “low seats” while an appointed ascetic—the cantor—sings the twelve psalms. These ascetics are exhausted from fasting and working tirelessly, so require the bodily respite during these liturgies; recall Chapter 3 which describes how ascetics “acquire a loftier insight into spiritual contemplation with a pure mind the more intently and zealously they focus on work and toil.”⁵⁶⁸ Such bodily rest better enables—we can infer—the attention of the heart to remain undivided and fully focused on the psalms sung.

Cassian's apologetic tone here reflects Owen Chadwick's observation that liturgical practices emerged in response to practical needs, as opposed to purely

⁵⁶⁷ *Inst.* 2.12.1-2.

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

theoretical or doctrinal concerns.⁵⁶⁹ Practical needs take priority because the objective is to advance in ascetic formation, not just a blind adherence to rules. Such advance, in turn, requires dedicated attention be devoted to the liturgy. Cassian is concerned with the quality and pacing of liturgical observance—the quality of attention is centrally important. He does not want monastics to rush through the prayers or movements and, in fact, extols the Egyptian ascetics for not rushing through the recitation of the psalms. Instead, “[t]hey begin and end the aforementioned prayers, then, such that once the psalm is finished they do not immediately rush to kneel down, as some of us do in this region who hasten to go down for prayer when the psalm is not yet completely over and hurry to get to the conclusion as quickly as possible.”⁵⁷⁰

- Liturgization of Everyday Life

Cassian refers to liturgy in another, strikingly different, way in his texts. While in the *Institutes*, Cassian prescribes liturgical practices directly, in the *Conferences*, Cassian frames the narrative of his texts with liturgical practices observed. Part of the difference in presentation between the *Institutes* and *Conferences* can be accounted for in his evaluation of Egyptian practices as the anchoritic ideal, while the practices in Palestine and Mesopotamia reflect more regulated forms of cenobitic liturgical practices. In the *Conferences*, Cassian frames several conferences with reference to how the young companions and elder host engage in *synaxis*, celebrating the divine offices.

Part I of the *Conferences* includes Books 1-10 and features seven *abbas*, providing a rich sense of how the young Cassian and Germanus were received into the

⁵⁶⁹ Chadwick, *John Cassian*, 76.

⁵⁷⁰ *Inst.*2.7.1-2.

Egyptian ascetic communities, sharing in the *synaxes* and benefitting from discussion with the elders. *Conference* 1 closes with the young Cassian and Germanus going to bed after a rich discourse by Abba Moses on the goal and end of the monastic.⁵⁷¹ The next conference, then, begins with the company the following day waking at the first light of dawn, after only a “very short time of rest” as Abba Moses executes the promised discourse on discretion (which will be discussed at more length in the next section).⁵⁷² Between these two conferences, the reader gets a sense of both the friends’ joy of edification in *Conference* 1 and their joyful anticipation of more teaching the following day, which renders their sleep brief and not restful. With the shift in host *abba*, comes a temporal shift as well. *Conference* 3, then, begins after *synaxis* observed on Saturday morning and continues through until midnight on Sunday morning.⁵⁷³ Abba Serenus, the host of *Conferences* 7 and 8, similarly engages the friends in conversation until nearly dawn, only urging them to take a short sleep in order to be rested for *synaxis* on Sunday.⁵⁷⁴ After *synaxis* on Sunday, closing around the ninth hour as typical, Serenus then presents the friends with a feast (as discussed in Chapter 3), followed by

⁵⁷¹ Cassian describes the friends going to bed in “solemn stillness, at once burning with joy as a result of the conference that had been given and excited by the prospect of the discussion that had been promised.”(*Conf*.1.23.4.)

⁵⁷² Abba Moses remarks: “Seeing you inflamed with such a burning desire, I have the impression that the very short time of rest which I wanted to take away from our spiritual conference and devote to the refreshment of the flesh did not help your bodily repose.”(*Conf*.2.1.1.)

⁵⁷³ *Conf*.3.1.1. Cassian says that “instructed by these words and not so much cheerful as moved with compunction in our hearts, we were dismissed by Abba Paphnutius from his cell before midnight.”(*Conf*.3.22.4.)

⁵⁷⁴ *Conf*.7.34.1.

conversation “by lamplight,” indicating its passage into the evening.⁵⁷⁵ *Conference* 9, then, closes earlier in the evening with Abba Isaac sending the friends to bed after they all celebrated the evening *synaxis*, with the intention of beginning conversation again early in the morning, most likely after the night vigil.⁵⁷⁶

Part II, then, with its seven books, moves to the chronologically first stage in the journeys of young Cassian and Germanus, as they first set out in Egypt. *Conference* 11, hosted by Abba Chaeremon ends with him coaxing the friends to eat, “so that after eating the attention of our mind may be given over to what you desire to investigate more carefully.”⁵⁷⁷ *Conference* 12, then, begins with all three ascetics taking their meal, although Cassian narrates this opening by declaring how he wished it were the sustenance of teaching instead of literal food.⁵⁷⁸ This conference on chastity, an issue we saw in Chapter 3 relates closely to fasting, reinforces the importance of food and chastens the impulse towards excessive fasting in its opening. In its closing, too, Abba Charemon urges the friends to not forget the necessities of the body and to take the “natural food of sleep, since the greater part of the night had already slipped by and it had gradually become more quiet.”⁵⁷⁹ Such practical reminders are then framed by waking after a short sleep to celebrate the morning *synaxis* in *Conference* 13, completed an hour before the

⁵⁷⁵ *Conf.*8.25.5.

⁵⁷⁶ Cassian notes: “Amazed by these words of the holy Isaac rather than satisfied by them, we rested our limbs in sleep for a short while after the evening *synaxis* had been celebrated. Intending to return again early in the morning in the expectation of a fuller discussion, we went back home...”(*Conf.*9.36.3.)

⁵⁷⁷ *Conf.*11.15.

⁵⁷⁸ *Conf.*12.

⁵⁷⁹ *Conf.*12.16.4.

cockcrow as indicated in the *Institutes*.⁵⁸⁰ *Conference* 15, then, starts after evening *synaxis*, and Cassian describes how they sat down on their mats for the conference.⁵⁸¹ Abba Joseph, after the close of his *Conference* 16 and at the beginning of *Conference* 17, brings the young Cassian and Germanus to their cell to get rest. The young friends, however, are so energized that they speak through the night, expressing their angst over not keeping their promise to return to their cenobium in Bethlehem, desiring to stay on and learn from the elders in Egypt.⁵⁸² Abba Joseph assuages the friends' anxieties during the full conference the following day.

Part III takes place after Part II chronologically and discusses conferences showcased in both anchoritic and cenobitic communities. The close of *Conference* 18, for example, has Abba Piamun discussing the rudiments of solitary living.⁵⁸³ *Conference* 21, then discusses the mores around observance of Pentecost, moving on to standards surrounding fasting as well as broader issues of conversion and purification. The young friends raise the uncomfortable question of why nocturnal emissions occur, and Abba Theonas defers the conversation to after the three take a rest. This rest ends up lasting seven days, during which Pentecost is celebrated, and after the evening *synaxis*, Abba Theonas discusses nocturnal illusions with the young friends in his cell until he urges

⁵⁸⁰ *Conf.*13.1.

⁵⁸¹ *Conf.*15.1.1.

⁵⁸² *Conf.*17.

⁵⁸³ Cassian states: "For, thanks to his instruction in the first place, we took up the rudiments of solitary living, the knowledge of which we pursued more fully afterward in Skete."(*Conf.*18.16.15.)

sleep so that they might start again the following day.⁵⁸⁴ The following day, as it becomes light, Abba Theonas begins *Conference* 23 (“On Sinlessness”) discussing the need for “frequent examination” of one’s spiritual status. *Conference* 24, finally, closes out the *Conferences* with the young Cassian and Germanus confessing their thoughts to Abba Abraham, who explains their thoughts like a good medical doctor in terms of sicknesses of the soul, diagnosing the state of the two friends and reaffirming their joyful embrace of the ascetic profession.⁵⁸⁵ In these many examples, the framing of the individual conferences gives a lived sense of how the friends experienced their interactions with these esteemed elders. This has the function not only of communicating a sense of character, but of showing how rigorous the practices and liturgical observances were in Egypt. These narrative features also suggest the appropriate time to celebrate the services, and put into action what Cassian describes in the *Institutes*. Similar to Cassian’s strategies discussed in Chapter 4, then, I see Cassian as modeling how his younger self and Germanus were formed according to the most excellent norms of the desert ascetics.

Discernment as a Social Practice

We have just discussed how Books 2 and 3 of the *Institutes* treat “the canonical method of prayer and psalmody that must be observed in the daytime gatherings in all monasteries.”⁵⁸⁶ In Book 4 of the *Institutes*, Cassian proceeds to treat cenobitic communities in particular, prescribing practices from the reception of new novices to the

⁵⁸⁴ *Conf.*22.1.1.

⁵⁸⁵ *Conf.*24.15.

⁵⁸⁶ *Inst.*4.1.

ways in which each monk “is subject at every moment to their elder with an obedience.”⁵⁸⁷ Rendering oneself subject to an elder monk is crucial for the ascetic life, especially in its communal dimensions. Discretion, the subject of *Conference 2* “On Discretion” (*De Discretione*), is central to how Cassian understands elders to support novices through their practical knowledge.⁵⁸⁸

Discretion, as *discretione* (referring to discretion, the capacity for distinguishing, and also discernment), and discernment, as *iudicium* (referring to judgment, notably with legal connotations) are related technical terms in Cassian. The practice of *discretio* involves the *abba*’s *iudicium* understood as the ability to judge a person’s motivations for actions and beliefs. This discernment involves distinguishing between the sources of the person’s different thoughts, and discernment in the elder/novice relationship is the means by which the elder reads and diagnoses the spiritual state of the novice. On the basis of this assessment, the *abba* prescribes an individualized course of action to help the novice overcome difficulties.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid. Cassian here treats, notably, the “cenobium in the Thebaid,” contrasting the weakness of monastic training in Gaul with the advanced asceticisms of this Egyptian cenobium where 5,000 brothers are under the direction of a single director precisely because they are so disciplined. Cassian provides a vivid account of this process that involves a fair amount of hazing by the monks already in the community who get to taunt and insult the postulant.

⁵⁸⁸ Cassian’s understanding of it *discretio* as a form of *phronesis*, or practical knowledge, is common in antiquity since Aristotle. Ramsey notes the classical roots of Cassian’s definition: “Already in classical thought, under the name *phronesis* or *prudentia*, discretion was seen as the governing virtue, distinguishing good from bad, and Cassian in one respect does no more than repeat that insight.” (Ramsey, *Conferences*, 78.)

Aristotle’s influence, as we will see in the next section on friendship, is relevant for thinking about *phronesis* as practical knowledge and its association with Cassian’s understanding of *discretione*. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 6.5.

In *Conference 2*, Cassian has Abba Moses narrate the account of discretion given by the most authoritative of desert elders: Antony the Great (*beatus Antonius*).⁵⁸⁹ Abba Moses recounts hearing Antony speak during his youth, and recounts Antony's direct discourse on discretion as a response to "some elders" who "came to him to ask about perfection" (*seniores ad eum perfectionis inquirendae gratia conuenisse*):

Nor can another reason be found for their fall, except that they were less well instructed by the elders and were utterly unable to grasp the meaning of discretion, which avoids excess of any kind and teaches the monk always to proceed along the royal road and does not let him be inflated by virtues on the right hand—that is, in an excess of fervor to exceed the measure of a justifiable moderation by a foolish presumption—nor let him wander off to the vices on the left hand because of a weakness for pleasure—that is, under the pretext of controlling the body, to grow soft because of a contrary lukewarmness of spirit.

*nec enim alia lapsus eorum causa deprehenditur, nisi quod minus a senioribus instituti nequaquam potuerunt rationem discretionis adipisci, quae praetermittens utramque nimietatem uia regia monachum docet semper incedere et nec dextra uirtutum permittit extolli, id est feruoris excessu iustae continentiae modum inepta praesumptione transcendere, nec oblectatum remissione deflectere ad uitia sinistra concedit, hoc est sub praetextu gubernandi corporis contrario spiritus tepore lentescere.*⁵⁹⁰

Antony, as ventriloquized by Moses, as ventriloquized by Cassian-as-author, describes discretion as the cultivated ability to avoid excess (*nimietatem*), following instead the *via regia monachum*. Neither excessive asceticism, nor excessive indulgence, is advocated—for the ascetic becomes prey to the spirit of pride (*superbia*) in the former case, and gluttony (*gula*) in the latter. From the nesting of indirect discourse, we can see how Cassian-as-author authorizes *Conference 2*'s view of discretion by putting the discourse

⁵⁸⁹ *Inst.*2.2.

⁵⁹⁰ *Conf.*2.2.4.

in the mouth of Moses who directly received guidance from Antony. With this literary technique, Cassian establishes an illustrious lineage between not only for himself and Antony, but between Antony and those instructed in Gaul who would read the *Conferences*.⁵⁹¹

As one advances in the ascetic life, one cultivates discernment as a skill, and Cassian describes many of the *abbas* in terms of their superlative discernment, such as Abba Moses as Serapion who discusses the eight vices in *Conference 5*.⁵⁹² Even exercising virtues and cultivating the desired ascetic disposition is not possible without discretion, as “the lack of discretion by itself did not permit those works to endure to the end” (*discretio sola deficiens usque ad finem ea durare non siuit*).⁵⁹³ The goal, then, is to cultivate one’s own discernment, whereby one will be able to moderate oneself and parse the sources for various thoughts, allowing beneficial thoughts to remain and negative thoughts to pass away and not incite bad behavior. So vital is discretion that Abba Moses notes the role that divine grace plays in its development: “The gift of discretion is no earthly or paltry matter but a very great bestowal of the divine grace” (*discretionis munus*

⁵⁹¹ It might seem paradoxical that such distancing of the authorial voice from the message communicated produces more authority. However, the authority of Antony went without question in the late antique context, and Cassian’s use of Antony as an indirect interlocutor confirms Cassian’s own claim to direct training by elders in the desert (such as Moses) who were trained by Antony themselves.

⁵⁹² *Conf.5*. This aptitude entails a soundness of mind and an equilibrium having been achieved so that one does not give into excesses of any kind. Not all ascetics prove capable of discernment, and age does not necessarily entail growth in this virtue. In *Conference 13*, for example, the discernment of the youth catches the grey-haired ascetic off-guard for his superior ability.

⁵⁹³ *Conf.2.2.4*.

non terrenum nec paruum esse ... sed diuinae gratiae maximum praemium).⁵⁹⁴ At the same time, human effort is also required, as Abba Moses continues:

Unless a monk has sought this grace with utter attentiveness and, with sure judgment, possesses discretion concerning the spirits that enter into him, it is inevitable that, like a person wandering in the dark of night and in deep shadows, he will not only fall into dangerous ditches and down steep slopes but will even frequently go astray on level and straight ways.

*quam nisi monachus omni intentione fuerit adsecutus et ascendentium in sese spirituum discretionem certa ratione possederit, necesse est eum uelut in nocte caeca taetris que tenebris ob errantem non solum perniciosis foueis ac praeuuptis incidere, sed etiam in planis ac directis frequenter offendere.*⁵⁹⁵

It is necessary that the ascetic “has sought this grace with utter attentiveness” (*omni intentione fuerit adsecutus*), reflecting how the ascetic’s agency involves devoting all one’s attention to cultivating this discretion. One learns to differentiate between these spirits in order to then embrace positive thoughts and spirits, and to reject negative ones “with sure judgment” (*certa ratione*).

One cannot, however, “grasp the meaning of discretion” (*rationem discretionis adipisci*) nor develop this capacity for discernment without proper instruction by elders.⁵⁹⁶ This instruction involves the novice’s obedience to the elder and the ceding of his judgment to that of the elder.⁵⁹⁷ The young monk is not to adjudicate his own thoughts and feelings through this process; instead, all thoughts were to be revealed to the

⁵⁹⁴ *Conf.*2.1.4.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁷ Cassian does not invent this relationship, the prescription of this relationship also features in Basil’s *Rule*, Section 26, but Cassian develops it in more detail.

elder for examination. The elder would then discern the source for the thoughts, differentiating the legitimate from those roused by demons, and assess the spiritual status and progress of the younger monk. Novices are “taught never, through a hurtful scheme, to hide any of the wanton thoughts in their hearts but to reveal them to their elder as soon as they surface, nor to judge them in accordance with their own discretion but to credit them with badness or goodness as the elder’s examination discloses and makes clear.”⁵⁹⁸ Central to this relation was an absolute transparency; the young monk was not to hide thoughts out of embarrassment or fear. The novice submits his thoughts to the elder so that the elder may judge if the thoughts come from the person, demons, or God. The more the novice submits his own thoughts to the elder for evaluation, the less afraid or embarrassed the novice is of the thoughts themselves. A “thorough examination of his own conscience” then can yield insight into how integrated the body, heart, and mind are in their orientation toward the goals of the ascetic profession.⁵⁹⁹ The confessional relation obtains because the *abbas* have both the authority and the ability of discernment that comes from experience-based wisdom.⁶⁰⁰ Discernment, in its most expansive sense, is figured by Cassian as a sign of divine grace.

What would later become sacramentalized as “confession” or “penance” began as the young monk’s compulsory admission of undesirable deeds and temptations towards those deeds. This relationship has power dynamics problematic to the modern reader, notably in relation to questions of authority and responsibility. Are novices subjected to

⁵⁹⁸ *Inst.*4.9.

⁵⁹⁹ *Inst.*6.4.2. See also *Inst.*6.5.

⁶⁰⁰ Other pedagogical practices occur in these relations, such as the interpretation of Scripture by the elder to help guide the novice. See Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authorities*, 191.

the elders in a way that precludes their own agency through “the obligation to submit in all respects to the older ones”⁶⁰¹ In some passages, Cassian seems to indicate so, declaring that “you must first strive, after having expelled your vices, to put to death your own will.”⁶⁰² However, to elide one’s will with one’s self is to flatten the inter-relational dynamic at the heart of the elder/novice relationship. It is also to flatten the subtleties of Cassian’s view of agency, for even of those elders he states that “...no one is allowed to rule over a community of brothers, or even over himself, unless he not only gets rid of all his possessions but also recognizes that he is in fact not his own master and has no power over himself” (*non enim quisquam conuenticulo fratrum, sed ne sibi quidem ipsi praeesse conceditur, priusquam non solum uniuersis facultatibus suis reddatur externus, sed ne sui quidem ipsius esse se dominum uel potestatem habere cognoscat*).⁶⁰³ The elder responsible for the community, who gives guidance to the brothers through *discretio*, is himself not imbued with fully self-determining authority but is constituted in relation to the community. As the elder is “not his own master and has no power over himself” (*ne sui quidem ipsius esse se dominum uel potestatem habere*), Cassian reflects a more nuanced understanding of power-relations. All members of an ascetic community are shaped in relation to the community, and self-mastery and mastery over another person

⁶⁰¹ Ramsey, *Conferences*, 78.

⁶⁰² “Therefore love can abide unbroken only in those in whom there is one chosen orientation and one desire, one willing and one not willing. If you also wish to preserve this inviolable, you must first strive, after having expelled your vices, to put to death your own will and, with common earnestness and a common chosen orientation, to fulfill diligently what the prophet takes such great delight in” (*et idcirco in his tantum indisrupta potest dilectio permanere, in quibus unum propositum ac uoluntas, unum uelle ac nolle consistit. quam si uos quoque cupitis inuiolabilem retentare, festinandum est uobis, ut expulsis primitus uitiiis mortificetis proprias uoluntates et ut unito studio atque proposito illud quo propheta admodum delectatur gnauiter impleatis*). (*Conf.*16.3.4.)

⁶⁰³ *Inst.*2.3.1.

are moot concepts because they presume a form of autonomy neither desirable nor even possible.⁶⁰⁴ One's authority is balanced by one's dependence on the community, and even the elder who cares for other monastics depends on those monastics for his own constitution as a monastic subject.⁶⁰⁵

Rendering oneself voluntarily subject to a relationship with a power differential does not abrogate human agency, precisely because these relations of powers are not simply hierarchical. The relationship of the novice monk to an advanced one is similar to that of a pupil and a teacher, entailing a more nuanced view of agency as neither autonomous nor completely curtailed. This relationship is the primary one that enables ascetic training through the practice of humility. Each and every ascetic must undergo this training, subjecting oneself to the practices, traditions, and beliefs internal to the ascetic occupation (*propositum*) and way of life (*conversatio*). Ramsey similarly resists seeing a facile dynamic of domination and submission in Cassian: "The practice of submission to the elders, in other words, might be far less an abject experience than the theory of it would seem to imply. Moreover, the act of submission, however highly recommended it may have been, still presupposed the exercise of free choice on the part of those seeking counsel."⁶⁰⁶ Accepting such guidance enables the cultivation of

⁶⁰⁴ "For they declare that to rule well and to be ruled well is typical of the wise person, and they insist that this is a most lofty gift and a grace of the Holy Spirit" (*bene enim regere uel regi sapientis esse pronuntiant summum que donum et gratiam sancti spiritus esse definiunt*). (*Inst.*2.3.4.)

⁶⁰⁵ "Cassian wished above all to encourage a sense that the opinion of others is better than one's own. Such an attitude had been fundamental to an understanding of authority in traditional ascetic society; but here it is given a wider importance, in that it is supposed to govern also relationships between friends. A link was thus forged between authority and community. Cassian reminds his readers that they must submit themselves to the 'definitions' of their fellows." (Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority*, 187.)

⁶⁰⁶ Ramsey, *Conferences*, 79.

obedience and humility central to ethical formation in the monastic profession, “for the superstructure of the virtues will never be able to rise in our soul if the foundations of true humility have not first been laid in our heart.”⁶⁰⁷ The issue of subjection can then be read as a point about social formation and the necessary ways in which Cassian recognizes all ascetics as shaped.

- *Discernment as Literary Topos*

In addition to these prescriptions by the *abbas* internal to the conferences, Cassian-as-author renders this social practice of discernment a framing literary feature of his texts. Through the format of *erotapokriseis*, Cassian has wise elders respond to the queries of the young Cassian and Germanus—offering practical feedback in response to the worried questioning of the companions. They profess their anxieties and ask for ways to think through difficult issues such as nocturnal emissions as we saw in Chapter 3. The one-to-one relationship between spiritual director and advisee needs to be understood as foundational to communal formation—it’s the basic unity of sociality needed to enable the advance of the individual novice.

This literary styling of discernment as formal features of the texts shows something else crucial about the relationship between a novice and an elder. The practice of reading Cassian’s *Conferences* itself requires that one accept the task of engaging the text. One submits to the text in a variety of ways, many of which can be construed as productive. The elder, should he truly have discernment, necessarily models a life of moderation. He therefore himself is an exemplar for the novice to follow, as Cassian suggests in his *Institutes*:

⁶⁰⁷ *Inst.*12.32.1.

you should seek out, while you live in the community, examples of a perfect life that are worthy of imitation. ... For, beyond the fact that a life that has been scrutinized and refined is found in few ... that a person is more carefully schooled and formed for the perfection of this chosen orientation (namely, the cenobitic life) by the example of one.

*exempla tibi sunt imitationis ac uitae perfectae in congregatione commoranti a paucis ... nam praeter id quod examinata uita atque ad purum excocta repperitur in paucis ... quod ad perfectionem propositi huius, id est coenobialis uitae, diligentius quis unius inbuitur ac formatur exemplo.*⁶⁰⁸

One needs to seek out an elder who has already cultivated discernment through the guidance of an ascetic to whom he was once a novice. This training in ascetic formation depends on following the excellent example of those who followed the example of other excellent figures. Two central relations thereby characterize the one between elder and novice monk: 1. that of discernment, and 2. that of exemplarity.

Discernment is at work on a literary level of the *Conferences* in a double register, where the young Cassian and Germanus seek out the advice and wisdom of the elders of the Egyptian desert, while Cassian-the-author figures the *abbas* and the young companions themselves as exemplary figures for imitation. Abba Moses, the host of *Conference 2*, speaks directly about discernment, showing the grace and virtue of discretion in the embrace of moderation.⁶⁰⁹ In a broader sense, each of the conferences sees the young Cassian and Germanus approach the *abbas* with specific questions, desiring to get direction, and clearly trying to work out issues of real, live importance to them.

⁶⁰⁸ *Inst.*4.40.

⁶⁰⁹ *Conf.*2.26.4.

Consider *Conference* 17, where they ask Abba Joseph to weigh in on promise-keeping. This is no theoretical exercise, for the two friends express clear anxiety over breaking their promise to the Bethlehem monastery to return from Egypt as once. Abba Joseph's response and attendant advice thus not only gives an interesting account of how use and the spirit of something should be embraced over the dead letter of the law. His response also gives direct advice to the young Cassian and Germanus, who thereby decide to stay in Egypt and leave "[s]trengthened as by a divine oracle by this instruction and teaching of the most blessed Joseph."⁶¹⁰

In *Conference* 6, as we discussed in the Introduction, the young Cassian and Germanus express their sadness and bafflement over the killing of the holy ascetics in Palestine. The previous conference (*Conference* 5) focused on the eight deadly spirits, two of which the young friends exhibit in *Conference* 6: sadness and acedia. Instead of hiding their struggle, however, they bring their questions to the *abba* in order to gain direction, and "[w]hen this was over we took such boundless delight in our spiritual in our spiritual repast that we were filled with more joy of soul from this conference than we had been touched with sadness before because of the death of the holy ones."⁶¹¹

Even questions of an embarrassing nature—like the focus on nocturnal emissions we saw in Chapter 3—the young friends raise with Abba Theonas because they want to know how to read their bodies.⁶¹² In *Conference* 22, Abba Theonas's response expresses much of the heart of discernment—to quell one's anxieties by putting into perspective

⁶¹⁰ *Conf.*17.30.2.

⁶¹¹ *Conf.*6.27.3.

⁶¹² Germanus expresses sustained embarrassment at *Conf.*22.8 and 22.15.1-3.

both the dangers at play and the therapeutic means for ethically fashioning oneself by combatting it.

Notable in all these examples is how the *abbas* prescribe concrete courses of action and direct ways of thinking through issues. The elder provides spiritual direction to the novice, and in order to know what to prescribe, the elder must have a keen power of discernment. Part of this prescription, then, involves the host of daily practices analyzed in Chapters 3 and 4. This relationship between the novice monk and an elder is central to understanding how constitutive inter-relationality is for ascetic formation. Cassian presents the elders as exemplars to be followed, in both action and disposition.⁶¹³

On Friendship

Throughout Cassian's *Conferences*, his friend Germanus functions as the primary interlocutor with the *abbas*. In each conference, Germanus directly both poses the questions to the *abba* and responds to the *abba*'s responses—at times seeking clarification, at other times, contesting the *abba*'s position. In *Conference* 13, for example, Germanus pushes back against Abba Chaeremon's position on divine grace that seems to obscure human agency. Germanus's questions oftentimes frame the subject matter for the entire conference, and his responses push the conference in a specific direction. The young Cassian is always present, as well, but as the younger figure, he remains mostly silent.⁶¹⁴ This feature likely involves the seniority of Germanus, and the

⁶¹³ *Inst.*2.13.1-3.

⁶¹⁴ Cassian's silence can indicate not only his youth, but also the fusion between he and Germanus that indicates that Germanus speaks for them both, as they share a similar status of virtue as they are true friends.

desire of Cassian-as-author to not figure his younger self as too crucial to the authority of the *Conferences*, choosing instead to defer to the wisdom of others. The elision of the young Cassian's concerns with those of Germanus (and the young Cassian's associated relative silence), however, can also be seen to reflect something about his relationship with Germanus.

- Typology of Relations of Care

Cassian opens his *Conferences* by introducing his relationship with “the holy Abba Germanus” (*sancto abbate Germano*), commenting at length on the spiritual nature of their relationship:

(with whom I was so closely befriended from the very time of our basic training and the beginnings of our spiritual soldiery, both in the cenobium and in the desert, that everyone used to say, by way of pointing out the identity of our companionship and our chosen orientation, that we were one mind and soul inhabiting two bodies)

*(cum quo mihi ab ipso tirocinio ac rudimentis militiae spiritalis ita indiuiduum deinceps contubernium tam in coenobio quam in heremo fuit, ut cuncti ad significandam sodalitatis ac propositi nostri parilitatem pronuntiarent unam mentem atque animam duobus inesse corporibus)*⁶¹⁵

In the Latin, as in its English translation, this identifying description occupies a dependent clause within the fold of the first sentence of this conference, extolling the virtue of Abba Moses, the host of the first two conferences.⁶¹⁶ The relationship between Cassian and Germanus—described in Aristotelean terms of “one mind and soul inhabiting

There are a couple exceptions where Cassian is addressed directly (as John), as when the threat of his classical education is raised by an *abba*.

⁶¹⁵ *Conf.*1.

⁶¹⁶ *Conf.*1. Of Abba Moses, Cassian states: “who in the midst of those splendid flowers gave off a particularly sweet odor because of both his practical and his contemplative virtue” (*qui inter illos egregios flores suauius non solum actuali, uerum etiam theoretica uirtute fragrabat*).

two bodies” (*unam mentem atque animam duobus inesse corporibus*)—is notable for both its longevity and its perdurance since the beginning of their ascetic training.⁶¹⁷ Their friendship spans both geographical locations and ascetic communities, “both in the cenobium and in the desert” (*in coenobio quam in heremo*). Cassian also keenly notes the testimony of others who recognize its chastity and profundity on the basis of “the identity of our companionship and our chosen orientation” (*sodalitatis ac propositi nostri parilitatem*). Cassian affirms a unity between Germanus and himself as co-participants in the spiritual life, akin to soldiers preparing for battle, as his military language of *tirocinium* (indicating a soldier’s first training) and *militiae spiritalis* (spiritual military service) reflects. They are companions who affirm a singleness of purpose and a unified conviction concerning the best way of life.⁶¹⁸

Such a true friendship is not common, however, and Cassian gives a fuller typology of friendships in *Conference* 16.⁶¹⁹ This conference features Abba Joseph, an ascetic from a distinguished family from Thumis who was fluent in Coptic Egyptian and Greek alike. His classical training both enabled him to talk in Greek to visitors and

⁶¹⁷ *Conf.*1. The opening section of the *Conferences* not only acts as an apologetic against any homo-erotic attachments between the two, but also shows how central Germanus is to the young Cassian and vice versa. The two function as “one soul in two bodies,” in an updated and more embodied Christian version. Cassian’s presentation of Germanus, then, becomes elegiac, mourning the loss of his friend earlier that century.

⁶¹⁸ *Inst.*2.12.3. Cassian discusses certain cells which were “allowed to be inhabited by only one or two persons whom a common task or instruction in discipleship and discipline has joined or whom at least a likeness of virtue has made equal” (*quam aut solus aut cum alio tantum inhabitare permittitur, quem scilicet societas operationis uel discipulatus et disciplinae inbutio copulauit uel certe quem similitudo uirtutum conparem fecit*).

⁶¹⁹ This type of brotherhood was not the norm, but there are ample precedents, as with pairs of friends living together or a disciple living with his elder. Claudia Rapp, “Ritual Brotherhood in Byzantium: Origins and Context,” *Traditio* 52 (1997): 285-326.

reflects his familiarity with Greek philosophy.⁶²⁰ Abba Joseph thus provides the perfect interlocutor for this conference “On Friendship” (*De Amicitia*), noting a typology of friendship similar to that of Aristotle’s in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.⁶²¹ After meeting the young Cassian and Germanus, Abba Joseph asks them if they were related by blood. Cassian indicates that their friendship was “joined not by a fleshly but by a spiritual brotherhood” (*non carnali, sed spiritali essemus fraternitate deuincti*), and Abba Joseph celebrates the uniqueness of their friendship.⁶²²

Abba Joseph goes on to discuss “many kinds of friendship and companionship which, in different ways, bind the human race by the fellowship of love” (*Amicitiarum ac sodalitatis, quae diuersis modis humanum genus dilectionis societate conectunt*).⁶²³ Friendship, as the Latin *amicitia*, reflects the Roman technical vocabulary for friendship. As David Konstan points out, this term frames the beginning and ending of *Conference* 16, but Cassian’s language then shifts to the less classical language of *caritatis* for the majority of the conference.⁶²⁴ Other terminology employed includes *sodalitatis*

⁶²⁰ *Conf.*16.1.

⁶²¹ Carolinne White, *Christian Friendship in the Fourth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 176.

⁶²² *Conf.*16.1.

⁶²³ *Conf.*16.2.1.

⁶²⁴ David Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 235. Konstan suggests that Cassian frames the conference with the classical terminology to attract elite monastics who share classical training, but employs the Christianized language, with which he is more comfortable, throughout the conference.

Konstan looks at how Christianity problematizes the classical notion of friendship through his treatment of Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus. However, Konstan’s reading is itself complicated by Cassian’s treatment of friendship, which allows for *both* the love of everyone equally and the particularity of “special” friends.

(companionship) and *dilectionis societate* (fellowship of love).

It is helpful with Cassian's account, as with Aristotle's, to think about friendship less in terms of the particular intimacy between two people, and more in terms of relations of care extended to humans broadly. Describing a type of friendship predicated on social utility, Abba Joseph notes how many human relations involve social reputation: "For a good reputation is sufficient for some people to enter upon a relationship of acquaintance first and afterward of friendship as well. In the case of others, a contract or agreement about something given and received forges a bond of love" (*quosdam enim praecedens commendatio primum notitiae, post etiam amicitiae fecit inire commercia. in quibusdam uero contractus quidam seu dati accepti ue depectio caritatis foedera copulauit*).⁶²⁵ Here, the "relationship of acquaintance" (*notitiae*) sometimes deepens to become "friendship" (*amicitiae*), and a social agreement can become formalized in a "bond of love" (*depectio caritatis*), although the translation of *caritas* could include more general understandings of regard, esteem, or affection. We can understand Cassian's terminology, then, as a reciprocation of regard that does not bear the stronger connotations associated with the "bond of love."

Abba Joseph describes the second type of friendship as that "which is founded on a natural instinct and on the law of kinship" (*quod instinctu naturae ipsius et consanguinitatis lege conectitur*). The love (*dilectionis*) extended to members of one's family or tribe characterizes a more lasting relation of care than the first. Such preferential treatment corresponds "naturally" (*naturaliter*) to one's blood relations, and this relation inheres not only between humans but also "every winged creature and

⁶²⁵ *Conf.*16.2.

animal” (*uerum etiam omnibus alitibus atque animantibus*).⁶²⁶ All creatures have a “natural disposition” (*naturali affectu*) to care for their kin, and Cassian spectacularly describes how even “basilisks and unicorns and griffins” (*basilisci uel monocerotes uel grypes*) known for their “unbearable ferocity and deadly poison” (*intolerabilis feritas ac letale uirus*) tend to their own with great care.⁶²⁷

Common to both the first and second types of friendship, Cassian notes, is that such relations of care can be between good and bad people, and humans and animals, alike. Only the kind of friendship described between Cassian and Germanus—true friendship—is based on “likeness of virtue alone” (*sola similitudo uirtutum*).⁶²⁸ Whereas the first two types of friendship rely on “various relationships of gain or lust or kinship or different needs” (*diuersis uel lucri uel libidinis uel consanguinitatis ac necessitudinum uariarum societatibus*), this friendship relies solely on the shared pursuit of virtue and “grows by the combined perfection and virtue of the friends” (*gemina amicorum perfectione ac uirtute concrescit*).⁶²⁹ True friendship requires a similar level of intensity with which the friends approach the ascetic life. Carolinne White points out that in Cassian’s view of true friendship, then, “[t]he startling conclusion is thereby reached that it is only the soul which has been purified by ascetic training in the monastic life that can experience genuine friendships.”⁶³⁰

⁶²⁶ *Conf.*16.2.2.

⁶²⁷ *Conf.*16.2.2.

⁶²⁸ *Conf.*16.3.1.

⁶²⁹ *Conf.*16.2.3.

⁶³⁰ White, *Christian Friendship*, 177.

Such particular true friendship inheres only between ascetics who have sufficiently advanced in the ethical life. Only then does true friendship involve a “properly ordered love” (*uere caritas ordinate*), which assumes the first and second types of friendship to coexist with its particularity. The particularity attained in true friendship then must logically require general Christian love—for such general love is necessary to progress ethically. In addition to the “particular affection” (*peculiari affectione*) common to love of kin, Cassian promotes the extension of general care to everyone as a function of Christian love which “loves everyone in a general way” (*generaliter diligit cunctos*).⁶³¹ One is to love everyone (*diligio* here, although Cassian varies his terminology), while still having particular affection (*affectione*) for those who share similar pursuits, the love of virtue, and admirable “good qualities” (*meriti*).

- Friendship as Communal Bond

Despite this treatment of friendship (*amicitia*) early in its titular conference, the majority of *Conference* 16 focuses on negotiating the communal life of the monastery. Cassian dedicates most of Abba Joseph’s discussion to both admonishing against anger and prescribing a host of attitudes needed for a community to function. Living in community reveals quickly different temperaments and characters, and this leads to tensions between people. Some ascetics find ways to maintain the literal practice, but employ an array of creative strategies to annoy other brothers at the same time. Abba Joseph hilariously admonishes monastics who sing the psalms really loudly in order to either show up their brethren in virtue or to ignore monastics with whom one is

⁶³¹

*Conf.*16.13.3.

annoyed.⁶³² Other monastics are chastised for performing virtuous works—like fasting—not out of virtue but out of anger and spite.⁶³³ Not only deeds but also intentions are relevant for assessing the virtue or culpability of a monastic.⁶³⁴ There is, in this treatment of action and intention, the imperative to unify the body, heart, and mind with a singular disposition in order to pursue virtue: “As we said a short while ago, it is not merely the thing itself which is done but also the *character of the mind and the intention of the doer* that must be looked at” (*Sicut paulo ante dictum est, non solum res ipsa quae geritur, sed etiam qualitas mentis et propositum facientis est intuendum*).⁶³⁵ It is impossible to form a virtuous disposition without one’s actions, thoughts, and intentions springing spontaneously from the same disposition.

This training requires that one be formed not only through the advisor/advisee relationship, as discussed in the last section, nor should everyone expect support from the true friendship modeled by Cassian and Germanus. Rather, this training requires shaping in relation to the broader community. The devil likes to stir up adversity, prompting one monastic to become angry or irritated with another monastic. The charge for monastics, then, is for each to shape himself by training away impulses to anger and other

⁶³² Conf.16.

⁶³³ Ibid.

⁶³⁴ “As if it were words alone and not the will in particular that is declared guilty in the sight of God, and just the sinful deed and not only the wish and the intention that should be considered wrong, and only what each person has done and not also what he wanted to do that should be submitted to judgment.” (*quasi uero apud deum uerba tantummodo et non praecipue uoluntas uocetur in culpam, et opus solum peccati et non etiam uotum ac propositum habeatur in crimine, aut hoc tantum quid unusquisque fecerit et non quid etiam facere disposuerit in iudicio sit quaerendum.*) (Conf.16.18.1.)

⁶³⁵ Conf.16.22.1.

destructive vices that preclude peaceable communal living.⁶³⁶ The monastic community becomes the locus for discernment, as one tests one's desires against the good of the community and decides that the particularity of one's wants should not overly determine the good of the community.

Cassian urges a monastic "to trust not so much his own decision as his brother's judgment, in accordance with his will" (*non tam proprio iudicio quam fratris credere decreuit examini, pro eius scilicet arbitrio*).⁶³⁷ To trust other monastics' judgments is to ensure concord in the community, provided that this judgment (*iudicium*) itself accords with one's own will (*arbitrium*), a will oriented towards virtue and progress in the ascetic life. Significantly, then, this is not just a matter of rejecting one's desire for the sake of the desires agreed upon by the majority. Instead, Cassian reflects significant hope that trusting the judgments of others will coalesce with one's own judgments when everyone pursues virtues and progresses in ascetic formation. The ideal monastic scenario characterized by "a stable and unbroken love" (*caritas stabilis atque indisrupta*) involves a community of monastics who, following Cassian's description of true friends, are "men of the same virtue and chosen orientation" (*viros eiusdem virtutis atque propositi*).⁶³⁸ Ideally, the monastic community will be constituted by people of like virtue (*virtus*) and orientation (*propositum*), and one's growth in discernment ideally grows with that of the broader community. One's own judgments will only discord with those of others when they are misguided.

⁶³⁶ See also *Inst.*8 for Cassian's extended treatment on the spirit of anger.

⁶³⁷ *Conf.*16.6.5.

⁶³⁸ *Conf.*16.24.

The site of liturgy, then, becomes an exemplary way of thinking through this community of ascetics, bound together through Christian *caritas*. Ascetic members advance as a communal body, as they participate in the liturgical services that unify them in bodily ritual, affective experience, and mental attention. Through liturgy, the individual ascetics are shaped into their most virtuous and loving selves. I read this liturgical formation as one way to extend White's point that friendship "may even be regarded as a divine relationship, not only because it is modeled on the relationship which Christ had with his Father and with his disciples, but also because it provides a foretaste of the equality which is to exist among men in the world to come."⁶³⁹ The bonds of true friendship, then, help constitute the body of Christ in both communal living, as individuals advance in virtue together, and liturgical performance, as a concentrated enactment of the unity anticipated in the eschaton.

This ideal understanding of community formed through monastics bound by a shared orientation (*propositum*) and mutual relations of care (*amicitia*) also allows for the forms of discernment discussed in the last section to be recognized as distributed in the broader community. Discernment occurs not only between an elder and a less experienced ascetic (with assumed power-differentials), but extends to friends, oneself, and—in Cassian's ideal dynamic—the broader monastic community. Cassian implies that the bonds of *amicitia* shape both the individual monastic and the character of the community, as monastics bound by "likeness of virtue alone" together pursue virtue and cultivate a way of life.⁶⁴⁰ To have a strong community is to have individuals who promote

⁶³⁹ White, *Christian Friendship*, 184.

⁶⁴⁰ *Conf.*16.3.1.

judgments that will assist in virtue over personal desires.

Cassian understands friendship, then, not only between friends, but as itself the precondition of a healthy monastic community. While the conference starts with the particular relationship between Cassian and Germanus, this is somewhat misleading. Instead of the conference on friendship describing the one-to-one relation between intimate friends, Cassian calls attention to the distributed relations that constitute the monastic community through discernment, true friendship, and monastic love. This conference, then, does not extol intimate connections between two people as the ideal, but rather, a communal body, bound together through pursuit of virtue played out in commonality of practice and intention.⁶⁴¹

Human Agency in Social Relations

In Gaul at the time Cassian writes, the form of monasticism burgeoning is cenobitic and this form of communal-living is in tension with the “eremitic route” of Egypt.⁶⁴² Cassian continuously moves between these two different contexts in his works, attempting a compromise between the needs of the community and those of the individual. The communal dimension becomes central to the monastic experience as

⁶⁴¹ Demacopoulos considers Leyser to overread Gregory the Great’s theoretical emphasis, undermining the force of the practical reading. I imagine this extends to Leyser’s reading of Cassian’s texts as well. Leyser implies, according to Demacopoulos, that Cassian divorces himself “from the spiritual father/spiritual disciple method of pastoral direction operating in the ascetic community”(832), probably because friendship as the primary relational category seems to prevent a spiritual elder and disciple dynamic of direction and discretion.

We need, then, both to understand how vital friendship is for sustaining the ascetic life in Cassian, while also recognizing that Christian friendship (and the particularity of affection therein) coexists with both general Christian love (*caritas*) extended to all, and Christian dynamics of discernment that inheres between a more advanced and less advanced ascetic as part of ethical practice.

⁶⁴² Chadwick, *John Cassian*, xiii.

monks are living in constant community, working together and continuously negotiating contrasting personalities. Monastics in Gaul, then, require pronounced emphasis on community by Cassian. Through liturgical communities, advisor relationships, and friendship, Cassian renders the social constitution of beliefs and practices central to ascetic formation. This understanding of social constitution entails an extended view of agency, where one is shaped through an extended network of agencies in concert with one's self. This understanding of agencies relates to how Rebecca Weaver analyzes the operation of divine grace in Cassian's community: "[Cassian's] instruction presupposed that the properly regulated communal life of a monastery provided a context propitious to the operation of grace. In contrast, the congregational setting with which Augustine had to deal lacked just such pervasive regulation. Accordingly, he identified a different arena for the operation of grace. The benefits of grace that Cassian could locate in the regulated community Augustine located in the outworking of the divine decrees on the human heart."⁶⁴³ In Chapter 2, we saw how divine grace works synergistically with the individual human—here, we see how divine grace works comparably with the corporate body of the monastic community.

By the time of Cassian, Christian monasticism self-consciously formed itself in relation to the apostolic ministry in Acts. Cassian himself understood *askēsis* as a return to the early church observances of the Jerusalem community. Peter Brown discusses this focus on community in relation to Cassian's treatment of sexuality, notably in the conferences of Abba Chaeremon, who starts his discussion on chastity "with a reference to the state of the first Christians of the Jerusalem community after the coming of the

⁶⁴³ Weaver, *Divine Grace and Human Agency*, 236.

Holy Ghost: holding all things in common there was among them one heart and one soul. The total expropriation associated with the life of the desert had begun, as in the case of Anthony, with the surrender of private wealth. It ended with the surrender of the last traces of sexual fantasy. This was a sure symptom, in Cassian's mind and in that of his Egyptian informants, that the dispersal of the last, most hidden treasures of the private will had taken place."⁶⁴⁴ The monastic is to shed the marks of individualism that define one through external markers, from one's material wealth and ties to civil society to one's personal desires.

Taking these many elements of social formation together, Cassian offers a distinctive view on how monasticism was to be shaped in Gaul. George Demacopolous directly discusses Cassian's innovation with ascetical direction in the west: "No longer was ascetic perfection found in the monk who lived alone in the desert. Cassian admonished his readers to take responsibility for others, and he elaborated the pastoral mechanisms through which that could be achieved (e.g., discernment, interiorization, and the saintly exemplar)."⁶⁴⁵ Ascetic perfection, thus, is recognized as necessarily involving social elements. Social relations, both gaining and giving help to them, constitute a necessary part of perfection now.⁶⁴⁶

Social inter-relationality—through friendship, liturgical communities, and the spiritual advisor relationship—is thus central to ethical formation in a double register.

⁶⁴⁴ Brown, *Body and Society*, 432.

⁶⁴⁵ Demacopolous, *Five Models*, 126.

⁶⁴⁶ It is an interesting question of how much Cassian's theology was to extend beyond the monastery. As Demacopolous notes, "Cassian displayed an increasing concern for the monk's responsibility to his neighbor, and he emphasized that many of the Egyptian elders were themselves clerics." (Demacopoulos, *Five Models*, 125.)

Such relations of care not only establish the conditions of possibility for ascetic formation, they themselves constitute a notable part of human agency. To argue this large claim about distributed agencies requires tying together the foci of the prior chapters, from Cassian's recognition of the synergism of agencies in Chapter 2, to the way both physical and narrative practices are shared by all ascetics within a specific tradition and through training of elders. Bringing together Weaver's point on divine grace in community with Colish's articulation of the synergism of agencies, I argue for understanding Cassian's view of community as a complex synergism of multiple agencies involved in the ethical formation that enables individuals to cultivate the desired dispositions and advance in the chosen profession.

Even memory, which we tend to think of as an individual faculty through Augustine's compelling accounts, becomes communal in this context, as Mary Carruthers has argued in a similar vein: "At the same time, because most of its building materials are common to all—are in fact common places—memory work is also fully social and political, a truly civic activity. The constant balance of individual and communal, ethos and pathos, is adjusted and engineered with the tools of rhetoric: images and figures, topics and schemes."⁶⁴⁷ Cassian prescribes in the *Institutes* that one forget any memories of one's past life, which only hinder progress in the monastic life, thereby painting a harsh rejection of one's former social identity and familial lineage, supplanting one's individual memories with those of the Christian community, both social and scriptural.⁶⁴⁸

⁶⁴⁷ Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 21.

⁶⁴⁸ "It would be of no use whatsoever to have left them in body if in heart I begin to gaze upon them and to revive and to readmit into myself the memory that everyone who renounces this world has rejected as though he were dead." (*Inst.* 5.32.2.)

What was a feature of the individual finds its expression within the communal; communal memory in a sense replaces the individual's memories of family and friends before their application to the monastic setting.

This rejection of traditional societal norms, however, requires the constitution of a stable, ascetic alternative—the very task of Cassian's texts. In this sense, Cassian-as-author can be seen to construct a collective memory understood in Carruthers' sense with a common repertoire of memories, writings, and historical figures by which individuals identify themselves. David Brakke similarly expresses the way the self is reconfigured in relation to community not as self-renunciatory but as increasingly self-transparent: "Thus his program attempts to form a self that coheres with communal life: that is, an increasingly transparent self, a self that seeks to be completely accessible to the sight of one's self, of others, and of God."⁶⁴⁹

From this discussion it is necessary to recognize the vital importance of social relations in the affirmation of one's self as participant in a larger Christian body. The network of community-oriented influences shows that the work of "inner" contemplation can never occur when divorced from "outer" practices within the community. In this context, "interiority" is not a terrain that can be considered in isolation from the socially participatory body ("exterior"). All members of the community are bound together in a dynamic of obedience and mutual faith, not least through the sensory dimensions to the liturgical participation that even the most reclusive hermits were required to honor. Cassian likewise emphasizes the importance of confession as a means of ensuring the cohesiveness of the whole community. An interiority, in the late antique Christian

⁶⁴⁹ Braake, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, 448.

conception, was not thematized in contrast to exterior social practices and formations.

Cassian, Foucault, and Anticipating Modernity

Key to the transformation model of ethical agency is the social dimension of these practices; a feature that Foucault ignores for the most part in his account of self-constituting subjects. Even the anchorites of the Egyptian desert that Cassian writes about formed communities gathered for *synaxes*. Thus, even the most solitary of monks were bound to some social body. In the case of the burgeoning monasteries that Cassian writes for in southern Gaul, this communal element is even more pronounced although not invoked as explicitly as the calls for individual practices. The elder/novice relation of discernment, as well as the distributed view of communal friendship, are excellent for rethinking Foucault's dynamics of domination and subordination.

Similarly, in Chapter 5, we have seen how in Cassian's texts, agency inheres in the community and is understood as distributed in this social network of support. This contrasts sharply with the dearth of social-recognition in Foucault's work on texts from antiquity. Even in his analyses of the Greek and Greco-Roman authors, Foucault does not seem to give sufficient emphasis to the societally determinative factors involved. While Foucault emphasizes the mastery of the self by the self, there is always an implied "other" in the form of philosophical, social or religious traditions that one answers to and against which one measures one's own actions.

- Cassian & Foucault on Social Formation

In interesting ways, then, Cassian's account actually does include emphasis on social formation in a way similarly to Foucault's work on knowledge and power. Cassian

responds, in large part, to social and political issues of his time. To his earlier theoretical emphases on knowledge and power, Foucault adds an emphasis on ethics, determined to think through possibilities for resistance, self-fashioning, and “thinking otherwise” to the modes of morality and normative social order breaking down in the 1970s.⁶⁵⁰ Cassian, over 1500 years earlier, was negotiating imperial and ecclesial Roman powers as he was commissioned by Pope Innocent I to bring the tradition of Egyptian desert asceticism to the burgeoning monasticism of Gaul.⁶⁵¹ Cassian’s work bears evidence that he was engaging in discussions on orthopraxis to counter both the determinist picture of Augustine and the slew of heretical anti-institutional Christianities, like the groups of monastics lambasted in Book 18 of the *Conferences*.

These features reflect how Cassian and Foucault both are thinking through what is up to the individual to self-determine, while recognizing how social formations produce certain forms of subjectivity. Cassian’s overarching question, in his balancing of tradition and innovation, is: how are we to live the ascetic ideal in our own way?⁶⁵² Foucault’s central question in the ethical phase of his work is: how can we be self-fashioning? Cassian requires, for example, engaging practices of obedience in a *cenobia* before self-stylization is possible; as with any skill, ordered practice is a precondition for making the practices one’s own. The central problem with Foucault’s reading of Cassian is that he fixates on obedience in the *cenobia* without looking at the broader framework of the ascetic life which, in fact, includes the modes of self-fashioning Foucault himself is after.

⁶⁵⁰ Michel Foucault, “An Aesthetics of Existence,” in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, ed. L.D. Kritznan (New York, NY: Routledge, 1988), 49.

⁶⁵¹ Chadwick, *John Cassian*.

⁶⁵² *Conf*.1.

This self-fashioning is what Foucault finds most compelling about the agency of ancient Greek and Roman ethical formation, but he does not recognize the emphasis on practices as preparatory for self stylization common to Cassian's account.

Conclusion

We've seen in this chapter myriad ways that community and inter-relationality are central to the ascetic life for Cassian. Cassian dedicates an entire book of the *Conferences* to friendship, and the central role that Germanus plays in his text reflects how devoted Cassian was to rendering friendship central to ascetic activity. Cassian's treatment of friendship, however, extends beyond the fold of individual relationships to promote a loving ethos for monastic communities.

Cassian not only prescribes liturgical and inter-relational practices for Gaulish monastics that reflect the venerable Egyptian tradition—he also shows them in practice what they are to do through his literary framing of the *Conferences*. Cassian repeatedly emphasizes how one must “learn by experience” and I argue that his literary devices show the reader how to experience the range of practices central to ethical formation. From the specific inter-social relations dramatized through the framing of certain *Conferences*, the reader gets a sense of when these liturgical services occur, when these conversations take place, what kinds of human relationships are extolled, and what kind of relationship a novice ascetic is to have in relation to an elder. The young Cassian and Germanus, as argued in Chapters 3 and 4, again model exemplary relationships, both with each other and their superlative (and superlatively chaste) relationship and by showing the appropriate deference to the *abbas* whose wisdom and discernment they solicit.

We see in this chapter, as in Chapters 3 and 4, how Cassian's texts shape the reader through its literary strategies in addition to its direct prescriptions. Cassian's emphases on norms for liturgical gatherings, for relations of discernment, and for friendship show how central social practices are to his *askēsis*. Cassian authorizes these social strategies by framing them as continuous with the tradition of Egyptian asceticism, noting consistently the antiquity and the sanctity of these practices. These social practices give us, furthermore, a lived perspective on how human inter-relations structure the ascetic's life day to day. Even the anchorites are no islands in the midst of the desert—rather, individual ascetics are always shaped by the communities within which they celebrate liturgy, the relations of discernment by which an elder helps him progress, and, if one is very lucky, the intimate relation of care characteristic of true friendship. Cassian thus finds a way to both endorse his account of social practices by referring to their continuity with tradition *and* give shape to the tradition of western monasticism through these endorsements.

CONCLUSION

Returning to Antiquity to Consider Modernity

Abba Moses, in *Conference* 1, declares to the young Cassian and Germanus the necessity of human agency in terms of the ascetic endeavor. “Otherwise,” he states, “there would be no free will in a person, nor would the effort expended in our own correction be of any help to us.”⁶⁵³ What is the good of working so hard if it does not do anything? Human agency, from the beginning of the *Conferences*, is recognized as central to ascetic life.

For both his historical influence and his usage in contemporary theory, Cassian provides an optimal occasion for inquiry into how to understand the human person and ethical agency. I have argued against Foucault that Cassian emphasizes an ethics of integration and transformation, not renunciation; the body is not to be rejected, but instead the body, emotions, and beliefs are to become maximally integrated, co-constituting each other in this transformative process. This argument thus rejects Foucault’s reading of Cassian as historically and textually inaccurate, and as predicated on modern philosophical binaries of interiority and exteriority that do not apply to Cassian. This dynamic becomes especially clear in Cassian’s theorizing about human agency that relies on his view of the human person. My critical claim, then, is that much

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*Conf.*1.17.1.

modern thinking about the “self,” “subject,” and “subjectivity” relies too much on binary categories emphasizing either the body or beliefs. A rigorous encounter with Cassian’s texts offers a richer sense of the integrated person and the ethical practices that constitute her, thus give compelling resources for rethinking the human person and ethical agency today.

We have seen that Cassian’s view of the person recognizes the importance and salience of all forms of subjectivity—bodily, affective, intellective—in the daily functioning of the person firmly moored in particular social, cultural, and religious contexts. Human agency, in Cassian’s texts, inheres in the arduous commitment to ascetic practices, constantly struggling to affirm the sought after disposition. The goal of the monk is to work towards *puritas cordis* that is an integration of the multiple features of the person and an orientation of the whole person—body, heart, and mind—towards the performance of these practices that reinforces this orientation. This total orientation is the achievement of human agency understood to inhere not just in an abstracted or interior “will” but also in the body, through the emotions, and through relations with others. The will is not a faculty of the soul, but an embodied, affective, and intellective orientation of the whole person enabled by rigorous daily practices and is an expression of ethical agency.

An account of the human being as a center of affection, reflection, and action suggests a productive way forward that can recognize both discursive social formations and intimate inter-relations. Such an account is not currently the norm in contemporary discourses, so I look to the texts of Cassian, as an historical source, for resources to think through such an account. Recognizing how social formations render certain options open

and others foreclosed, Cassian strikes a balance with his emphasis on how the human person is an integrated whole. We see this, too, in his treatment of the cenobitic and anchoritic ways of life, both of which are socially structured yet admit of creativity on the part of the individual person.

Foucault, too, was after “thinking otherwise” about ethics and modalities of living. However, instead of recognizing continuities in ethical agency from antiquity to late antiquity, Foucault wants to see in the texts of Cassian the genealogical origins of modern subjectivity, characterized by self-renunciation, obedience to others, and the compulsion to not hide anything. To do so, Foucault analyzes Cassian’s texts in terms of what he sees as the two central principles of modern subjectivity “to be obedient in all things and to hide nothing.”⁶⁵⁴ Foucault characterizes Cassian’s work as necessarily self-renunciatory and self-expository, conflating self-mastery and self-determination.

Cassian’s integrated account of the human person, however, enables a rich sense of ethical agency, which belies Foucault’s reductive reading. Cassian’s view of agency is much more complex than the modern binary of freedom or determinism allows; his articulation of agency involves a host of agencies operating in tandem—a view directly articulated in *Conference* 13, which Foucault never cites in either his lectures or articles. Cassian’s view eschews any pretension of autonomous agency as an alternative to full-obedience-and-determination. This reading relies on understanding “obedience” and “direction” in ways that modern dualist conceptions of structure versus agency occlude. Foucault’s analysis of subjection and the possibilities for agency relies, therefore, on a binary logic opposing freedom and determinism, self-determination and determination-

⁶⁵⁴ Foucault, *Du Gouvernement de vivants*, 260. My translation.

by-others, so misses the productive potential of Cassian's texts to elucidate something important about ethical agency for contemporary readers.

Implications for Agency and Ethics

This brings us to how reading Cassian can help us think about contemporary issues of human agency. I argue that Cassian provides resources for thinking about human agency in three primary ways. First, as he does not assume the dualisms read into his texts by modern interpreters, he opens resources for thinking about the human person from an integrated perspective. His integrated paradigm of the human person helps us think about the person without a hierarchy of "interior" and autonomous will over the "exterior" and passive body. This view of the person draws pronounced attention to the body, heart, and mind as *together* enabling ethical practices—and this is an integrated view not operative in most contemporary philosophy. We could say that consciousness is not just cognitive—it is also bodily and affective. The entire body, heart, and mind of the person is affected; it is not just an "inner" transformation.

Second, Cassian gives us insight into the mechanisms of habituation, indicating the ways that habituation works in a deliberative, affective, and embodied way. Through his emphasis on daily practices—manual, dietary, narrative, and prayer practices alike—he describes the means by which one cultivates the desired disposition. One transforms oneself as an integrated whole—one's ethical agency contributes to the motivation to engage the practices, the ardor with which one attends to the practices, and the openness to being affected by the narratives and ritual practices. Like any skill-building exercise, deliberation, resolution, and actualization of practices are all involved. His account of

ethical practices thus shows how people can help shape dispositions in intentional yet habituated ways. In Cassian's ethical program, bodily, affective, and intellective forms of awareness enable habituation and transformation in their unified orientation towards a certain end.

Third, Cassian gives us a rich sense of lived experience and the practical concerns that populate it. Cassian starts from the position that human beings are culturally embedded, constituted in communities, and to a large extent subject to the vicissitudes of various agencies—of weather, of politics, of one's own biology and psychology. In this late antique world where Rome had recently fallen and social order was precarious, what could one little person do? Well, they could engage in practices of self-formation that could enable them to become better people and create better communities with each other. Cassian shows sensitivity both to the stabilizing force of tradition and the galvanizing force of individual agency—read me, he says, and learn from the desert elders, but make the practice your own.

One could question how useful is Cassian if we're dealing with ascetics for whom two dates and some chickpeas constitutes a feast. Is the ascetic way of life too "other" to be helpful to modern concerns? In a certain respect, yes. I would not suggest that anyone follow to the letter the way of life Cassian details in his texts. And yet, there is the *ethos* of his text that I think we can learn from. This requires the lived experience of the practices and the disposition cultivated through their practice in bodily, affective, and intellective ways. My central reason for affirming these various forms of awareness is to figure out what informs action. If we want to think about how humans decide to make certain judgments and perform certain actions, it is not just the will that is operative.

Instead, bodily memory, affective training, and communal-social understandings all contribute to the decisions that people make.

Methodological Contributions

As I think about what the examination of Cassian contributes to discussion today, I focus on three main areas. First, the historical area: Cassian is a fascinating figure in the history of Christian thought, exceptional both for exerting a central influence on the development of western monasticism and for his posthumous rejection by doctrinal history. Reading Cassian enables a richer understanding of this figure who was defeated posthumously by the legacy of Augustine, whose doctrines were accepted as orthodox. This retrieval of another voice gives a sense of how rich and variegated Christianity is as a tradition, especially in its formative stages in late antiquity.

Second, the critical area: my rereading of Cassian involves the critique of modern interpretations of his texts. Foucault deploys Cassian's texts in a way that both shows Cassian's relevance to theoretical discussion and illustrates how this relevance is predicated on a misreading of his text. More broadly I think these debates over how to conceive of the human person and her active, ethical potential need to move beyond focusing on "subjectivity" as either too "internal" and belief-oriented or too "external" and bodily. Recognizing how the features of the "internal" and "external" here are not at odds can open the critical space to recognize the human person as an integration of bodily shaping, affective motivation, and deliberative commitments. A rigorous encounter with Cassian's texts can, therefore, give compelling resources for rethinking the human person today without assuming philosophical binaries that limit our operative paradigms for the

human person and human agency.

Third, the constructive area: By reconsidering Cassian's view of the human person and the integration of the heart, mind, and body necessary for ethical practice, I have argued for an integrative model that does not rely on exclusionary categories like "interiority" and "exteriority" or mind over body. To speak about "interiority" or "subjectivity" in this way is to fundamentally misconstrue Cassian's pre-modern contexts as sharing preoccupations with philosophical and theoretical dualisms characteristic of modern thought. For Cassian, the "inner" person is not a terrain that can be considered in isolation from the physiological and socially participatory "outer" bodies; separations in contemporary discussions like the Protestant emphasis on belief versus the discursively constituted body, between the autonomous will and the discursively shaped body, do not hold. Cassian's emphasis, in particular, on the work of the heart indicates a sense of a unified person; one that is not at odds with oneself, for one follows one's desire for God completely.

Constructive Conclusions and Looking Forward

What, then, could be a contemporary *telos* if Foucault's technology were to be engaged today? If the function of intellectual work is to "think differently" and to exercise one's own freedom as Foucault states in the introduction to *The Use of Pleasure*, can these techniques not be used to renounce the self as he claims they would have been in the monastic setting, but to "constitute positively a new self."⁶⁵⁵

⁶⁵⁵ Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, Vol. 1 Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley, et al. (New York, NY: New Press, 2000), 249.

In the world of ancient Greece and the Greco-Roman world, the ability to practice self-regulation voluntarily was a social privilege--those who were involved in such practices of establishing their own techniques of the self, were restricted to the elites, the males, the freemen. In the contemporary moment, however, the possibility for such ethical formation seems to be present to a much wider net of individuals. For Foucault, nothing occurs in isolation—power structures inscribe individuals yet these individuals have the ability to transform power structures. If self-constitution is really possible, it necessarily occurs in relation to power relations and fields of knowledge.

The stylized ethics of the individual who constitutes herself as an ethical subject, then, could potentially have real and direct effects on the structures wherein the relations of power subjugate the weak or are in disequilibrium. Cassian's ethical program as a whole provides ways to think about what is relevant for the cultivation of ethical dispositions. As one becomes habituated in certain salubrious ways of life, unifying the various forms of awareness that constitute the human, such cultivation involves an orientation towards an ultimate good (for Cassian, the Christian God) that orders proximate goods of deed and character, fostering certain emotions and tempering others. Through the ethical agency of the individual, practices are self-stylized and made one's own as one develops one's full way of life. To make sense of the import of the practices addressed here requires understanding them against the backdrop of Cassian's view of ethical agency. Understanding these practices, in turn, brings to life and makes vivid in lived practice what Cassian means by ethical agency.

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