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The Absurdity of Self-Alienation

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Self-alienation is curiously both a condition that is pervasive as a felt phenomenon but also seemingly paradoxical. As a relation to the self, how can we be distant from ourselves? From what standpoint can we occupy such that we can be alienated from ourselves? That standpoint would just be the self that we inhabit. Another aspect of this paradox is that for some moral theories it would be seemingly impossible for an agent to intentionally undermine themselves. Self-alienation puts the agent in a position where they are not only distant from themselves, but also hostile to themselves. Despite this paradox, self-alienation is a common feature of both literature and various philosophical treatments on alienation. This dissertation is an exploration of how self-alienation can be possible. There are two main arguments I am going to make: (1) that most traditional explanations of self-alienation try to get around the paradox via an "othering" process whereby a part of the self is transformed into an "other." I argue that this is a kind of "weak" self-alienation where the agent is not really alienated from herself but alienated from a part of herself she no longer identifies with (and in consequences, she does not see that as part of herself). (2) That a stronger form of self-alienation involves two wholehearted practical identities mutually undermining each other. These identities have to be tied to the

essential features of a rational agent, and in their undermining of each other, create a kind of absurdity that the agent cannot reconcile. Finally, I will consider both how this strong form of self-alienation is possible under formalist contexts, and what some possible resolutions are to this kind of alienation.

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Introduction

Wim Wenders' tragic neo-western *Paris, Texas* opens with Travis Henderson wandering the desert alone. As the film unfolds, we learn that Travis had been wandering for years. He abandoned his child with his brother after a yet unexplained incident that saw Travis cut ties with his wife and family. The movie follows Travis as he is found by his estranged brother and is given the chance to reconnect with his son who barely knows or remembers him. The climax of the film sees Travis travel to Houston with his son in an effort to find his wife and try to repair the relationship between her and their son. Travis finds that Jane, the mother, is now working at a seedy peep show where customers can watch and interact with women via a two-way mirror. After a first abortive effort, Travis leaves his son at a hotel in Houston to finally confront Jane at the establishment she now works at. Shrouded in darkness, Jane is unaware of who is behind the mirror at first. Slowly, Travis tells a story of a man who was so beset by jealousy and anger that he sought to control the woman he loved, eventually losing both his wife and his son due to his controlling nature. Jane realizes who is behind the mirror and they both share a small moment reconciliation before Travis leaves and begins his wandering anew.

This scene is impactful because of the way the dialogue relates a kind of longing and estrangement. Travis' story begins with him recounting the slow downfall of his marriage. How he transitioned from infatuation to jealousy, and how Jane begins to resent him for the life she was forced lead. He remembers how Jane dreamed that she "…saw herself at night, running naked down a highway. Running across fields, running down riverbeds, always running. And always, just as she was about to get away, he'd be there. He would stop her somehow. He would just appear and stop her. And when she told him these dreams, he believed them. He knew she

had to be stopped, or she'd leave him forever." (*Paris, Texas* 1:30) This led Travis to tie a cowbell around her ankle, and when that did not work, he tied her to the stove with his belt. In hearing the screams of his entrapped wife and confused son, he recounts that "He was surprised at himself because he didn't feel anything anymore. All he wanted to do was sleep. And for the first time, he wished he were far away. Lost in a deep, vast country where nobody knew him. Somewhere without language or streets. And he dreamed about this place without knowing its name." (1:35) Later in the conversation, Jane echoes a similar kind of sentiment about retreating: "…it slowly faded. I couldn't picture you anymore. I tried to talk out aloud to you like I used to, but there was nothing there. I couldn't hear you. Then...I just gave up. Everything stopped. You...just disappeared. Now I'm working here. I hear your voice all the time. Every man...has your voice." (1:37)

The dialogue has all of the hallmarks of alienation. Travis and Jane are alienated from each other. This shows in their once deep love for each eroded away by events of volatility and the span of time apart. Travis was so angry that he hurt the person he loved the most, and when he broke, he could only imagine running away, which mirrors the dreams that Jane had. She also felt stifled and constricted before Travis' anger grew out of proportion (and she was then literally constricted), and her dreams turned toward running away. Where they both ended up is in a place of nothingness. Travis wanders around aimlessly trying to get away both from himself and the life he once had. Jane works at a peep show where the memories of her former husband come out through the men she performs for, and yet she cannot see him even in her own imagination. Both of them turned away from their only child, abandoning him to family out in California in fear that they would see the other in their child's face. But, this is only one facet of alienation. This is alienation from another, and from one's life. The other facet is that of self-

alienation. Certainly, some of Travis' story gives an impression of self-alienation. The acting gives the effect to the audience that Travis is disgusted at himself for the actions he committed. He is running away from himself as much as he is running away from having to confront Jane and his son. The question is how much does this capture self-alienation?

Alienation at times can seem like a literary artifact or a philosophical term of art meant to capture the basic notions of discontent and longing. Richard Schmitt asks "…whether the concept of alienation adds anything to the discussion of suffering in human lives." (Schmitt 7) Every example of alienation can appear as different "explanations of unhappiness." Travis feels discontent, but what is added by talking about his state as one of alienation? Or even self-alienation? The basic answer leaves us in a circle of roughly equivalent language. Travis is estranged from himself, he is a stranger to himself, he does not recognize who he is anymore, etc. This kind of language does beg the question of who is estranged from whom. Travis, by all appearances, is still Travis. He may loathe himself, but the evaluative standpoint from which he does so is recognizably himself. But alienation as a kind of estrangement suggest two evaluative standpoints, one where the agent sees himself as undesirable and one that is trying to be a different self altogether. This paradoxical nature has the air of someone trying to run away from their own shadow. It is distinctly familiar, but it is unclear what kind of state that familiarity is tied to.

This paradox of self-alienation has a few consequences for the study of self-alienation. The first was just mentioned. One might think that self-alienation is a vague gesturing at a phenomenon that will naturally resist further analysis. The second consequence is that because of its seemingly paradoxical nature, attempts to describe self-alienation will label states and conditions as "self-alienation" even if they are not properly explaining the whole phenomenon.

Lastly, some will find self-alienation an impossible state to be and try to write out the phenomenon altogether. These consequences have obstructed a proper study of self-alienation in the philosophic literature. My project is an attempt to both save and expound a view of self-alienation.

The following dissertation will be roughly structures around first solving the three consequences mentioned above before giving a definition of self-alienation that is distinct from other analyses of self-alienation. In **Chapter 1**, I will give a basic definition of alienation. The problem that needs to be resolved is that alienation is a notion that is hard to pin down. Examples from art can only take us so far, and while alienation is not an uncommon term, it is difficult to define exactly what the condition of alienation is. My first task is to distinguish the condition of alienation from affective states and to argue that it is more like a 'despair' in the way Kierkegaard uses that term. It is not identified with any particular affective state, although it is commonly associated with painful affective states, but is rather a condition that the agent conceives of herself as in when she is experiencing a particular kind of disunity. My definition states that alienation is a particular kind of disunity involving three necessary (but not sufficient) conditions: distance, identity, and conflict. Distance involves the separation between the agent and the object she is alienated from, identity concerns the agent's specific relation to the object as one of care, and conflict narrows down the kind of disunity as one where the agent's wholehearted practical identities undermine each other. At the end of the chapter, I also give an overview of the paradox of self-alienation, and how the three conditions argued for can possibly create a context where a self undermines the self.

In **Chapter 2**, I argue where previous theories of self-alienation fall short. My main contention is that most theories of self-alienation rely on an "external antagonist," or create a

situation where the self is split from itself and its disjointed state is a result of a kind of "othering" process. I will consider two sets of examples, Frankfurt's unwilling addict example and Marx's estranged laborer. In the former case, the agent intentionally disavows a part of themselves as external to their wholehearted self. This externalization has the agent see the pangs of a past self as an other; as an undue and unwanted influence that the agent no longer identifies with. In this way, self-alienation is no longer a self undermining a self, but an externalized source of desire undermining an agent. A similar argument can be made for Marxist's estranged laborer, which is usually categorized as a case of self-alienation. Here, the estranged laborer is divorced from the essential functioning of their agential capacities insofar as the agent cannot use their creative capacities. Instead, they are forced to use their labor as the means to another's end. Examples like this use an external antagonist (e.g. an oppressive economic systems, colonial influences, or patriarchal domination) to force the agent to act against or to deny the agent access to some essential feature necessary to their well-being. This antagonist acts against the essential ends of the agent. The result of this suppression is to "split" the agent effectively. A split where the agent is twisted into a cruel simulacrum of an agent forced into an uncomfortable position. Either way, these two forms of self-alienation do not confront the paradox directly, but instead try to find ways around it. I label these kinds of theories of self-alienation "weak" forms of self-alienation.

My aim is to find a case of "strong" self-alienation, or an instance where the self truly undermines the self. One possible starting point is to look at cases of moral alienation where it appears as though the agent is rebelling again their own good, either in terms of trying to undermine their own constitutive end of reject any kind of moral good altogether. **Chapter 3** is concerned with cases of moral alienation. The case I start by examining is that of Underground

from Dostoevsky's *Notes From Underground*. The agent in that case is so spiteful of reason, morality, and any notion of good that he withdraws himself from his own nature. While extreme, it does give us a starting point for understanding what total alienation of the self could look like, and a format for understanding strong self-alienation. If we are looking for an instance of the self undermining itself, then there seems to be no better candidate than an agent turning away from their own good or to at least be in conflict with their own good. The question is just if this possible.

The rest of the chapter is about looking at this kind of case under the guise of various moral theories. Moral alienation, while a limited subject, is a topic of discussion in relation to both constitutivism and certain thinkers trying to get around objections first raised by Bernard Williams. The general idea remains the same in either case. The worry is that there is some kind of distance between the agent and an impersonal moral theory that does not properly take into account the personal projects of the agent. The moral alienation problem for constitutivism is raised by Sergio Tenenbaum who argues that standard formulations of constitutivism are open to scenarios where the agent prioritizes subordinate ends over and above their constitutive end. The distance created is a kind of moral alienation where the agent's constitutive end is not the direct object of agent's will, and thus occupies a lower status in the agent's practical reasoning. To resolve this issue, Tenenbaum suggests a shift to Formalism, which restricts the notion of good to the absolute good such that the agent can only ever aim (in any action) at that absolute good. Williams' original moral alienation objection had to do with the short comings of Utilitarianism in accurately capturing the ground projects of agents (projects that according to Williams are what make life worth living for the agent that adopts them). In this vein, I take a

look at the response from Peter Railton and Adrian Piper, both of whom try and dissolve the difficulty this version of the alienation problem poses.

I am less interested in the resolution to the various moral alienation problems presented than examining the usage of "alienation" in the examples of moral alienation problems. What I find lacking is an instance of actual, or even possible, cases of alienation. The way moral alienation as an example appears to be used (by Tenenbaum, Williams, Railton, etc.) is as a kind of reductio meant to show that some impersonal, or problematically structured, moral theory is liable to produce agents that turn out to be satires of agents. Still, there are two useful outcomes of this exploration I would like to highlight. The first is that Tenenbaum's formalism does provide a useful benchmark to test cases of strong self-alienation against. While I am not suggesting that formalism is true, I do think that showing that self-alienation is at least possible in such cases displays the viability of my definition of strong self-alienation. Formalism collapses the distance between the agent and their own constitutive good (the absolute good), finding room for self-alienation will be a challenge. The second issue is that while Williams' examples of moral alienation are not to my taste, he does have a view about conflict that appears to fit in with the condition of conflict that I detail in **Chapter 1**. Williams' conflict is between different perspectives the agent can inhabit, that between an impersonal (or moral) one and the perspective one takes when thinking about their ground projects. It is this general kind of conflict that I will argue ultimately drives strong self-alienation.

Finally, in **Chapter 4**, I will consider the absurd and its connection to self-alienation. In order to establish this connection, I first set out to argue that agents can, even when there is an absolute good, aim at a plurality of goods. Further, I argue that agents can even pursue the good perversely (or under perverse circumstances). Here, I am trying to set up the conflict that I

alluded to in the previous chapter, that of a self taking up perspectives related to the various goods an agent can pursue. Part of my argument for the plurality of goods is to show both that happiness and morality are independent goods, but also that the pursuit of them involve the taking up of wholehearted practical identities. Pursuing these goods means instantiating them in particular and subjective ways relative to the agent (even if the goods themselves are not relative) through wholehearted practical identities. Because of this, there is a kind of conflict of the self with the self if these pursuits end up undermining each other through these instantiations.

Still, this is not enough to get us *strong* self-alienation. The above conflict only suggests that conflicts between different pursuits of different goods can occur. But this need not result in alienation. What we need is a case that provides a kind of intractable problem for the agent, one the two pursuits undermine each other so thoroughly that the agent cannot see a way out. This is where the notion of absurdity comes into play. Thomas Nagel's well-known treatment of absurdity is close to Williams' conflict between perspectives, only for Nagel it has to do with the perspectives of the subjective and the abstract. I argue that Nagel's conception of absurdity ultimately does not provide the basis for strong self-alienation, but advancing his notion of absurdity a bit further does. To this end, I detail a notion of absurdity that is closer to one that Martin Esslin presents, where the purpose of absurdist theater is meant to discomfort the audience as they reflect on the absurdist situation characters are framed in as similar to their own. Absurdity is not just a tool of reflective abstraction, but something that you take back with you and imbues your subjective experience as an intractable conflict.

I end the chapter by presenting a case of strong self-alienation. This case is one where the agent is presented with a conflict between two wholehearted practical identities that are subjective instantiations of pursuits of different goods. The conflict generated in this example is

between one's moral pursuits and their pursuit of happiness. From the agent's own perspective, this is a kind of disunity that has to do with the very core of their identity, as the pursuits mentioned are tied to ends that are given to them rather than taken on. The problem is that these given ends can only be actualized by the agent through these individualized instantiations. Conflict is not the intended effect, but it is a common one. Dropping one of these wholehearted practical identities is not an easy option, as these kinds of identities shape an agent's life in a fundamental way. The end of one can be the end of the agent's recognizable identity. As the agent abstracts away from their subjective position in order to try and find a harmony, they discover an intractable problem. The existential risk of having wholehearted practical identities at all, and the possibility of enduring conflict. The agent in this example is alienated from themselves because the conflict is between two identifiable pursuits of the good that they instantiate into core pieces of their identity. They come to represent a kind of absurdity, as it appears that in resolving the conflict, they come to destroy who they are.

Chapter 1 – Alienation to Self-Alienation: What is Alienation?

Introduction

The purpose of this section is to set a base standard for what alienation is. Art seems to provide us with many kinds of cases that count as alienation, and yet there is no unified conception of what alienation is. What links Kafka's and Wim Wender's alienated characters? Is it emotion? Is it being distant from others and oneself? Or something else entirely? While we have at hand expressive examples of alienation, it is difficult to find a common link between them. My aim is to find that link. This might appear to be a bold claim on my part, but my aim is not to (yet) argue that any given definition of alienation is incorrect and to supplant it with my own. Rather, my aim is to try and explore some intuitive common features of alienation and to use that as a baseline for comparing and contrasting different kinds of alienation later on. Part of my motivation for establishing a base standard for alienation is to provide some structure to a concept that appears resistant to the establishment of any clear standards. Richard Schmitt notes that "Alienation, being estranged from oneself, remains an unclear idea. There exists no single entity – a self all one's own – from which the alienated are separated…Explaining alienation turns out to be quite difficult." (45) Perhaps more damningly is Richard Schacht's despairing remark: "Because the term is employed in connection with so many different ones, however, it enjoys no special association with any of them. Using the term "alienation" without explaining any further what one has in mind communicates little more today than does tapping one's glass with one's spoon at a banquet; neither does much more than attract attention." (237) To avoid such a fate, I want to try and explain what I mean by alienation in this chapter.

In the first section of this chapter, I will try and answer the question as to whether or not alienation is fundamentally identical to an affective state. While alienation is commonly associated with depression, estrangement, and angst (among other forms of melancholia), I want to argue that at its core, alienation is not any one of these states, nor is it an exclusive collection of specific affective states. If alienation is not just an affective state, then the questions arises as to what it is. In **Section 2**, I argue that alienation is a kind of disunity that creates a tension within the agent between her (to borrow a phrase from Frankfurt) "wholehearted" practical identities. This disunity is partially constituted by three conditions: Distance, Identity, and Conflict. The section will detail how all three of these conditions form a good general description of alienation that is able to accommodate several different theoretical usages of the term.

In the second half of the chapter I will consider two remaining questions: what is it to experience alienation? And, what is so paradoxical about self-alienation? Both of these questions will get further treatment later on, but it is worth setting the stage for things to come.

Section 1 – Affective Alienation

Alienation as it appears in literature and art is most commonly associated with certain kinds of feelings. Travis in the movie *Paris, Texas* is not a happy individual, but one whose separation from himself and his family causes him to be in a kind of fugue state. In works of art about alienation, the artist usually tries to evoke how that character feels as a way of relating their alienation to the audience, whether that be Gregor Samsa's crippling anxiety and fear, or the suffocating loneliness Travis Bickle experiences as a cab driver in New York. From this, there is a temptation to equate alienation with those affective states to some degree. This creates an

immediate problem: is there a concrete feeling of alienation? I would like to dismiss this question immediately. There is nothing in the literature to suggest that there is such an identifiable, and singular, feeling of alienation that comes anywhere close to the "base" emotions of fear, affection, and anger. Similarly, alienation is very commonly described as being isolated or considered alien by some social group or from oneself. That relation is independent of a given affective state. A more nuanced viewpoint is that alienation is linked with a common core of affective states that together constitute the *experience of* alienation. This seems much more immediately plausible. Art about alienation may not typify any one affect as alienation, but the identification of a character's state as alienated is typified by a certain range of affective states across many different artworks.

This "experience of" alienation as a set of affective states is still, however, problematic. It leads to two problems: (1) there is a kind of normative volatility in setting the range of affective states relevant for alienation that makes the concept especially difficult to pin down, and (2) pinning down the experience of alienation in this way poses substantial problems for certain definitions of alienation that do not rely on any particular affective state or sets of affective states. To begin with (1), a common concern within the social science literature on alienation is its inability to be made clear as a concept.[1] You can see this in social scientist Peter Christian Ludz's particularly biting remark "To what extent is there a 'feeling of alienation' because the term alienation is in vogue? Or, to ask the reverse question: In what way is real

[1] While not about affective states per se, you can see another angle of frustration at the end of Igor Kon's treatment of the history of alienation as a concept: "In the terms of alienation such demarcation is extremely difficult. Hence, both the analytical weakness and ideological vagueness of the concept, which with some authors denotes the demand for the global reconstruction of society and with others merely modification of the individual's value orientations." (528) Alienation has a tendency to either be treated as an all encompassing social ill, or one in which a condition afflicts an individual in a personal existential crisis they go through. This frustration speaks to some of my own motivations, there ought to be a kind of bridge definition of alienation that speaks to both of these sides.

human experience manifested in the term alienation?" (9) A common gripe is that the "feeling of alienation" is an inherently uncertain term that changes its boundaries depending on the context, culture, or theory one is examining alienation under. This is what I mean by "normative volatility," the boundaries of this set of commonly accepted affective states related to alienation shift too rapidly according to the context. You can represent someone as alienated who is lonely and depressed, or as someone who is disaffected and apathetic, or as someone anxious and possessed. Pick any two negative affective states and you might have a decent description of alienation as presented in some artwork somewhere. Schmitt brings up this issue when describing the fervently religious zealot as an example of someone who is alienated: "Alienation displays itself in listlessness, boredom, and disinterest in the world around us. But it also displays itself in frantic activity, in constantly striving, in looking toward an imagined, hoped-for future, devaluing thereby what one has already accomplished and the life one leads." (pg. 21) As a heuristic for recognizing when a given piece of art is depicting alienation, this indeterminate set of affective states might have some use. But as a way of defining alienation, I am not convinced.

As for the second problem, there is a tension between some theories of alienation and the experience of alienation as a set of affective states in that those theories are not interested in specifying the affective side of alienation. This comes up in some conflicts between social science/social psychology and Marxism. The latter has a theory of alienation that states that workers are self-alienated because they are estranged from their own labor under a capitalist system. If this is so, and if alienation is an experience of a certain set of affective states, then theoretically one could test whether or not laborers are indeed self-alienated.[2] This was actually

[2] Of course, that in itself would not prove if they were alienated because of capitalism if the workers were indeed self-alienated, but it would be good indirect empirical evidence in favor of it. You can see testing of this method being done in David Braybrooke's "Diagnosis and Remedy in Marx's Doctrine of Alienation," where in empirical approach is used to disprove Marx's conditions of alienation. He states: "A man can, of course,

done by Social Scientist Peter Archibald in his paper "Using Marx's Theory of Alienation Empirically." The general point of the article was to compare Marx's predictions and theory of alienation with studies that measured the general satisfaction of workers. (126) Anyone who has tried to define "happiness" in a philosophical context should see the problem. If happiness were the uninterrupted sensation of sunshine on one's face, then we would have an easily testable metric for happiness. If hedonism claimed that a set of pleasures maximized fully is the same as happiness, then we could go and find out how many people fit the criteria. But, even base hedonism cannot give us that kind of specificity, and Marx was not trying to tie self-alienation to a specific set of affections. For Marx, the issue is not that people are necessarily suffering from the same negative psychological conditions, but that human beings under a capitalist system are unable to fulfill the human need to imprint themselves onto nature through their labor. Similarly, base hedonism is less concerned about identifying a unified set of pleasures than directing you to maximize that which you find most pleasurable. The positive set of pleasures, in this case, is going to change from individual to individual, just as the negative affective consequences of self-alienation might take different forms in Marxism.

As I stated in the introduction, a problem with studying alienation is that it appears as if it is a vague concept. I would argue that one reason that is the case is because of this indeterminacy having to do with the *experience of* alienation. A distinction I would like to introduce is between two different locutions when referring to alienation: having an *experience of* alienation, and *experience as* alienating. The former locution is what is at issue when we are trying

find his work very disagreeable, even frightening, and still have a strong sense of purpose in doing it; but we would not allow that a sense of purpose admits of his being apathetic, or bored." In other words, the purposelessness of capitalism does not appear in all cases of dissatisfaction of work. He is trying to tie, necessarily, an affective state with a condition of alienation and then showing that connection is empirically false.

to find a "unique" experience associated with alienation; a set of affective attitudes that are always identifiable as an experience *of* alienation. The problem with "experience of" type approaches to alienation is tied to the issue of normative volatility: any given set of affective states can be experienced independently of alienation. An agent can just be depressed, or they can just feel ennui. Neither affective state demands that they are also alienated. In a similar fashion, a set of affective states, no matter how well-identified they are with alienation, does not necessarily demand that the agent is alienated. For example, Jim feels listless and depressed after his partner passes away. He spends his days in his room, staring up at the ceiling and doing very little. But, while his affective states are similar to many cases of alienation, if we were to ask him if he is alienated, Jim might adamantly deny it. Even if we were to doubt him, it is plausible that the mere shock of a death of a loved one is enough to put anyone in such a mood without ascribing them estrangement from either the world or themselves. I think any combination of affective states can be described without referring to alienation.[3] It is unclear that *any* combination of affective states can ever really give us a unique experience *of* alienation. But, we might experience that set *as* alienation or alienating.

To experience something *as alienating* is to conceptualize your experience as one of alienation, or more accurately, as an expression of alienation. This allows us to say that alienation can be associated with a whole host of affects while not being attached to any one affect or particular set of affects. Some people's expressions of alienation might come in the form of depression, anger, or self-isolation, but it need not necessarily be tied to any of these affective states. I would argue, then, that alienation as a concept is not dissimilar to something like despair

[3] One caveat would be using terms like "estrangement," "disconnected," or something like those terms. The problem is that estrangement, among other such ambiguous states, carry the same problem as alienation in that it is unclear if they are associated with particular affective states. Further, estrangement (in less careful texts and historical texts) is often equated to alienation. This would be to push the same problem to a different term.

in the way Kierkegaard uses the term. In *Sickness Unto Death*, Kierkegaard contrasts despair with illness stating "Not only is despair far more dialectical than an illness, but all the symptoms related to despair are dialectical, and thus the superficial view is so easily deceived in determining whether or not despair is present." (33) As a spiritual illness, despair is commonly associated with the physical side effects of melancholia. But, it would be a mistake to think that the depression, loathing, and idleness are constitutive of despair. Kierkegaard's point is partially that if you try and treat despair as a physician (or as a psychiatrist for a more modern example) would be to treat the symptoms and not the cause. In commenting on this, Jeffery Hanson makes the point that "Despair as Anti-Climacus analyzes it is a condition, not merely a feeling." (184) This is how I want to treat alienation, as a condition rather than an affective state. Even if we can link up commonly associated affective states with alienation, we would still not be getting to the heart of the matter.[4]

Section 2 – Practical Identity & Disunity

If alienation is not to be located in affective states, then where and what is it? I will argue that alienation is a kind of disunity characterized by a tension between "wholehearted" practical identities. This particular kind of disunity has three necessary conditions that specify what kind

[4] There is some inquiries into the phenomenological psychology of despair that might go against this point. Rick Anthony Furtak, for example, convincingly argues that depression and mania track Kierkegaard's distinction between being obsessed with the finite and the infinite respectively. The finite is associated with the languishing petty bourgeois who is only concerned with material pleasures, while the infinite is associated with the overzealous agent who flits through numerous possibilities without being able to settle on in anyone. (Furtak 100) Regardless of if the analogy is one that Kierkegaard would find plausible, there seems to be, in actuality, to many possible disanalogous examples for me to find this plausible as a 1:1 tracking. *Some* within the class of the petty bourgeois are going to be depressed, but some are going to be like Ivan Ilyich in the way Schmitt describes: "He simply turns away from his conscience and from moral issues, refusing to give them any thought." (7) The issue is not that Ilyich is not suffering from some kind of spiritual sickness, but that the manifestation of that spiritual sickness is not that of depression.

of state it is. Before I get to those conditions, I would first like to introduce the notion of wholehearted practical identities. While a practical identity is a common term in the agency literature, I would like to codify a terminology that expresses a practical identity which the agent sees as fundamental to her personality and self-conception.

Section 2.1 – Wholehearted Practical Identities

A practical identity is best succinctly put by Korsgaard as "a role with a point." (*Self-Constitution* 21) They are governing roles with set normative structures and principles. Typically, practical identities are associated with codified roles: that of being in a certain kind of vocation, as a friend to someone, as a parent, etc. A practical identity is both action guiding, in that being a parent to a child comes with certain dos and do nots, but also in inhabiting these practical identities we start to define ourselves as a self. We constitute ourselves as a particular kind of person by defining ourselves through these roles. I want to be remembered as a devoted parent, a caring friend, and an ambitious scholar. It is through these roles that the contours of my life take shape. For Korsgaard, practical identities are also "standing sources of incentives" (ibid. 22) in that they structure our actions and choices. My practical identity to be a scholar gates certain possibilities, just as it steers me towards others. Instead of going out, I will stay in and read. But, just as well, I might pursue certain opportunities as they arise where otherwise they would present no incentive. Going to a conference is not on everyone's radar, and most would not even consider it as a reasonable incentive to have.

Practical identities are also contingent. The roles we take up are both the product of circumstance but also negotiable and deferential. Not everyone has the opportunity to become a scholar, much less have the desire fostered within them. Further, I might decide to drop a

scholarly life in favor of a different kind of practical identity. These roles do not necessarily set one's life in stone. Finally, I also might recognize higher duties or callings that supersede my practical identity as a scholar. Taking care of my elderly parents can derail my plans, but that might just be the right thing to do from the perspective of morality. Practical identities defer depending on the interests of the agent or, at least ideally, according to more controlling purposes like morality. So far, I have presented a fairly standard account of practical identities, but there are two wrinkles I want to introduce, and the first has to do with this contingency. For now, I want to maintain that practical identities are also arbitrary and fluid. By arbitrary, I just mean that *some* practical identities can be picked up and dropped at will, like an actor stepping into a role for just one soliloquy. This is not much different from Korsgaard, as it is good to emphasize that practical identities can have varying degrees of importance to a person. You can decide to start practicing philately, i.e. stamp collecting, on a whim. You can also just as easily stop your philatelist practices just as quickly once you discover no one knows what philately is.

The more interesting point about the arbitrariness and fluidity of practical identities is how they are susceptible to being described in specific ways that changes how the role guides your actions. The problem with practical identities talk is that it too often hews to the vocational model. Sally is a lawyer and thinks to herself what a lawyer would do under certain circumstances as if there is homogenous conception of "being a lawyer" to follow. The vocational model suggests that there is such a homogenous conception, and that we can apply it outside of vocations. Being a "parent" or a "philatelist" would be similar to being a lawyer with this homogeneous conception. Further, if deference or disagreement does occur, it occurs within a hierarchical structure. As a lawyer, Sally might think it best to further this practical identity by pouring herself into her work, but as a caring friend she also recognizes the need to spend time

with her loved ones. A traditional reading might say that her commitment to a career, while admirable, ought not be at the expense of more central human pursuits.[5] This hierarchical model even comes out in cases where interests conflict. George's interest in philately can be overruled by his interest in saving money to travel if this interest is more important to him.

The problem with this model is twofold: for one, we need space to talk about practical identities that are specific to the way the individual characterizes themselves within a general abstract role. The vocational model might be correct in some sense when it describes, for example, being a lawyer as a homogenous pursuit. But, I would argue that agents very rarely, if ever, actually hew to that abstracted role. George might obliquely refer to himself as a philatelist but consider himself more as a cultural anthropologist with a flair for collecting. There is use in using the general descriptor as a categorical tool, but it does not actually capture how the agent conceives of themselves and the specific mode of how they operate under that specified role. Secondly, it is part of the contingent nature of practical identities that multiple can be taken up and conflict with one another in a way that is not apparent to the agent at first. Sally's commitment to her career might come at the cost of other pursuits, like living on a ranch in Wyoming. She might genuinely not have realized the conflict until the beginning of her career as a lawyer, and she might genuinely be in a state of uncertainty as she navigates the question of which one to actually commit to. This indeterminacy muddies the water when it comes to the supposed hierarchical nature of practical identities. Just as the act of inhabiting a practical identity can be important to the creation of a defined self, so to can the act of dropping a

[5] Or vice versa depending on her commitments. Either way, there is some kind of deference to hierarchy that occurs.

practical identity and committing to another that gates the pursuit of the one dropped. As we will see, this is going to play a large role in alienation.

Not all practical identities can be so easily dropped. There are some that we can refer to as "wholehearted" practical identities. "Wholehearted" being a term that I am borrowing from Frankfurt (although Korsgaard also employs the term) and in applying to practical identities, it is meant to capture certain "central" identities that we take to be core to who we are. They are the identities that we most strongly identify with and would be the ones that other identities most often defer to. Frankfurt uses "wholehearted" in a more restricted sense, in that it reflects what the agent *really* wants to do, and the coherence between what the agents really want to do and making that desire their will, they are acting wholeheartedly. (*Importance*, 154) Similarly, a wholehearted practical identity reflects who the agent *really* wants to be. If George is merely on the fence about philately, then this practical identity would truly be susceptible to the arbitrary whims of the agent. It can be dropped, or even altered, at a whim. If George is, in fact, in love with travelling, then the specific way in which he considers himself a traveler not only takes precedence[6] but will be actively pursued. George sees himself as a traveler, it is part of his own self-definition. Of course, with time, some practical identities can become wholehearted. The more we see ourselves as our chosen career, the more central it becomes, and a lot of times that just comes with living within a certain role long enough. On the other hand, we might very well decide to commit to a practical identity because we aspire to be viewed that way. I can admire my friend's charity to the point that I too wish to become that. I want to be that kind of person.

[6] This does represent a hierarchy of sorts. Wholehearted practical identities have a kind of priority that demands deference. George's philatelist activities, if it takes too much money away from travelling, will be curtailed by a more central wholehearted practical identity. My main concern is not the relation between fluid practical identities and wholehearted practical identities, but the relation between a wholehearted practical identity and another. It is here that I think the hierarchy, as we shall see, breaks down a bit.

Section 2.2 Disunity

With a host of practical identities that we inhabit, both ones that are not so committal and ones that we inhabit wholeheartedly, one issue is how to unify these practical identities. Conflicts between practical identities are often resolved through an appeal to a hierarchical structure. Ideally, this structure provides a coherent edifice that guides an agent's project and that sets appropriate instances for which practical identities defer to other practical identities. This structure would promote wholehearted practical identities and provide an overarching principle for integrating future practical identities. Would that it were so simple. Conflicts are a part of daily life, some are easily resolved in the way just stated, while others linger entire lifetimes. Outside of the question of how we ought to live and structure our lives, there is just the bare problem of disunity. Just as finding a way of unifying our practical identities together is important, dealing with disunity is just as important. The pain of conflict can either be trivial or immense. Having to abandon a burgeoning friendship is vastly different from having to stop seeing a childhood friend. This kind of tension alone is not the crux of alienation, but it is a good starting point.

I should note that disunity is a common feature in the literature on alienation. Richard Schmitt identifies the tension between our animal natures and rational selves as what alienation is (77). Jaeggi suggests something similar when she explains alienation in Heideggerian terms: "The world, in Heidegger's interpretation, is a structure that includes within it subject and object. The separation of the two sides – ontologically considered – is alienation, the separation of what belongs together." (18) Schacht also explains the definition of alienation for Hegel as a kind of disunity between ourselves and society (30) (Rousseau, as far as we can trace the concept of

alienation back to him, would also say something similar).[7] In some sense, the difference between various theories of alienation sometimes comes down to how you delineate disunity. What is disunited from what? I am certainly keeping in this vein. From the outset, I want to distinguish myself from other thinkers by locating the disuniting in wholehearted practical identities.

Disunity among practical identities is a trivial problem[8] if we are only considering conflicts between non-wholehearted practical identities, or between a practical identity that is not wholehearted and one that is. Sally would give up a lot to continue her career wish of being a lawyer, and George is at best ambivalent about his pursuit of philately (if it was between that and some other small collecting desire, he might very well choose one over the other without much thought). Alienation has to then concern tensions between wholehearted personal identities. Instances where abandoning one identity is a real concern, and perhaps one that cannot be merely resolved by an appeal to a higher authority. I want to flesh this out over the coming sub-sections, but there are a couple things I want to mention first. For one, my point about the fluidity of practical identity plays an important role in how conflicts arise between wholehearted practical identities. For one, I think that the way in which an agent can conceive of themselves as a scholar both generates conflict, but also hides conflict from becoming immediately relevant. A scholar whose wish is to undermine the standard form of academic writing in the university

[7] In reading Hegel, I am not sure if this is true. However, even if you had a different reading of Hegel, Rousseau, Heidegger, and others, the point is that there is a tradition in the literature to describe alienation as a problem of disunity.

[8] I will note that there are psychological limits to describing this as a "trivial" problem. Those who suffer from ADD, for example, have issues with deciding between small tasks. There is possibly some agent who is not unlike Buridan's Ass in regard to two trivial practical identities. I think true cases of this are rare though. Some cases are actually going to represent more than what they appear in a bare description. For example, a person choosing between philately and collecting baseball cards (not that either of these pursuits are inherently trivial, despite how they appear to many) might think of those practical identities as potentially turning into something more.

system might at the same time conceive of themselves as a rebel, but in such a way as to make sense of them pursuing a career within that very same system. However, in pursuing that career, they may also develop identities that are then reliant on the upkeep of that career (as a supportive lover, parent, etc.). I think that a lot of the conflicts between wholehearted practical identities are like this in that they come about because of the unintended effects of branching identities. No one sets out to be an atheist and a catholic, but a novitiate with a love for humanism might end up as one.

Lastly, I want to note that for Frankfurt one cannot have conflicting wholehearted *desires*. While I am borrowing the phrase "wholehearted" from him, I am neither taking on his commitments, nor am I trying to argue against him. A wholehearted desire is not eligible for conflict unless it is by some kind of external passion. The smoker whose wholehearted desire to stop smoking is undermined by their addiction does not experience an internal conflict. Wholehearted desires cannot come into conflict with one another because they reflect what the agent really wants to do. The agent can be ambivalent about a set of desires that can shape their will, but then none of those desires are going to be wholehearted. Nothing I have said undermines this position. The difference between wholehearted desires and wholehearted practical identities is, partially, one of complexity. Wholehearted practical identities are both fluid and sprawling. As a marker for the self, in terms of distinguishing the self, being a lawyer or being a catholic in whatever specific way the agent wants means that those identities are going to generate guiding norms that reach the domains of other practical identities. We may not set out to generate tension between two different wholehearted practical identities, but two sprawling structures of this kind are bound to come into conflict with one another. There might be a downstream issue, as in the conflict could be described as between two wholehearted desires

that are spawned from wholehearted practical identities, but I do not think that is the right way of caching out the conflict. The agent in this kind of conflict has yet to settle on which course of action is best, or which practical identity to affirm. Thus, the desires are not yet wholehearted.

Thus, what we have to begin with is that alienation is a kind of disunity that involves wholehearted practical identities. Because of the nature of these identities, it is only natural for them to branch out and entangle themselves in messy ways in our lives. While we have some tools to disentangle or drop certain practical identities, these tools can fail to resolve the difficulty. The nature of this disunity is still in question. Not all disunities are going to count as alienation (or, not all disunities are alienating). In the next section, I will give three conditions of alienation that will help specify when a disunity is an occurrence of alienation.

Section 3 – Three Conditions of Alienation

The three conditions of alienation that I have identified as necessary for alienation to occur are distance, identity, and conflict. Distance has to do with the relations of alienation, identity is about the stakes of alienation, and conflict determines the need for resolution. These three conditions in themselves, I will argue, are necessary for alienation as I believe they capture a broad range of cases that we would intuitively refer to as "alienating." Since my aim is to provide a starting point for examining self-alienation, I do not mean for these three conditions to be fundamentally at odds with any other theory of alienation.[9] The problem is not what is included but what is missing from these conditions that would make a difference for any of the mentioned theories of alienation. For example, because I am trying to provide a broad outline, I

[9] In fact, I think that these three conditions work quite well with Marxist, Sartrean, or Neo-Kantian views of alienation.

am not going to include "capitalism" as a necessary condition for alienation. Thus, I am not going to argue that these conditions are sufficient for alienation even if they are necessary.

It is also important to note that with a broader notion of alienation, I am not directly commenting on self-alienation yet. You might wonder that if alienation is a disunity between wholehearted practical identities how this evades alienation fundamentally being self-alienation. The immediate answer is that the agents in the following examples in this section are not alienated from themselves but alienated from some external object because of the disunity. I can be alienated *from* a friend because of a result of a kind of disunity between my own practical identities. Further, and this will be made clear in the following sub-sections, the disunity can come about without the agent changing their practical identities, but can be induced because of other agent's choices (or, in some case, the presence of a debilitating cultural norm or some other oppressive societal structure). A friend who joins an extremist religious sect is alienating themselves from me, but that alienation occurs partially because I still have a practical identity that revolves around their friendship.

3.1 Distance

The condition of distance for alienation has to do with the relation[10] between the alienated and the object[11] they are alienated from. Specifically, it is a kind of relation that

[10] This is a condition that deals with relations. What kind of relation an agent has to the object she is alienated from, and the effects of that kind of relation. This condition chares some similarity with the way Rahel Jaeggi defines alienation. Her theory suggests that alienation is a kind of deficient relationship one has to the world and herself. My intention is not to take her definition and turn it into a mere condition for a much more fleshed on definition of alienation. Jaeggi's definition is much more involved than what this condition is trying to describe, and her view of a deficient relation includes powerlessness and loss of identity (6). My aim is only to set up a mere relational condition.

[11] "Object" is meant to capture both persons and abstract objects. An agent can be alienated from their mom or they can be alienated from their country.

specifies the distance created by disunity. This condition also captures the experience of distance the agent experiences when they are alienated from something. These general points are best fleshed out by example: Catherine grew up in a very close-knit family that valued spending all of their time together. At a very young age, it would have been impossible for Catherine to imagine what life would be like without them as spending time with them was a genuine source of joy. However, as she grew older, her political views gradually developed to the point where she was at odds politically with the rest of her family. While as a child the issue of politics never arose, she now finds that her parents and siblings are more comfortable bringing up political topics for discussion. In fact, these political topics end up dominating every family gathering. The more Catherine finds herself at odds politically with her family, the more she finds these discussions distressing. She is caught between two worlds, one in which she sees herself as someone who avows a certain kind of lifestyle according to her political beliefs (a lifestyle that might demand confronting opposing viewpoints that are considered egregious; viewpoints that her family shares) and one in which she is still trying to be a constituent member of the family. Though Catherine still goes to family events as a matter of course, she begins to find herself dreading the ensuing debates and genuinely believes that they are wrong to hold the political views they have. She finds herself missing what once was and, despite her dread, finds herself unable to stop participating in these events. Catherine is alienated from her family. She is caught in a conflict between two wholehearted practical identities: the love of her family and her commitment to her own political beliefs, and the fact that she is torn represents a kind of disunity.

Catherine's relationship to her family is one of distance. She is alienated from her family, and she feels removed from a kind of life she used to wholeheartedly pursue. There is still a remaining want in there. Importantly, distance is not just bare distance, but a distance

characterized by loss.[12] This is an important element of alienation as a kind of disunity. To be removed from something is not in itself enough to characterize alienation, there needs to be a sense that something is missing. For Catherine, her distance from her family represents a loss of a life that she enjoyed partaking in. She has nostalgia for past interactions and wishes that things could be the way they once were. These are bound up with her wholehearted practical identity as a member of the family. Again, if we think of this a sprawling structure, the distance removes the ability for Catherine to enjoy many of the activities that filled her life. The loss is not just mere absence, but an obscene obstruction to how she conceives of herself. As such, one aspect of the condition of distance here is that distance does often[13] engender the feeling of wanting to "return" to the object that the agent is alienated from. Catherine's distance from her family is represented as a kind of loss, and ameliorating that loss comes in the form of wanting things to return to normal. What that means will vary case by case, but I think it often comes in the form of wanting "things to be the way they used to be." Part of the pain of alienation comes in seeing this as wish rather than a real option.

Distance, as a condition for alienation, is also characterized by the intentional nature of the distance created. I will refer to this aspect as "created distance." By intentional nature, I do not mean to tie myself to any specific theory of intention, only to say that there is a kind of

[12] One thing to note about "loss" here is that it is being used in a morally ambivalent way. I think Gregor Samsa is experiencing a kind of loss at not being able to return to work and live a life of bureaucratic nonsense and familial obligation, but that does not mean he *ought* to view it as a loss at all. A healthier individual might focus on other changes occurring within themselves, like turning into a massive bug, than a preoccupation with anxious normality. A more relatable example might be someone who experiences the loss of a friend who was abusive, that agent might still conceive of the absence of the abusive friend as a kind of loss even though it is beneficial for them in some kind of objective sense.

[13] As we will see, I am ambivalent to make this a necessary part of the distance condition. While I think that in many cases of alienation, there is a desire or wanting to return to the object the agent is alienated from (like in the case of Catherine), there are going to be cases where an agent is alienated in such a way that they may not realize they are alienated. Or, more accurately, the agent does not conceive of themselves as alienated. In these cases, there may still be distance, but the agent does not have the ability to even want to return to the object they are alienated from.

purposiveness behind the distance. This created distance can be a result of the agent distancing themselves from the object they are alienated from or from the object of their alienation creating that distance. You can see this in two different variations of the example I used: First, Catherine coming to realize that her family gatherings are significantly more tense decides to shut down whenever politics begins to be discussed. She intentionally creates a distance between her and her family. Second, we can imagine the inverse scenario. Catherine's family, noticing her change in political views, begins to stop inviting her over as frequently as before. When she is invited, discussions are short and terse. In this variation of the example, it is the family who is creating the distance.[14] Either way, whatever distance exists, the distance is purposive. This is even the case for larger societal structures that induce alienation. For example, someone might argue that it is our current political climate that is in fact alienating families from each other. This is still an instance of created distance in that the aim of the current political climate is to divide.

Lastly, the condition of distance also captures much of what we would consider to be the consequences of alienation. What can come with distance is easy to imagine: social stigma, isolation, and hostility. Catherine's family, in one version of the example, can come to isolate her from something she values. Like my argument against making a particular affect, or set of affects, constitutive of alienation, the consequences of alienation are certainly not universal. In most cases, interestingly, it might be most proper to say that the affects commonly associated from alienation are more proximately caused by the consequences of being alienated.[15] Catherine's ostracization might be a more immediate cause of depression than the initial disunity itself. If her family's reaction is that of belittlement toward her considered political beliefs, then

[14] This is a bit more flexible than the dichotomy I set up. There might be "mutually" created distance in the sense that both the agent and the object maintain this distance.
[15] One obvious caveat is that this might not be the case with self-alienation.

her affective expression of her alienation could be one of hostility and anger. That said, I do not think that it is the case that all the consequences of alienation cause all of the affections associated with being alienated. But, it is worth noting that people can live with being alienated for a long time without doing anything about it. Catherine's alienation might be something she grits her teeth through if the consequences of distance never become too severe. She could still miss the way things were and still think that her current political views are too entrenched without trying to resolve the alienation itself.

To sum, distance is a condition that captures the relational aspect of alienation between an agent and the object that the agent is alienated from. The relation is defined in terms of the distance created by a disunity where an agent tries to pursue two practical identities that do not agree with one another. The result is described as distance because the agent no longer feels connected to a way of living that they once inhabited. From this, we can see that distance also has a temporal component. This distance is created "intentionally," either by the agent herself or by the object she is alienated from. Further, distance is associated with the negative effects of alienation.

3.2 Identity

The identity condition is what is "at stake" in alienation. My interest in wholehearted practical identities is because a disunity between non-wholehearted practical identities is uninteresting. If Catherine finds herself at odds with her family but neither considered her family an important component of her life nor was she ever committed to any political system, then the resolution to this minor family drama would only be so interesting. This is the same for instances where a wholehearted practical identity comes against a non-wholehearted practical identity.

Again, Catherine might resolve the tension with her family by cutting them off with little emotional pain if she never cared for them in the first place. Distance is a condition characterized by loss, and to see something as a loss is to care about that thing. Disunity between practical identities can create a loss, but it also focuses one's attention on how the modes of caring and the contingencies of life can produce conflicts that do not allow us to pursue all of our cares. One facet of this issue is that of identity. Who we are, how we want to be seen, is a function of practical identities that incorporate our cares and direct us on how to pursue them. To drop a wholehearted practical identity is to change what we care about, and it is to change who we are.

The way in which identity is at stake in alienation is best explained through the difficulty it would put the agent through in changing who they are to resolve the alienation. Catherine experiences a kind of loss when she is distant from her family. To resolve the disunity of her practical identities demands a change that she is unwilling to accept. Either she drops her committed political views or significantly diminishes her relations to her family. Either option has ramifications for the identity that she has built. She loves her family and would not readily cut them out of her life, but her political views also represent major values she has cultivated over many years. These political views also lead her to act in ways to substantiate various other activities she cares about. She cannot easily drop a way of relating to the world that she has come to see as core to her identity. The alienation in this case may still be "resolvable," but not without a difficult shift in identity. [16]

[16] This also fleshes out the temporal dimension of alienation. Instances of alienation have "staying" power, perhaps more so than many affects. Even if it is not the best thing for Catherine to do, it is easy to imagine her remaining in a state of alienation for years, if not for the rest of her life. There is a way of managing disunity between wholehearted practical identities by simply not engaging with the problem itself.

The identity condition is realized by what a practical identity is, but only partially. The problem with practical identities is that they are mutable. There is a precarity in defining oneself because it opens the agent to having that practical identity conflict with another. Further, the agent might be required to drop the identity altogether, either because of the conflict, or other external circumstances. If someone makes their partner their whole life only to find out that person has stopped loving them, then they are forced to drop that practical identity. It will only become obsolete in the best of circumstances. This points to the other aspect of the identity condition that is important here. Practical identities are a structured set of values and directions, and the creation and destruction of those identities represent a kind of existential risk when circumstances force that decision upon the agent. There is a fair amount to unpack here. For one, an agent's identity has a tendency to shift over time regardless of unfortunate circumstances and often times without existential risk. Someone who begins to fish everyday will start to see themselves as a fisherman. This might be a remarkable change from their usual indoor lifestyle, but that agent might welcome the change (and other's might see it as a welcome change as well). Part of growing up and maturing involves a natural aging into different practical identities; one's that we choose and develop intentionally. Thus, alienation is a kind of forced identity shift that leaves the agent paralyzed. Alienation can be characterized as a state of "being between two worlds." Catherine is both true to her political self and desirous of her past familial life. She is on the precipice of change, and it is this uneasy state regarding who she is that is partially emblematic of alienation.

Another aspect of this view of existential risk and identity is the role of circumstantial pressures. I have been skirting around the issue of how responsible the agent is for their own alienation and the above characterization seems to take alienation out of the agent's hands. I

think this is accurate to a degree. Changes in practical identities, even wholehearted practical identities, need not occur intentionally. Some people, as I said, grow into practical identities, but some changes can occur over a very long period of time without the direct intentional input of the agent. An American in Paris may come home with a European affect to their demeanor and personality without having intentionally thought of themselves as changing into that identity. Their return home might be quite alienating, but their alienation in not due to the fact that their identity shift happened unintentionally. Rather, their alienation comes about because of the tension between their past life and their new self, and operating as if one is compatible with the other. To some degree, this alienation is circumstantial, or a matter of luck. This American formerly in Paris could have stayed in Europe, just as Catherine's family could have been more accepting of their daughter's political opinions. That said, the American affected a personality that was unknowingly in conflict with their past life, but Catherine intentionally adopted a political view that she probably saw as at odds with her family's values. So, is Catherine responsible for her own alienation? This is a tricky question to answer. The disunity she has between her wholehearted practical identities is not like adopting conflicting beliefs. The part of existential risk that might get overlooked is that it is a risk to adopt an identity at all. People can be smarter about it. If Dave is a freewheeling hippie, then adopting a lawyer persona might prove to be an obvious disunity. That said, Catherine's own disunity could be a case where she took a leap of faith. She hopes that her family can be more accepting, or that she might not even have thought that she would become so enamored by whatever political system she has taken to. The point is that this is done intentionally, but the fallout is not necessarily within the agent's control.

3.3.1 Conflict Preliminaries – The Diachronic Nature of Alienation

The two previous conditions are both passive in some respect. Distance is a relation, and identity represents what is at stake. Conflict, on the other hand, is the active component of alienation. There must be something that makes the disunity an issue such that it is a candidate for alienation. Disunity, in itself, is not alienating. Even among wholehearted practical identities, disunity might just represent a minor annoyance more than a major concern. Catherine's political views might be disagreeable to her family, but if they are comfortable just not talking about it, then there is no conflict, and no alienation. Disunity and conflict seem like related, if not identical, concepts, but the former is much more abstract than the latter.[17] A disunity can be a dry academic affair. If I discover that my deep love for philately is disunified with my goal of saving for retirement, then resolving that disunity can be a simple matter of reorienting my expectations for collecting stamps or making financial cuts elsewhere. On the other hand, disunity can also be aggressively volatile to the point that alienation has no chance to form at all. If Catherine's family has a sudden and explosive reaction to her new political views before she even has time to evaluate her own disunity, then she might react impulsively and cut her family off entirely. She was forced to make a decision under extreme pressure, but in doing she would not be alienated but resentful. We usually think of alienation as a state that persists, and for that to happen the disunity must have a chance to fester. The notion of conflict I am employing here suggests a particular kind of disunity that is enduring because it is forced to be enduring. The disunity is held in place by the conflict.

[17] Part of the issue is just the vagueness of language. "Conflict" can mean a broad number of things. A scheduling conflict is described in different terms, and resolved differently, than a conflict between two nations.

To get a better grasp on this notion, we might ask why alienation must have a diachronic feature at all, why can there not be synchronic, instantaneous, or even short-lived forms of alienation? Anger, for example, would appear to have both a diachronic and a synchronic side to it. Cathrine can both hold a long grudge against her family and display bouts of heated anger in quick succession during tense dinners. But, alienation is not an affective state. It is not an emotional response to a sudden set of circumstances. The best examples of alienation we have from art displays the condition as a long simmering state of affairs, and I think that tracks an important feature of any alienation case. The movie *Taxi Driver*, for example, is an effective study of alienation precisely because we see Travis Bickle slowly descend into a paranoid madness through his alienation from modern society. Gregor Samsa's immediate reaction to his transformation into a giant insect is not one of alienation, it is the worry that he will not get to work on time. His alienation is already present as modern society itself has valued productivity over anything else. Thus, when I say that the condition of conflict is about what makes the disunity an issue, what I am trying to point to is that conflict is a condition that maintains the tension of the disunity over a period of time. It is precisely this elongated tension that makes the disunity an issue for the agent.

This also follows some of comments on contingency I mentioned earlier. People change over time and pick up new practical identities, or even shift within their old identities to take on a new conception of it. A hard-nosed teacher might, over time, become softer with their assignments as they learn to personalize their students more, but that shift within a practical identity might come into conflict with the standards of the institution they are working for. For Catherine, the disunity that she encounters is a function of growing into a different person but still trying to maintain a past life. Conflicts and tensions are not generated by an agent

intentionally choosing two wholehearted practical identities that would produce such states. The temporal nature is integral to understanding how wholehearted practical identities begins to grate against one another. It took a lifetime of bureaucratic conditioning for Gregor Samsa to want the comforts of it so badly.

3.3.2 Conflict as a Condition

Conflict is the condition of alienation that specifies a tension between two wholehearted practical identities over a given period of time.[18] The disunity in question is thus diachronic, but also debilitating in that it prevents the agent from transforming themselves or properly integrating new wholehearted practical identities into a new self. This gives us insight into the kind of disunity that is specific to alienation. For one, it is not a disunity between the self and the world. Although it can feel that way, disunities that are mere estrangements from others or institutions do not count as alienation. It does not display the right kind of conflict or tension. A superior can estrange a worker, but if the worker cares little for the place in which they work then there is no alienation. This changes if we alter the conflict. If the worker has made their career their life, then this estrangement can cause a conflict between their work and their own personal needs. The agent, in this case, needs to decide between their commitments toward work and alleviating the stifled atmosphere that their life has suddenly become mired in. The disunity

[18] You might wonder if alienation can involve the tension between more than two wholehearted practical identities. I think that this is more than likely the case. As we shall see, certain theories of alienation posit a "total" alienation for the subject, where the agent is alienated from all of their personal projects. While I do not think that this is the only kind of alienation, I do think that there are plausible examples of this kind of alienation. I might say that this kind of example still exhibits a kind of duality, namely that there is one large wholehearted practical identity that has a tension with a set of wholehearted practical identities, but there is nothing that hinges on me maintain that we must consider this to be a duality.

is conditioned on the conflict between wholehearted practical identities that the agent cannot easily resolve. Even this, however, is still not specific enough to get us a conflict of alienation.

Wholehearted practical identities, as I mentioned earlier, come up against each other due to their fluidity and sprawling nature. Conflicts of many sorts are bound to happen. Some of these conflicts are going to be small practical matters that require the agent to fine tune their expectations or the limits of these wholehearted practical identities. Catherine's conflict could just be one in which she merely needs to be sensitive about what topic she brings up at dinner with her family. This can create a kind of "balancing act" where the agent maintains an equilibrium between two wholehearted practical identities that are not aligned with one another. Any conflicts that erupt into further aggravation are counterbalanced by the agent managing their expectations and behavior. Alienation does not seem like a necessary component of this kind of conflict.

The issue is when this balancing act becomes too much to maintain. I do not think that alienation has a "tipping" point, but it is useful to think about how leading a double life can transition into a life of alienation. Catherine may, at first, find it easy to balance these two conflicting wholehearted practical identities between her family life and her new political views. If her interest in the latter continues to grow, she would find it harder and harder to keep it as separate as she wants it to be from her family life. As her framework expands and she takes on new responsibilities according to her new political views, her family life could suffer. It is not necessarily the doubleness of her behavior and attitudes, but that the conflict becomes one where the two wholehearted practical identities begin to undermine one another. Her political activities take her away from her family life, and her family life begins to ridicule her new beliefs. They are in contrast to one another in a way that trying to fulfill both is futile.

This is the crux of the conflict condition and what marks the disunity as specific to alienation. Wholehearted practical identities may come into minor conflicts with one another, but it is the cases where they begin to undermine one another that leaves the agent alienated. So far, we have just been looking at cases where the alienation is directed outward. Catherine is alienated from her family. This generates an interesting question: what determines the object of alienation? What I am going to argue is that the agent determines that object depending on what she conceives is maintaining the conflict between her wholehearted practical identities. In Catherine's case, she sees her family as maintaining the conflict. To see why this is the case, we need to dig deeper into some factors that are in orbit of the conflict condition.

3.3.3 Conflict & Resolution

One way of getting a better handle on the condition of conflict, and how it exactly maintains a tension within the agent, is to explore how alienation gets resolved. On a first read, the answer to what counts as resolution for alienation would appear easy. If alienation is a kind of disunity, then reunification would appear to be the obvious way in which an agent's alienation could resolve. However, a similar problem with this answer can be found in thinking that alienation is itself just a mere disunity. Alienation is a particular kind of disunity, and in that way, we might think of the resolution for alienation as a particular kind of reunification. Let us call this kind of reunification "ideal reunification." Looking at the example of Catherine, we might argue that the ideal reunification for her is one where her family's political views and her own do not interfere with one another such that she can pursue both wholehearted practical identities without one undermining the other. We can think of this kind of ideal reunification as the desired state of affairs that Catherine would have hoped for in the first place. She might have

known her family would not react well to her new political beliefs but would have hoped that they would display more understanding than what happened in the various examples described. Ideal reunification then is the tensionless balance of wholehearted practical identities that we normally engage in when pursing disparate projects that are meaningful to us.

The problem with ideal reunification is that it might seem at once both rare, but also not fitting to every case of alienation. For the issue of rareness, we might consider the resolution presented in the above examples as overly optimistic. Serious fissures between wholehearted practical identities in many alienation cases do not lend themselves to such solutions. Alienation is often times presented as a serious and unresolvable dilemma to the agent who is in it. Catherine is not alienated *just* because her parents are snippy at her political beliefs, but because they are actively hostile to those kinds of beliefs and undermine her attempts at expressing her newfound identity. These hurdles may only present practical hurdles, but these practical concerns can appear insurmountable to those that face them. Further, there might be instances where the ideal resolution is actually antithetical to resolving the alienation in the first place. Consider the identity condition again: there are times in which alienation is an occurrence precisely because the adoption of a new wholehearted practical identity signals a shift in the agent's overall identity and shifting values. The examples involving Catherine have been assuming that remaining as a family member is both desirable and core to her own identity. This is partially what makes the conflict so compelling. But, the existential risk of shifting identities is not just the arousal of external conflict, but also the internal struggle to consider what kind of person you want to be. In this light, it is unclear what is ideal about ideal resolution if the agent begins to think they should transform into something else by cutting off a wholehearted practical identity.

Where does this leave us? Here are three potential ways of resolving alienation: (1) Ideal (or Status Quo) reunification. The agent's conflict is resolved in such a way that they can pursue their wholehearted practical identities in a way where one does not undermine the other such as to not cause pain for the agent. (2) Burning Bridges Tour. The agent resolves her alienation by cutting off one of her wholehearted practical identities from her own cares and values. Note that this can take the form of someone "demoting" their wholehearted practical identity to just a normal practical identity. In shifting from one friend group to another, I might still maintain friendly contact with the older friend group while developing closer ties to the new friend group. This can help me avoid feeling alienated from my own life just by caring less about that old life. (3) Recontextualization. Here the agent recontextualizes their practical identities to find a balance between them. This can involve either an internal reframing of the wholehearted practical identities at issue or adopting a "meta" wholehearted practical identity that regulates the two. Remember that wholehearted practical identities are specific to how the agent conceives of them. Catherine is not just a "loving family member" but a loving family member in a specific sense to her own conception of what that means. Part of the disunity is certainly generated by this specific sense. A sense in which Catherine wants to be active in the political discussion her family has, to be seen and respected by her family, and to be treated in a certain kind of way. These are not petty nor egregious demands, but some of the tension might be reduced if Catherine changes the context in which sees herself as a family member. This is not the wholesale dropping of a wholehearted practical identity but a difference in how one approaches the wholehearted practical identity itself. Catherine can alter the way she sees her own commitment to her family in a way that reduces, if not entirely erases, the tension. Further, she might also take on a kind of higher commitment that regulates both her wholehearted practical

identities as a loving family member and as a political agent. Adopting a kind wholehearted practical identity that allows her to approach both with equanimity can also reduce the tension.

Resolving alienation is thus not just about reunification; it can also involve cutting off and recontextualization. What is the common element amongst these three paths? The particular kind of unity we are interested in is one that is absent the kind of tension of present in alienation cases. All three paths lead to a kind of transformation, even the one I have derisively labeled "status quo" reunification. In adopting new Wholehearted practical identities, we can either integrate, destroy, or recontextualize. All three are paths of altering our lives in such a way as to make room for development with a transformational element. Conflict, then, is the disruption of this transformational element.[19]

3.3.4 Failure to Be

The diachronic tension that makes up the conflict condition are the factors that artificially limit the agent's ability to transition and inhabit a newly formed wholehearted practical identity. There needs to be some care in distinguishing between normal conditions that make it hard to transition into a new identity and those specifically related to the conflict condition constitutive of alienation. If Catherine's only problem with transitioning into a new kind of political agent was money, as if her chosen political party required a monetary donation to join, then we might be hesitant to ascribe her frustration as alienating. In trying to integrate or

[19] A few quick codas on resolution: For one, none of the three paths presented are supposed to guarantee success. It is not as though every case of alienation has a unique solution such that if you were just to try and resolve a particular case of alienation that you would choose a particular path. The tricky aspect of Catherine's position is just that she has options, some better and some worse depending on her desired outcome. While I maintain that all cases of alienation involve a want by the agent to "return" to the object they are alienated from, this in itself does not restrict the possible space for resolution. That is an immediate problem, not the solution.

transition into any new wholehearted practical identity we are always going to be faced with some challenges or difficulties that make the change difficult. Becoming healthier requires sacrifices, but these sacrifices are not always alienating. Of course, Catherine's inability to transition into her new political identity because of a monetary gate might very well be alienating. If she thinks that a core part of herself is her frugality or if she is resentful of any institution that uses money as means of gatekeeping because of her particularly hard life growing up in poverty, then this very factor which we might at first dismiss as irrelevant to alienation could be become the very factor that drives a conflict of alienation within her. Hence the care needed. There is no class of inherently conflict oriented factors that are to be distinguished from irrelevant factors. The question becomes one of function: what kind of role does that factor play in the transformative process? The further difficulty is that sometimes this function is determined by the agent herself.

The problem that Catherine is having is that she wants to integrate her new political identity into her previous life. This process is being frustrated by her family's belligerence to her new political views. In a straightforward way, her transformation is disrupted both by her previous commitments and her family's hostility. They are both, in the context of this example, sustaining a tension within Catherine. Her commitment makes one path of resolution impossible (at least for the moment), and the hostility maintains the painful distance she experiences as the effect of being alienated. Both of these factors contribute to the tension.

Rahel Jaeggi argues that a significant part of alienation is the inability to live the life the way you want to lead it: "My claim is that we can become alien to ourselves, or our lives alien to us, when processes that take on a dynamic of their own or conditions of rigidification hinder us in understanding ourselves as agents in what we do (as the "subjects" of our actions and our

lives)." (51) Catherine has an inability to act as a subject in choosing how she wants to live her life; to actualize a new wholehearted practical identity. Alienation, including self-alienation, involves the failure to be. If you are understanding this in the same terms as Jaeggi, this failure is the lack of autonomous and free control over the direction your life is going. She states, "Insofar as freedom presupposes that one can make what one does, and the conditions under which one does it, one's own, overcoming alienation is a necessary condition of realizing freedom." (2) If we take this view, then we could modify the condition of conflict as those factors which inhibit your ability to transition into a new identity that uniquely deny your control over that transition. We could look at the variation of our main example with Catherine's monetary roadblock either as an instance where such a block only constitutes a hurdle that Catherine can exercise her own autonomy to overcome, or as a block that inhibits her own ability to transition in the way she wants to transition. There is still interpretative work, but in the latter case we can think that Catherine's background as preventing her from seeing that roadblock as anything else but a gatekeeping tactic meant to keep her out. In this case she would conceive of this roadblock as limiting her own autonomy in the sense that she cannot transition, or lead her life, in the way she wants to lead that life. But mere autonomy is only partially Jaeggi's point. To see why we need more, let us consider bare autonomy alone as resolving alienation. This sort of autonomy condition, from my perspective, is not all there is to alienation. That said, I think there is something correct about it. There is a unique frustration in trying to adopt new wholehearted practical identities but living in an uncooperative world. The problem is that sometimes this modifier gets in the way of understanding what the resolution to alienation is, and how exactly conflict disrupts that process.

The phrases "unity" and "wholeness" have some ambiguity about them. There is some sense in which the country of Canada is a unified whole, and there is a sense in which it is not. Catherine can be similarly considered unified, or as the case may be, disunified. Bare unity is ambiguous and is not a good guide for understanding how alienation is resolved. The problem is that adding an autonomy condition, that we be unified in a way such that it reflects how we want to lead our life, does not remove the ambiguity. Catherine's alienation is partially a result from a failure to be the kind of person she wants to be, but autonomy alone will not tell us what that kind of person is or should be. There are two general problems I want to bring to light. The first is an example adapted from Andrea Westlund's article "Selflessness and Responsibility for Self: Is Deference Compatible with Autonomy?" In that article, she presents an example of an agent who defers all of their responsibility to their partner. (486) In some sense, the agent is acting autonomously insofar as she is freely giving up her own decision making to another. But this is a troubling example because it seems as though she is not being responsibility to herself in choosing the life she wants to live. If we adapt this to Catherine's example, we might suppose that she could resolve her alienation by adhering to her family's wishes in a rigid way. The problem is that this appears to be jumping from one form of alienation to another.

The second problem is that the bare autonomy condition seems unhelpful in resolving the kind of disunity that is particular to alienation. If we think of the conflict as one where different wholehearted practical identities are undermining each other, then it appears as though autonomy is the root of the problem but not the solution. The issue in Catherine's case is that she is not able to live the life she wants to live, regardless of if this is due to internal factors or the contingencies of everyday life. Failure to be is an issue of having your autonomy restricted in

determining who you are.[20] But this does not give a solution. Just as restriction to one's autonomy is a root issue in the conflict issue, the trouble in deciding how to proceed is just as much of an issue. The alienation cases being examined are not ultimately unresolvable[21] as the agent always has the above three solutions available to them. What is maintaining the tension here is a form of indecisiveness in the agent, she wants to be both things and yet both undermine each other.

I do not think that bare autonomy is going to get us to a solution to alienation. What we need to add is some kind of that they are doing what they want to do. Part of the trouble, however, is that agent is deciding who they want to be.

Section 4 – Experiencing Alienation

In the first section, I wrote how alienation properly considered is not an emotional state. It might be associated with common core set of emotions – anxiety, depression, ennui, etc.- but it is not any one of these, nor a specific set of them either. However, it appears as though the most common examples of alienation appear to involve some kind of emotive, or at least experiential, element. The example involving Catherine is not tied to any specific emotion (or range of emotions), but it would be hard to actually imagine the example without seeing her act without some kind of emotion. She might be angry at her parents, depressed that her life choices are conflicting, or perhaps withdrawn in an attempt to preserve stability in her life. I earlier introduced the distinction between the "experience of" and "experience as" locutions involved in theories of alienation. The latter locution was meant to express the idea that alienation should

[20] Sometimes this is self-caused.
[21] Though some are built that way in the sense that the agent alone cannot resolve them, see **Chapter 2**.

be more properly thought of as something we "tag" on experiences. Catherines anger is not itself alienation, but it is an expression of alienation. She experiences her anger *as* a manifestation of alienation. While I reject the restrictions placed by the former locution (that alienation is an experience of a specific emotion or range of emotions), this still leaves open the possibility that alienation must have some kind of experiential component. In this section, I want to argue that while not every case of alienation has an occurrent experiential component, once the agent is aware of their own alienation then it is associated with an experience of pain.

As I mentioned earlier, you would be hard pressed to imagine a lot of common examples of alienation without an accompanying affective component. Some of this has to do with the nature of the example. Catherine is immediately confronted with the conditions of her alienation in the most obvious way. Her distance from her family is presented through emotionally painful experiences that highlight the very conflict and tension she harbors. Despite this, can we imagine a scenario in which we can refer to someone as alienated without the agent realizing they are alienated? To answer this question we need a new type of example, so for now let us consider the alienated suburbanite. We can imagine our alienated suburbanite as someone who is constantly trying to satisfy the norms of the dominant culture he is a part of when satisfying those norms are counter to other, deeper, desires he harbors. A decent representation of this kind of example can be found in the movie *Seconds*, where Arthur Hamilton, an aging upper-middle class banker, is offered the opportunity to inhabit a new bohemian lifestyle. The constraints of suburban America are presented as stifling. He is bored with his work, unsatisfied at home, and under a general malaise. When a secretive group offers him the chance to restart his life and become a well-respected artist with the face of Rock Hudson, Arthur jumps at the opportunity. While the denouement of Arthur's decision is interesting, it is the set up to the plot

that I want to use as the main example.[22] As an alienated suburbanite, it is unclear if Arthur would have perceived his life as alienating. Another example might be the too comfortable bureaucrat as seen in *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* or Akira Kurosawa's adaption of the novel *Ikiru*. Both versions of this character are seen to have lived pointless lives bound up in paperwork only to have a final awakening when confronted with their mortality.

Both of these kinds of examples point to a plausible view that an agent can be alienated without being consciously aware of their alienation. Their lives are stifling in some sense, either engaged in the upholding the restrictive norms of a dominant society or engaged in pointless tasks that distract from more important aspects of life. But, an agent forced into this position might adamantly deny that they are alienated. This would certainly be the case of Ivan Ilyich before his illness. This does not mean they are living meaningful lives, or happy lives for the matter, but only that the relative comfort afforded to them is enough to distract them from their own alienation. Perhaps it is also possible to extend the pool of examples of cases where institutions repress an agent's ability to recognize their own alienation. There might also be cases where an agent is just blind to their own condition. You can imagine someone clinging onto a friend group that is shifting away from them without consciously recognizing that they are undergoing a process of alienation. In all the scenarios presented there still would have to be some kind of distance created, and thus some kind of negative effects directed toward the agent. Arthur is depressed, Ivan is unsatisfied, and our most recent agent is lonely. The key is that none

[22] Though, the movie does go on to explore some of the dynamics of alienation that I was engaging with in the previous sections. Arthur's new life is luxurious and freeing in a way that he finds exciting, but also stifling in its own right. Arthur eventually misses the safety and comfort of his old life and even tries to return back to his original home. While his new look makes that impossible, it does speak to the inner conflict that many people face in battling against dominant norms. There is safety and security in complacency, and going against dominant norms can be ostracizing. This is the tension between familiarity and expression that cements the conflict in alienation cases like this.

of them would be experiencing these as an effect of alienation. The alienated suburbanite, for example, would probably see his depression as symptomatic of something else altogether.

I think examples like the ones I just presented are possible, but I am not sure how far we can extend them. In other words, it is a tricky thing to ascribe alienation to someone who according to all outward appearances does not seem alienated. Some suburbanites are happy being suburbanites just as some bureaucrats are happy being bureaucrats. What I would argue is that while not all instances of alienation are seen by the agent herself *as* alienation, there must be other experiential indicators of alienation having to do with the distance condition that the agent could come see as experiences of alienation. What helps this argument is that I think there is a divide between living a kind of lifestyle that is particularly susceptible to alienation, and actually being alienated. The Ivan Ilyich example is emblematic of this divide. It is unclear, and unlikely, if Ivan was indeed alienated before his unfortunate turn. Ivan's lifestyle was comfortable and he was comfortable living in it. We could say, however, that his lifestyle was particularly prone to inducing alienation. It was one in which things must remain static in a particular kind of way for him never to reflect on what matters most in life. It lead him to neglect his own well-being in an intellectual and productive sense. Before his fall, Ivan was merely susceptible to alienation, but after his brush with mortality he begins to question his life choices. At first he is adamant that he did nothing wrong as he is head strong in his assumption that the life he lead was the right one. It is this state that I think we can say that while Ivan has no occurrent alienating experiential component (insofar as he conceives of his suffering and questioning as alienating), he is in fact alienated. It is here that he begins to question his life choices and see his projects as discontinuous with what really matters.[23] We might see the same pattern in the alienated

[23] Kurosawa's *Ikiru* is a better version to tell if I wanted to present the story explicitly in terms of my own conditions of alienation. In his adaptation, Kanji (Ivan) realizes the futility of his life's work and then tries to

suburbanite. Someone who is at first happy following the norms of the dominant culture before starting to feel the effects of the distance condition once his familiar life no longer matches either a new wholehearted practical identity or a wholehearted practical identity that never conflicted with his suburban lifestyle until some kind of change occurred. At first the suburbanite might just feel that something is missing but not see this as alienation. It is only after many attempts to satisfy some gnawing feeling that they must recognize their own alienated state.

The last point I want to argue for is that the conscious experience of alienation is one of pain or suffering. This point speaks to an issue that should be clear in my use of the two examples in the above paragraph: it is the effects of alienation via the distance condition that leads to a moment of awareness (or awakening) for the alienated agent to their own alienation. I partly described the distance condition as concerning the "consequences of alienation" and if the experience of alienation amounts to much, it is through these consequences that we experience something as alienating. While this is an integral point about experiencing something as alienating, pain itself is not the core feature of alienation.

Section 5 – The Paradox of Self-Alienation

We have established so far that alienation is a certain kind of disunity among disparate wholehearted practical identities where the conflict between them maintains a tension within the agent such that they are unable to transition into a new kind of identity and mutually undermine

discover what life would have or could have given him meaning. He tries to carouse and spend money before ultimately devoting his final days to help fund a park in a local neighborhood. His experiments in different lifestyles suggests someone who is trying to adopt new Wholehearted practical identities and search for the kind of coherency and unity I have been advocating for.

each other. I am considering standard cases of alienation to be cases where the condition of distance establishes a relation between a self and some kind of external object (object' considered loosely). Catherine is alienated from her family, just as Travis Bickle is alienated from society or how I can be alienated from my home country. The common thread in standard cases of alienation is an alienation from something that is external to you, be it social structures, people, places, etc. However, a seemingly common form of alienation, or at least a common way of expressing feelings of alienation, is self-alienation. Here the self and the object are one in the same. This should lead to a rather straightforward reading of self-alienation: a subject is alienated from herself when she is the object of her own alienation. But this description might appear self-defeating. How can I be alienated from myself?

The issue can be easily seen from the perspective of the defining characteristics I have been putting forward. What does it mean to be distant from ourselves? What does it mean not to identify with ourselves? And what does it mean to be in conflict with ourselves in such a way that we undermine ourselves? It can seem like answering these questions leads to a certain kind of absurdity. If there is a subject that is distant from something else, then that relation is partially instantiated by the fact that there is a kind literal separation between subject and object. If I feel distant from myself, then from what perspective can I judge that distance? It appears as a tale of two selves. One in which we are distant from, and one in which we inhabit to judge that distance. The language is tricky because it sounds circular, and this is the paradox of self-alienation. How can the self separate from itself such as to see itself as alienated from itself?

One way to look at the paradox is through the lens of Constitutivism and its opponents. Constitutivism is the meta-ethical view that we can derive substantial moral norms from the simple premise that we are constitutively agents. By analyzing what agency is and what it means

to be agents, we can (hopefully) ground universal norms of action. A common analogy in the literature is to compare human agency to something like house building. There are norms of "good" house building, but those norms are grounded in what is constitutive of the activity of house building such that one must follow those constitutive principles to be even considered engaging in that activity. For example, if someone purports to be building you a new home but instead constructs a large black obelisk, then you might say that the builder was never really engaged in the activity of house building at all. In order to do so, they must be constructing a structure with walls, a roof, and something basically habitable. There are going to be better and worse versions of that activity, but the constitutive foundation is there. We might also say something similar about agency. Agents must be rational, means-ends directed, susceptible to reasons, etc. And, of course, within this structure there are better and worse ways of being an agent that are determined by what it means to be an agent. The constitutivist move, so to speak, is to say that not only are we agents, but that we are constitutively agents. We cannot be anything else, and as such, we can ground substantial moral norms from this fact because we all have the same constitutive structure that determines what is to be better or worse agents. Part of the project is to suggest that in some sense all rational agents *care* about being good agents.

One argument against Constitutivism comes from David Enoch who argues that "being a good agent" is actually a contingent fact of being a human that we can opt of. We could be, or so he argues, a "shmagent." A person who acts and behaves like an agent but is not indebted to the norms of being a good agent or even an agent at all. The shmagent is merely someone who rejects the principle boundaries of agency as something to care about. In one sense this debate fits into the meta-ethical issue of framing a moral theory such that it is both universal and authoritative. Constitutivists answer both issues by appealing to the fact that everyone is an agent

and in virtue of being an agent they must find the norms of agency compelling. The shmagent is a counterexample to the latter solution as the shmagent hypothetically would not care about the authority of agency.[24] We may all have the power to be agents, but we do not have to be agents.

The response to this objection, from the constitutivist, is to reaffirm the "inescapability" of agency. The shmagent can only exist if agency is a framework among many that we can operate under. This would be to treat agency as if it were any other given moral framework. We might find Kantianism compelling, but many do not find it authoritatively compelling to the degree that we feel we *must* be good Kantians. A given person can easily decide to ignore the categorical imperative for any number of alternative moral options. The constitutivist point is to deny that this same openness is applicable to agency. Any moral theory requires the structure of action, desire, and reasons to build anything out of. These features are not contingent to agency, but necessary features of it, and moreover, exclusive to it. The shmagent, in this case, would then be attempting to undermine their own agency with the only tools available to them: the very tools of agency itself.

This relates to the paradox of self-alienation in that there seems to be a kind of absurdity in using our own agential powers to undermine ourselves. Say that I have two wholehearted practical identities that come into conflict with one another. For it to be self-alienation, under my view at least, the conflict between these two wholehearted practical identities are in some sense sustained by my own volition. I am preventing myself from transitioning into a new kind of identity. It is true that sometimes identities are forced upon us. We might have to take on roles that we see as inauthentic to our own personal interests, but note how those examples

[24] There are actually two different versions of the shmagency objection that Enoch presents. The first is rejection that everyone *has* to be an agent, while the second is that everyone has to *care* about agency. I am focusing on the first version of the objection here and will focus on the second version in a later chapter.

always involve the influence of others. For self-alienation to be self-alienation, there needs to be a sense in which the self is what maintains the conflict against itself. We might try and make sense of it this way: Catherine undertakes the wholehearted personal identity as a certain kind of political agent. This wholehearted practical identity is at odds with another such that she becomes distant from herself. Maybe she decided to become a certain kind of political agent without really thinking through the consequences of it and finds herself in the position of trying to organize her life around it in a way that is inconvenient. The problem is that it is unclear why she would maintain the tension at all, and moreover, feel alienated from herself.

To further this issue, the other part of the conflict condition is one of mutually undermining of wholehearted practical identities. Part of the reason that I brought up the theory of Constitutivism, and its discontents, is to illustrate a theory that would not allow for agents to undermine themselves. A little care is needed here. We can easily imagine cases with agents who self-implode through a series of bad decisions. In some sense, we all undermine ourselves constantly (or at least speaking for myself). The inescapability argument is not arguing against bad agents, but it is arguing against the possibility that we can intentionally undermine our own agency in the way that Enoch might want. We cannot act against our own agency using the tools of agency. In the same vein, self-alienation appears to suggest that we can undermine our own selves using the powers of the self. This is also similar to some akrasia cases. Can we knowingly engage in self-alienation? Can we maintain a tension within ourselves that undermine ourselves?

It is the unclarity that determines the paradox of self-alienation. And yet, self-alienation is not an unheard-of concept, nor unfamiliar. Many of the examples I have used from literature are cited as examples of self-alienation. Gregor Samsa appears not just alienated from the working world, but he also appears alienated from himself as a person in so far as he cannot

even see his own mutated condition as something to be anxious about over and above his anxiety about making it to work on time. The following chapters will take a look at "solutions" to this paradox and attempt to give a satisfactory account of how self-alienation can be possible at all.

Chapter 2 – Weak Self-Alienation

Introduction

In the last chapter, I covered the three conditions of alienation that I argue are necessary for any state to be described as alienation. Further, I also explained the supposed "paradox" of self-alienation and what makes such a state so concerning. It appears as though an agent cannot intentionally engage in a self-undermining process. However, cases of self-alienation do not seem far-fetched nor are they absent from the philosophical literature in numerous fields. In this chapter, I want to begin by looking at the various attempts to get around this paradox of self-alienation. The first step is to fill out the conflict condition more thoroughly. The dimensions to the conflict condition is more complex than what I initially presented it as. What maintains or perpetuates the conflict is still fuzzy. I will introduce a distinction between *internal* and *external* drivers of conflict. The former can be described as an "internal dilemma" that the agent faces and feels paralyzed by, while I will describe the latter as "external antagonists" where the processes of transition is interrupted by an external agent. While I will first present this distinction as fundamental, I will also question if this distinction tracks anything real. My ultimate conclusion is that while this distinction can be muddied when looking at specific cases from an objective point of view, the distinction matters to the agent who is in an alienated state. Further, the distinction also tracks an important way in which the paradox of self-alienation is "solved."[25]

[25] I should note that none of the thinkers presented in this chapter would say that they are setting out to solve the paradox of self-alienation. As noted in **Chapter 1**, the paradox itself is mainly regarded by theorists who work on alienation as a paradox. That said, thinkers like Marx are used as common examples of those who present a view of self-alienation that attempts to solve that paradox. (citation needed?)

In the second section, I will present a series of views on self-alienation that side-step the paradox of self-alienation. Using Frankfurt as a starting point, and ending with the views of Marx and Franz Fanon, I will show how some theories of self-alienation rely on the self as an "external antagonist" to explain self-alienation. I begin with Frankfurt's infamous unwilling addict case to present a view of the self as divided. The notion of externality is introduced as a way of speaking about parts of ourselves that are not really parts of ourselves. As Frankfurt states: "There is in fact a legitimate and interesting sense in which a person may experience a passion that is external to him, and that is strictly attributable neither to him nor anyone else." (*Necessity* 64) This creates a situation where certain cases of self-alienation might be thought of as instances where externalized bits of ourselves fulfill the role of an external antagonist. However, the role that mere externality plays in the explanation of self-alienation must be expanded beyond Frankfurt. Part of my argument in the second section is to show that extreme externality, such as in the quote presented, cannot be a real aspect of self-alienation. The agent must still identify themselves in some capacity with this external antagonist.

Marx and Fanon also have views of self-alienation that are reliant on external antagonists, although their external antagonist come from larger social institutions like crippling economic conditions or the conditions of colonialism (respectively). But, just explaining self-alienation in terms of these oppressive conditions is not enough. I argue that the self-alienation present in both cases involve these oppressive conditions making a mockery of the individual. They twist the self into something that it does not want to be; that is against its own nature. Its bondage produces a self that is at once identifiable to the agent as themselves, but also one that constricts the agent's ability to achieve some other form of itself. This explanation of self-alienation is still, however, reliant on an external antagonist that is forcing the agent to split

themselves. The undermining is not done by the agent themselves but done by this external antagonist.

This way of solving the self-alienation paradox involves what will call an "othering" process. The idea being that either in creating a part of the self that acts as an external antagonist or an external antagonist that diminishes the self to the point that is becomes unrecognizable, the self undergoes an othering process whereby the agent sees part of themselves as an other. While this shares some similarities with Sartre's view, I want this formulation to remain largely independent. Regardless, this process solves the paradox by having the self to self undermining be recontextualized as an externalized self undermining the "true" self. As I note at the end of this chapter, while I think this is a legitimate form of self-alienation, it is a form that produces what I will call "weak" self-alienation. These solutions side-step the paradox of self-alienation without confronting the possibility that there is a stronger form of self-alienation where the self truly undermines the self.

Section 1 – Externality & Weak Self Alienation

The examples of alienation that were covered in the last chapter were intentionally limited to the most general kinds of cases. These general cases are, I would argue, some of the most familiar forms of alienation. As life moves forward, we lose touch with many different kinds of projects, passions, and people that were once wholeheartedly important to us. In losing touch, we may find ourselves in a position of alienation. But, within these most general forms of cases, it is worth detailing a taxonomy of different kinds of alienation cases to see what they reveal about our topic. One distinction that I have been skirting around has to do with the condition of "conflict." One missing element from my discussion of conflict was giving a full

explanation of what it means to maintain the tension of alienation. In this section, I want to introduce a divide between cases where the agent herself is the driver of conflict (internal) and cases where there is some kind of antagonist that drives the conflict (external). This distinction maps onto a common divide within the alienation literature, that of existential (internal) and social (external) alienation. In **1.1** I talk about the distinction between internal and external forms of conflict, and how these forms map onto other theories of alienation. In **1.2** I will consider whether or not this distinction maps onto anything real.

1.1 Internal V. External Conflict

Let us examine Catherine's case in a bit more detail and create two alternate scenarios. In the first scenario, Catherine seethes at every family function but her family is unaware of her discontent. Her alienation is her own private world. In the second scenario we can imagine Catherine's family makes her feel unwelcome at every family function, constantly reminding her that her own political views are constitutively misaligned with that of her family's. Both cases, broadly, fit within the three conditions of alienation and are part of the same example, but we can see that both scenarios would play out differently. In the first, we have an agent who has secluded herself solely through her own will. This is a scenario of an agent coming to a realization when those around her have not and fit into similar archetypes where someone begins to feel as though they are play-acting.[26] An agent may not agree with the gender norms

[26] This is a kind of answer to Jaeggi's question "…why are we sometimes tempted to say that we are not really ourselves in a particular role or that we do not feel "at home" but are instead alienated from ourselves in situations where role behavior is called for?" (69) at the beginning of her chapter on the loss authenticity. Her aim in this chapter is mainly to talk about a "total" kind of alienation, or the feeling that are entire lives are a kind of play-acting where we inhabit different and artificial roles. But, a more familiar sense of this kind of alienation is when we feel like we are suppressing our true selves in order to fulfill a different kind of role. For example, I have to pretend to be religious at church, and in that pretending I feel false. This is a slightly more

that their society places on them, but still does not want to be considered an outsider among their family members who they still love. In accepting those gender norms, they may feel "false." Similarly, we can say of Catherine in this example that she is putting on an act when she goes to family functions, keeping quiet when the conversations turn political and perhaps even hiding her own view. In the second scenario, we can see a more immediately hostile circumstance. Catherine's family, in discovering her divergent political views, makes her life more uncomfortable by constantly pointing out her failings in regards to their own political alignment. This is not unlike the traveler who is intentionally made to feel unwelcome. In this case, Catherine is not simmering in internal dread, but rather the alienation is forced upon her in some sense.

These two scenarios map onto a commonly discussed division in the alienation literature: that between "existential" alienation and that of "social" alienation. Julius Sensat gives us a good basis for understanding this distinction: "…one can distinguish a concept of what might be called social estrangement—whereby agents unwittingly construct an alien social world—from one of 'existential estrangement'—whereby agents live individual lives that are their own but are nonetheless inauthentic or alien." (4) The latter type of case involves an internal withdrawing from society as opposed to instances, in the former case, where society itself alienates you from it. Another way to put the distinction is that for the existentialist the social world itself is always a condition of alienation, whereas for the theorists of the latter type it is only a dysfunctional society that purposively alienates its subjects.[27] While there are issues with this distinction (and as

complicated example in that Catherine really does love her family, but what she loves becomes an odd exercise when she also has to suppress another side of her that she also cares about.

[27] This distinction is usually made when talking about the history of alienation. Rahel Jaeggi talks about the divide between social theories of alienation, as it relates to Rousseau, Hegel, Marx, Foucault (and later thinkers as well, like Fromm), and existentialist thinkers like Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre. (6-10) This distinction is not always sharp, as in the case of Rousseau who combines existential elements like authenticity with social

we shall see, there is reason to think that the distinction itself collapses), I want to use this as a starting point for thinking about how conflict is conceived in a variety of alienation cases. For the two Catherines in alternate scenarios, how the conflict is being perpetuated appears experientially different. In the first scenario, she appears to be the main driver of the conflict in the sense that it is her own obsession with her family's differing political views and her worry that this is indicative of an unbridgeable divide that perpetuates her own alienation. In fact, many of the effects related to the "distance" condition are going to be informed by this internal, and existential, form of conflict. She will appear to herself as an outsider, but more so, as a play-actor or as disingenuous to her own beliefs. Contrast this to the likely effects of distance in the second scenario: ostracization, humiliation, and shame are likely candidates for negative effects when it is something external to the agent that is perpetuating the conflict.[28]

The way I want to cache out this distinction further is by suggesting that the kinds of conflict possible in alienation cases come down to whether or not the conflict is perpetuated by an "internal dilemma" or an "external antagonist." To explain the difference, we need to do so without losing sight of the idea that alienation is a disunity between wholehearted practical identities. In some sense, all cases of alienation are internal to a broader degree in that they constitutively involve a conflict within the agent herself. That said, the idea that is relevant here is not the disunity itself, but how the conflict is maintained. In the previous chapter I discussed the condition of conflict as the driving force of alienation. To keep with the metaphorical

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elements. (6) But, Jaeggi sets up a comparative model of her alienation critique by examining the different approaches taken by Marx and Heidegger. Ultimately, alienation and self-alienation, for Jaeggi, are going to be about both authenticity and the ways in which society can corrupt our ability to pursue authenticity, but historically there is some argument over which takes precedence.

[28] These are still not rigid categories of effects. An agent who is undergoing an internal dilemma may yet still feel shame even if the object of their alienation is not actively shaming them. Similarly, social alienation can also produce feelings of play-acting. These are more like stereotypes rather than natural kinds.

language, the current distinction is about what is pushing the gas pedal down. Cases where there is an internal dilemma focuses on the agent as someone who recognizes the conflict and is the one active in maintaining the conflict. Catherine, if she is the only one who recognizes the disunity, keeps the alienation alive by becoming increasingly frustrated by the disunity. *She* cannot let it go; either her life as a person with a set of political values or as a member of her family. In external antagonist cases, the agent is the one who is being pushed away. Catherine, if her family consistently ridicules her for her own political beliefs, is being cast as an outsider.

One issue with external antagonist cases that should be apparent is what exactly the disunity amounts to. If we take a simplified Marxist case, it might seem odd to say that the agent has an issue with dueling wholehearted practical identities at all. I will expand on this issue further, but for now it would be helpful to consider the alienated suburbanite again. This agent's conflict is being driven by an external antagonist insofar as their alienation is a kind of social alienation. It is the stifling nature of the rigid demands placed on them by the dominant culture that appears to be generating a kind of disunity. But what is this disunity exactly? A tempting answer might be to say that they are alienated from their own suburban culture. This, however, would run into similar problems with the Marxist case. Can we really say that the agents in those cases are alienated *from* capitalism? I think not. A better answer would be to say that the agent's wholehearted practical identity that is disunified from another is not determined by the external antagonist itself in all (if not most) cases.[29] The conflict present in the alienated suburbanite is one more of a wholehearted practical identity of security and comfort against a wholehearted practical identity that is concerning the kind of freedom an agent may desire. Adhering to the

[29] This is a little tricky, because I think that interpersonal cases of external antagonists (such as those involving former lovers and friends) do appear this way. My former lover was my wholehearted practical identity to a certain extent. While I think these cases are common, I also tend to think that cases of social alienation better fit the literature on alienation.

social context one is in can determine an identity in the sense of shaping a self to accept the benefits of adherence. Event to want that adherence badly. The point is that we can still locate a conflict within the agent that is distinct from that which drives the conflict. I would also argue that this is also the case in internal dilemma examples.

How useful is this distinction? For one, it helps us make sense of cases of alienation that involve social norms or economic systems. A Marxist view of alienation[30] suggests that alienation occurs when a worker is disconnected from their own labor: "The fact simply means that the object labor produces, its product, stands opposed to it as something alien, as a power independent of its producer." (Marx 324) Part of what makes humans human is their ability to freely transform nature for their own personal use. Capitalism denies the worker this process of transformation and instead forces the worker to use their labor for someone else's end. Distressingly, this further denies the worker the ability to express their fundamental creative impulses, shunts their autonomy, and subjugates them to the will of profit. Regardless of your views on Marxism, it is hard to categorize this form of alienation as one in which the agent herself is perpetuating. There is an external antagonist driving the conflict, and without the machinations of this external antagonist, there would not be any alienation. It should be mentioned that these kinds of cases are not just cases of oppression.[31] There is still a disunity in her manufactured by the conditions the agent finds herself in. The agent both has a desire to

[30] It might appear a bit disingenuous of me to regard this as merely alienation when a more accurate reading of Marx would call this view one of self-alienation. For now, I just want to set up the distinction, I will cover Marx's theory as one of self-alienation in a later section.

[31] See Richard Schmitt: "Those who experience oppression, deprivation, or great losses feel pain and bitterness but often recover from their intense suffering and emerge into a more serene state of mind with their powers enhanced and their understanding sharpened. They are alienated only if bitterness corrodes their souls so that they give up living their lives thoughtfully, just taking what comes, with few complaints and little joy." (IX) Here, Schmitt is trying to underscore that unhappiness itself is not a condition of alienation, as though who are unhappy are not necessarily alienated. I made a similar point in **Chapter 1** when I talked about the affective side of alienation.

survive in this world while they also have the desire for the ability to exercise their labor the way they see fit.[32] Thus, this disunity and the conflict is maintained because something is preventing them from becoming unified. This is similar to Catherine's case, there is a possibility that she is fine with her parents' political differences but is constantly pushed away from family functions despite this.

As for the other side, "internal dilemma" cases better capture instances where the agent's own growing existential frustration perpetuates the conflict. Antoine Roquentin in Sartre's *Nausea* is a good example of this, and I think it captures the existential side of alienation well. *Nausea* is presented as Antoine's diary that details his descent into existential anguish. We see him slowly obliterate his connections to the world as he obsess over the condition of his existence, and this physically manifests itself as a kind of nausea. Later on in his diary, Antoine writes

> "My thought is me: that's why I can't stop. I exist because I think ... and I can't stop myself from thinking. At this very moment—it's frightful—if I exist, it is because I am horrified at existing. I am the one who pulls myself from the nothingness to which I aspire: the hatred, the disgust of existing, there are as many ways to make myself exist, to thrust myself into existence." (99)

Antoine's anguish is perpetuated by his inability to stop thinking. His alienation is not one that is forced upon him but driven by him. Again, we can look at Catherine's case: inverse to the above formulation, Catherine's family may be fine with her political differences but she may find the gulf troubling. If her political values are entrenched in the right kind of way she may find the

[32] This is not a criticism of Marxist theory, so I am going to leave it up to the reader to see how plausible they find this theory. The main tension I have with Marxism is how much it delineates an essentialist view of human nature and how much that comes up against my view that wholehearted practical identities are more malleable than that. Basically, I am concerned with the claim that everyone under a Capitalist system must necessarily be alienated. It seems to me that someone could wholeheartedly endorse being a worker and conceive of themselves happily as a cog in a machine. Should they do this? No. But I am suspicious of any claim that points to a given social structure and suggests that everyone must be alienated under it. To be clear, I also hold the same suspicions for more existentialist theories as well.

idea of even associating with people outside of her political spectrum repellent. To keep with the *Nausea* theme, she may even find herself disgusted by her family even as she desperately tries to maintain relations with them. She cannot give up one life for the other and her own existential morass deepens her alienation. She will feel withdrawn and unable to express herself, as she is paralyzed by the different choices in front of her. Which wholehearted practical identity to suppress, identify with, or drop? This is the dilemma that she faces.

To sum, external conflicts are those driven by what I have called "external antagonists" while internal conflicts are those driven by the agent herself. External antagonists can be anything from person to larger social institutions. In these kinds of cases, these objects perpetuate the conflict by driving the agent away. To a certain extent, we can also think of this category of alienation as more susceptible to the contingencies of the world. Social alienation can just be a byproduct of the time and place in which you live rather than a deliberate choice that you have made. Internal dilemmas, on the other hand, are agent driven. They are products of the agonizing thoughts that an agent can be wrapped up in by trying to decide between two wholehearted identities. As stated earlier, what drives the conflict in both cases is different from the actual disunity itself. In both kinds of cases, the wholehearted practical identities are in conflict, but what is perpetuating that conflict is still a distinct entity.

1.2 Is This Distinction Real?

The distinction between internal dilemma cases and external antagonist cases I think helpfully sorts out different kinds of alienation cases, but it is worth asking if this distinction is tracking something real. While there may be clear cases where the conflicts are being perpetuated by either the agent or an external antagonist, a lot of cases are not so clear. To see that, we just

need to go back to the original example involving Catherine. There is a lot of uncertainty as to what is perpetuating the conflict. Her family pointedly brings up politics, but she is also committed to her own views. It seems like we can come up with a lot of "mixed" cases like this. If I am alienated from a friend group, it might just be that the conflict present is partially perpetuated both by my other commitments and their inflexibility in meeting my time constraints. Can we extend this to all cases of alienation? Maybe. The existentialist commitment to an agent removing themselves from society, or seeing themselves as removed from society, is partially constituted by the pettiness, frivolity, and sensuousness of the society around them. Perhaps more controversially, we can also see an internal dilemma contained within Marxist cases. Safety and security are understandable goods to have in life; if an agent sees themselves as a kind of provider, then they might have to submit themselves to conditions antithetical to their very nature. They may rightly agonize over the decision to pursue their own good over and above providing for their family.[33]

I do not think there is a real distinction to be made here if your criteria is to produce conceptually sharp categories. This also tracks the literature on alienation: Marx incorporates existential elements within his view of alienation just as much as existentialist notions incorporate elements from social alienation. Rather, I think the importance of this distinction comes in two flavors: First, I think the distinction matters to the agent who is alienated in that experientially it differs. For example, in instances where alienation is not recognized as such, or the agent herself is unaware of her own alienation, I think that these cases are only possible because an external antagonist can be the main perpetuator of that alienation. Experientially, if the agent becomes aware of their alienation, they will not see it as an internal dilemma, but

[33] Again, this is a simplified Marxist case.

something holding them back. The same could be said of internal dilemma examples. The agent is experiencing their internal dilemma as alienating. Even if Catherine's family is not being supportive of her new political beliefs, if her focus is solely on her own agony over the choice of which wholehearted identity to foster, then her experience will be colored by that agony. The main point is that while we there is a muddied status to any given alienation case from an outsider's perspective as to whether or not the conflict is "truly" being driven by an external antagonist or an internal dilemma, the way in which the agent conceives of their own alienated status can mean a lot more. While I stand by my argument that alienation is not necessarily experiential, this is an example of which the experience says something important about the flavor of alienation in question.

Second, the distinction matters in looking at theories of alienation because there is a trend in the alienation literature to explain cases of self-alienation that ascribe the process of self-alienation in terms of an "othering" process. This process, as I will argue, functions to treat the self as a kind of external antagonist. It is these kinds of cases that I think most naturally fit into the category presented. My argument, as explicated in the next section, relies on this distinction to help the reader understand the nature of the types of examples that are used to illustrate self-alienation. Even if in the abstract this distinction is only useful in marking these kinds of cases from others, it still says something important about how self-alienation is seen by other theorists. Further, my own view on self-alienation will rely on features unique to internal dilemma cases. Perhaps I could have delineated three categories: External Antagonists, Internal Dilemmas, and Mixed. The last category might be the most common to ground level everyday type alienation cases, but for the specific interest of severe self-alienation, the other two categories would reign. I am not particularly committed to saying that there are three categories or two, as my main

concern is establishing at least two distinct kinds of alienation cases that have importance for our understanding of self-alienation cases.

Self-alienation presents itself as a paradox because it both leaves undetermined who is alienated from what and true self-undermining appears hard to swallow. Treating part of the self as external to the self, as if to delineate a "true" self from a false one, would solve part of this paradox. I am not alienated from myself, per se, but alienated from something external to me. Further, it is not *I* who is doing the undermining (or vice versa), but an external, and alien, aspect that is contributing to this undermining process. In terms of resolving the paradox, treating this externalized part of the self as an antagonist works well. But, I think there are some limitations. While I will cover this in more detail in the next section, there are a few details to consider now. For one, this resolution to the paradox feels like sidestepping the issue altogether. Interest in self-alienation is in trying to confront the paradox head on. Treating part of the self as an external antagonist is just to ignore the paradox itself. How can I be alienated from myself? How can I undermine myself? These are questions that are both difficult to find an answer to, and yet the phenomenon that borne these two questions feels familiar. They go beyond just externalized desires, emotions, and antagonists.

Section 2 – Self Antagonists

In this section I want to establish that some ways of describing self-alienation rely on the external antagonist model I described in the previous section. In the first part of this chapter, I will cover Frankfurt's unwilling addict case and the notion that externality is a key factor in the alienation present. While I will question whether or not externality alone can be a condition of alienation (and self-alienation), I will argue that externality does provide a basis for an "othering"

process that the self goes through to separate out a part of itself that it no longer identifies with. The unwilling addict, under this framework, "others" the urge and behavior to use drugs. This externalization process does result in a kind of self-alienation, but one where the self is undermined by a vestigial practical identity that it disavows. It essentially turns that part of the self into an external antagonist. I will also consider how this othering process relates to Sartre's view. There are similarities between my usage and Sartre's, but the important distinction is that my othering process does not require the "gaze of the other."

In the second part of this chapter, I will turn to the works of Marx and Franz Fanon as examples of external antagonist cases involving oppression. Section **2.3** will present these two thinkers as expounding a view of self-alienation that requires that agents have essential qualities that are undermined by oppressive structures. The inability for agents to pursue these essential qualities turns the agent into a cruel mockery of an agent. One where the agent undermines their own interests due to oppressive forces, either that of capitalism or colonialism. These kinds of cases more easily fall into the category of "external antagonist" types of alienation, but it is worth exploring how that is exactly. The self-alienation present is not one where the self actively and intentionally chooses to undermine itself, but one where the absence or suppression of some essential quality forces it into undermining itself. The wholehearted practical identities that conflict are often ones between safety and security and the expression of that essential quality.

Finally, in the last two sections (**2.4.1** and **2.4.2**) I will argue that these kinds of external antagonist cases amount to a kind of "weak" self-alienation. Both involve a kind of othering process where the self does not truly identify with a feature of itself that it is conflicted with. The problem with weak self-alienation cases is not that they are not "true" instances of self-alienation, but that they do not confront the paradox directly, only obliquely. It is here that I first

start to outline what a possible case of "strong" self-alienation might be. In **2.4.2**, I briefly discuss possible resolutions to weak self-alienation cases.

2.1 Fractured Selves

Let us return to Frankfurt. The paradoxical nature of self-alienation has to do with locating the source of the alienation. Who is alienated from what? To solve this paradox, we might look to a Frankfurtian type of example: the unwilling addict. An agent who is addicted to drugs finds themselves in the position of taking those drugs despite the fact that they do not endorse their behavior. For Frankfurt, this is all explained through first and second order desires. A first-order desire constitutes an agent's will in so far as it motivates him to act. We can have many first-order desires competing to become a volition, or that which moves us and constitutes our will, but first order desires alone do not explain the natures of self-reflexive agents. A second-order desire is the agent's ability to reflect on the kinds of desires they would like to have. This is the capacity to care about what moves us and separates us from the wanton who is moved merely by what inclines them more at any given moment. (*Importance* 15-18) The unwilling addict, in this case, is an agent who has two first order desires in conflict with one another: one to take the drugs and one to refrain from taking the drugs. What makes this an example of an *unwilling* addict is that the agent has a second order desire for the latter first order desire to be effective. Crudely, we can say that despite their wish to be able to control their behavior, they still have a clear want to engage in that behavior. As explained by Frankfurt: "The unwilling addict identifies himself, however, through the formation of a second-order volition, with one rather than with the other of his conflicting first-order desires. He makes one of them more truly his own and, in so doing, he withdraws himself from the other" (ibid. 18) The key is

that the unwilling addict *identifies* themselves with this second order volition. That creates an experience of externality when the unwilling addict "succumbs" to their baser desires and takes the drug.[34] If we were going to apply this kind of example to self-alienation, we might suggest that self-alienation occurs when a part of yourself is externalized to such a degree that the wholehearted practical identities associated with that externalized self interfere with newer wholehearted practical identities. The unwilling drug addict used to endorse their behavior and in doing so created an identity around that behavior, but in wanting to move on they are now in a case where their transformation is blocked by this "old" self that is now externalized.

This raises a host of questions. For one, is it possible to have a wholehearted practical identity that is externalized in such a way that the agent no longer identifies with it? Frankfurt mainly talks about externalized passions, defining them as when "passions are external to us just when we prefer not to have them, or when we prefer not to be moved by them…" (63) Wholehearted practical identities do not seem to fit this mold as the modifier "wholehearted" appears as though it requires identification.[35] As strange as it might seem at first, I believe that the answer is yes. This is apparent in cases where an agent is undergoing an identity shift but is having a hard time separating from their old identity. Here, we might call an "identity" a collection of wholehearted practical identities organized around some self-conceptualization.[36] Someone who wants to portray themselves as studious will try and adopt wholehearted practical identities that fit under that general description: hard working, a bibliophile, attentive in class, etc.

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[34] Contrast this with cases where an agent wholeheartedly endorses satisfying their appetite. It is still a base desire, but they gleefully enjoy their meal without any experience of externality, much less alienation.
[35] In borrowing the term (partially) from Frankfurt, it is hard to separate the two. His essay "Identification and Wholeheartedness" marries the two functions. (163)
[36] We might think of this in terms of differing levels or layers of wholehearted practical identities. We have one wholehearted practical identity that by itself is important to us, but a collection of wholehearted practical identities forms a "super-cell" that becomes a kind of identity. This can be considered a kind of "monadic" look at wholehearted practical identities. Monads can be organized in such a way that they form more complicated monads.

In undergoing this identity shift they may have to drop previous wholehearted practical identities[37] that were important to their previous identity. That previous identity might have been being a slacker.[38] An important aspect of a wholehearted practical identity is that it is both hard to take up and hard to drop. They are not personality quirks or as arbitrary as normal practical identities. I can be a cinephile for a day, but for that practical identity to become wholehearted it must become something I care about in the long term. I covered this in the section on conflict, but alienation has a diachronic component precisely because wholehearted practical identities cannot be removed so easily. The other side of this is that inoculating them into one's personality also takes time to develop. The now studious agent must work hard to inculcate themselves within this new identity by fostering new wholehearted practical identities, but they also must work to dispel old wholehearted practical identities. This is no easy task, as anyone who has tried to form new habits while also trying to break bad habits. Our agent is both inclined to watch TV all day and is inclined to try and start working harder. I think that in these kinds of cases, it is apt to say of the agent that they are between two worlds or minds.

In translating the unwilling addict example from desires to wholehearted practical identities[39], we can see an agent who once wholeheartedly endorsed their drug habit but decides to go sober. They thought that living that kind of lifestyle was good and, at one point, made

[37] Among other things, there are also probably going to be practical identities that are relatively easy to drop because they are not wholehearted. If being a pizza delivery driver is getting in the way of this agent's ability to be more studious, then they will simply quit. A more interesting question is if there are non- wholehearted practical identities that are difficult to give up. I can think of two scenarios: (1) the agent is unaware of a wholehearted practical identity as a wholehearted practical identity, and (2) the non- wholehearted practical identity is more entrenched than previously thought. This requires a more substantial discussion than what I can provide here.

[38] While this is generally considered a derogatory term that no one would willing apply to themselves, I think it fits as a kind of self-conceptualization that has in its orbit a series of wholehearted practical identities. I can see myself as a slacker if I enjoy leisure time, distracting myself, etc.

[39] You might wonder if alienation could be described just in terms of desires. Maybe, but you would have to translates the language of wholehearted practical identities onto desires. I am not sure that singular desires alone could get you the kinds of disunity necessary to have alienation proper.

them feel good. In transitioning out of that identity (one as a drug user) and into a new one (one that is sober) they feel a certain amount of residue from their old habits. This creates effective first order desires that they no longer endorse and wish that they never had. However, and in line with Frankfurt, they still recognize these desires as a part of themselves, they still feel the pull of an older identity.[40] This creates a disconnect within the agent, one where in trying to transition into something new they need to see this old part of themselves as external, or as an "other." They are no longer that kind of person and yet still latch on to those old patterns of behavior.

We can extrapolate this kind of example to a more general formula: a self-alienated person is someone who experiences a kind of disunity among their own wholehearted practical identities where the conflict is driven by a part of themselves that they are trying to disenfranchise. In cases of alienation that are not cases of self-alienation, what we see are instances where external pressures are forcing the agent into a kind of conflict. Catherine's family, for example, is an external root for her alienation. I mentioned this in **Chapter 1**, but "externality" is seen as a condition of alienation. This is definitely the case in some of the literature on alienation, externality, and Frankfurt. Timothy Schroder and Nomy Arpaly tie Frankfurt's notion of externality to alienation explicitly: "…the externality of a desire (or other psychological state) is simply a matter of alienation from that desire, nothing more." (372) The argument of the article is to re-examine the notion of externality in Frankfurt, place it firmly in terms of alienation, and to argue that alienation has no bearing on questions of personhood and responsibility. The effect of this is to make self-alienation into another normal case of alienation

[40] There are also some dissimilarities. Note that a wholehearted practical identity can never truly be "alien" in the sense that the agent does not even recognize the source of the desire. The scenario I am describing is only a partial retelling of external passions.

by suggesting that self-alienation occurs when the agent sees part of herself as external to herself. Again, this might seem just as paradoxical as the original problem of self-alienation, but if you accept the idea that an agent can "partition" herself into identified and non-identified parts, then it makes sense to say that self-alienation is the control that a non-identified part has over the identified with self. This is boosted by the intuition that while all of our desires are undeniably our own, it still feels as though some of them can control us in ways that we do not fully endorse. But notice how this simplified picture makes no room for a conflict between wholehearted practical identities. Bare externality and bare alienation defined in this way are not, as Schroder and Arpaly argue, particularly interesting outside of the odd phenomena of experiencing an alien force.

Using the unwilling addict case as an example of alienation for Frankfurt is, I would argue, misleading. For Schroeder and Arpaly's article on Frankfurt and alienation, it is taken for granted that a feature of externality is alienation. But, this is a feature that they introduced themselves to make sense of the issues surrounding externality for Frankfurt. Alienation as a term is one that Frankfurt seldom uses and does not use to describe the unwilling addict case. "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person" is more naturally read as a description of what the *will* is rather than a treatise on alienation. The issue that the unwilling addict has is that their first order desires do not align with their second-order desires. Self-alienation is actually something that I tacked on, and something that I would argue that Schroeder and Arpaly also added.[41] It appears plausible to me that you can have an unwilling addict who is not alienated in

[41] Frankfurt never uses the word "alienation" in *The Importance of What We Care About,* and uses the word "alien" once: "The reason a person does not experience the force of volitional necessity as alien or as external to himself, then, is that it coincides with - and is, indeed, partly constituted by - desires which are not merely his own but with which he actively identifies himself." (265) I think it is fair to say that Frankfurt did mean to suggest that externality and alienness are at least related concepts, if not synonymous, but this is a far cry from trying to identify externality with a notion of alienation. He does slightly increase his usage in *Necessity, Volition,*

any way. They may recognize that their old self is exerting a kind of influence on their attempts at a new life, but they simply accept that as part of the process. As I outlined in **Chapter 1**, there needs to be someone or something driving the conflict. Even if the unwilling addict finds their desires as foreign to who they want to be, they may not experience this discordance as a perpetuated conflict between disunified wholehearted practical identities. The modifications I made were to have the agent still see some of themselves in the wholehearted practical identity they are trying to transition out of. These conditions are much more substantial that what is suggested by Schroeder and Arpaly: "Alienation, we have argued, is simply an experiential state, an unpleasant experience of ourselves as being a certain way." (384) An external passion or iota of desire is an experience of alienation under their view.[42] But, as I have been arguing, this is a deprived notion of alienation at best, and does not even fit the intuitive notion of alienation we get from the most common examples of alienation presented in art.[43]

The last issue I want to bring up in this regard is that I am not sure that the unwilling addict case as presented is actually the best example that Frankfurt himself gives for alienation and much less self-alienation. When the case was first introduced it was one of a conflict between first order desires and the second order desire for one to be effective over the other. As presented, it is more like an akrasia case than a case of alienation. The two notions are certainly related, but as I argued above, there is no particular reason why the unwilling addict *has to* be alienated. This is in contrast with a different set up Frankfurt uses in "Identification and

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and Love, the most relevant usage being: "An addict who struggles sincerely against his addiction is contending with a force by which he does not want to be moved and which is therefore alien to him." (99)

[42] See also: "We suggest external thoughts are just those accompanied by a feeling of alienation. A thought from which the thinker feels estranged, as though he weren't really thinking it, is external if any thought is." (Schroeder and Arpaly 377)

[43] I think one of the obvious mistakes here is that they are taking "alien" and "alienation" to be coextensive in terms of relating to the same concept. But something can be alien without it being alienating.

Externality." There, Frankfurt considers the different ways in which an agent can relate to these external passions, stating in one scenario where "…after long struggle and disillusion with himself, a person may become resigned to being someone of whom he himself does not altogether approve. He no longer supposes that he is capable of bringing the course of his passions into harmony with his ideal concept of himself, and accordingly he ceases to reserve his acceptance of his passions as they are." (64) Externality plays a role in our understanding of the case but note how it is modified by the way in which the agent conceives of their struggle with the external passions. This form of the example is much closer to the kind of intuitive self-alienation we have so far examined.

What we have now is a picture of a fractured self and a way in which we might incorporate such an idea into the concept of self-alienation. The more sophisticated example of the unwilling addict relies not only on externality, but also on the further conditions of alienation that I introduced in **Chapter 1.** Externality plays a role in the distance condition, as the agents see part of themselves as foreign and unrecognizable.[44] Along with this, I also want to require that the agent, despite its externality, identify with this passion as a previous wholehearted practical identity. We can ask ourselves if this passion is then truly "external," but part the argument I have been making is that the truly alien forces just do not promote self-alienation.[45] An external passion, if it is to be subject to the identification condition, must be one that we have some history with but no longer want to be effective. Again, the cases that most readily come to mind are instances where old habits conflict with new ones in a way that prevent our

[44] You can also arguably say that the effects of alienation are also covered by this externality alone, at least in terms of the experiential states the agent is placed in. Though, the actual "effect" might be surrendering your will to this foreign desire.

[45] Just as a further intuition pump, you can imagine a case where your limbs are being moved by strings (as if you were a marionette). It is unclear why this would cause you to be self-alienated as much as surprised and terrified.

transition into a new wholehearted practical identity. This also obviously speaks to the conflict condition. One interesting thing about the Frankfurt example brought up in the last paragraph is that it does not appear to convey a conflict. A person who is resigned to having these external passions control their lives is like the agent who wants to be studious but is stubbornly procrastinating on all their work. They may recognize a disunity in themselves but might also shrug their shoulders at the disunity. If they are going to procrastinate, then they will. It is the agent that sees this as an issue, as a prevention, that will be in conflict in the way I described earlier.

2.2.1 "Othering"

Then what is the condition on which externality matters in alienation cases? Frankfurt argues that "passions are external to us just when we prefer not to have them, or when we prefer not to be moved by them…" (63) Similar to how resignation plays a role in determining the externality of desires (or passions), the way in which our preferences determine externality is a matter of the agent's own conceptualization of those desires. In other words, does the unwilling addict *see* their desire to be moved to take drugs as external? This is old hat, but the addition that I want to make is that what matters for alienation is whether or not the agent *sees* those desires (which, to translate to wholehearted practical identities, would amount to the vestiges of a previous identity) as paralyzing them from leading the life they want (not merely holding them back). For this kind of example to be thought of as a case of self-alienation, they also need to see those desires as once originating from them. What I want to argue in this sub-section is that this amounts to a kind of "othering" process whereby the agent conceptualizes a part of themselves as an other, and more substantively, as an external antagonist.

The contrast that I set up in the previous section was between a conflict that is maintained by an internal dilemma and one that is maintained by an external antagonist. The temptation would be to see the internal dilemma case as most fitting to Frankfurt type cases. It is the agent, in some sense, that is maintaining the conflict between one wholehearted practical identity the agent is trying to transition into and another wholehearted practical identity that is a vestige of a previous self-conception. The conflict is internal. The key difference is the role of externality. A role that is not merely one of defining alienation all told, but a role that changes the dynamic between the disunity. In internal dilemma cases, the agent sees both wholehearted practical identities as legitimate options, they desire both to some degree. The tension is in not being able to have both at the same time. The cases I have set up in this sub-section are not like that, but ones where there is an active resistance to one wholehearted practical identity. The externalization of that identity suggests an unwanted influence, much like the external antagonist cases I have set up. That wholehearted practical identity is not seen as truly part of the self, but as an other.

The unwilling addict case can be translated to the pathology of the schizoid as described by R.D. Liang, where the schizoid "…does not experience himself as a complete person but rather as 'split' in various ways, perhaps as a mind more or less tenuously linked to a body, as two or more selves, and so on." (17) Of course, the unwilling addict does not have a pathology but is complicit in the splitting of the self. This is what I would describes as an "othering" process, one where the agent disenfranchises or disowns a previous wholehearted practical identity. While these kinds of identities are hard to drop, it is also something that happens in the natural course of one's life. As a teenager I might be into certain activities that I intentionally adopt as a wholehearted practical identity only to try and dismiss them later in life. Sometimes

this happens suddenly, sometimes slowly. The unwilling drug addict might have a health scare that suddenly transforms them into someone who wants to quit their habit, but they might also incrementally reduce their behavior over a long period of time because their circumstances start to change.[46] These wholehearted practical identities can lay dormant for long periods of time. If there is no conflict, or if they just are not very effective at influencing one's will, then they remain non-threating vestiges. This only a partial telling of the othering process. These vestigial identities, if they do not cause a conflict in an alienating way, can be considered by the agent as "past" selves. Something they recognize, and maybe even affirm to some degree. Think of the lawyer who enjoys remembering their wild college years, they are not that person anymore, but they also take some pride in the fact that they were that way. The othering process really gets started when the agent sees this vestigial identity as problematic. It is when they start to see it as external that they have othered that identity.

This process then affects the manner in which we see this kind of self-alienation. It is not one that fits into the paradox in the sense that it presents itself as a situation where the self is undermining itself, but as one where the considered self is being undermined by an external source that is considered external by the agent. In this case, she see these influences as an external antagonist that is hindering their ability to transition into a new identity or a adopt a new wholehearted practical identity fully. Just as Catherine's family can be considered an external antagonist by actively denying Catherine the opportunity to express herself, a vestigial wholehearted practical identity can lead an agent astray when trying to express themselves. The

[46] I am not sure how realistic this is for hard drugs, but you might think that it is more plausible in the case of the smoker. They have an addiction and a self-conception that revolves around a certain aesthetic (cool, existential, artistic, etc.). But they could start reducing their cigarette consumption as they shift into new circumstances, such as being in an environment that is actively hostile to smoking (like stuck-up universities that do not appreciate how cool smoking is).

unwilling drug addict who wants to be clean is frustrated by their past live. They actively see this as external to them. This is captured in Frankfurt's description of the kind of conflict at issue:

> "The conflict is not one to be resolved by ordering the conflicting desires, in other words, but by rejecting one of them…He places the rejected desire outside the scope of his preferences, so that it is not a candidate for satisfaction at all. Although he may continue to experience the rejected desire as occurring in his mental history, the person brings it about in this way that its occurrence is an external one." (67)

The unwilling addict rejects this vestigial behavior despite its influence. It becomes less of an internal dilemma in the sense that they want pursue or once again inhabit that old persona, and more of an external antagonist in that it threatens the way they want to be.

The external antagonist mode of alienation presents a compelling way out of the paradox of self-alienation, but it is worth asking if this is the only way of looking at self-alienation. The cases of self-alienation that hinge on either having an external antagonist or the agent conceiving a part of themselves as an external antagonist are supposed to function similarly to "standard" cases of alienation. There is something distinct that you are distant from. There is something distinct that your values do not line up with. There is something distinct that is driving the conflict. There is something distinct from the identified self you endorse that is enabling the alienation. As stated, this gets around the paradox of self-alienation by recontextualizing self-alienation as either a case of some entity preventing you from becoming unified, or having the agent see themselves as distinct from some other part of themselves. There is a firm answer to the question of who is alienated from what, and in the most troubling self-alienation cases, we might say that we are alienated from a part of ourselves that we no longer endorse. The unwilling addict feels the habituated pulses of a past life, but it is not who they are now (despite their apparent behavior).

2.2.2 Sartre's Other

The othering process that is described in this section has a similarity to Sartre's notion of "the Look of the other." In *Being and Nothingness*, Sarte uses the gaze of the other as way of objectifying the subject being observed. He states:

> "The look does not carve me out from the universe, it comes to find me within my situation, and all that it grasps of me is indissoluble relations with implements: if am seen as seated I must be seen as 'seated-on-a chair', if am grasped as stooping, it is as 'stooping-over-the-keyhole', etc. But, in consequence, the alienation of myself that is being-seen implies the alienation of the world I am organizing…I see a subtle alienation of all my possibilities, which are arranged far away from me, in the midst of the world, alongside the world's objects." (361-2)

The other only sees my concrete situation, and as such can only see me as an object. This is different from my own subjective experience of the possibilities that come with freedom. As Schacht explains it: "My body, when I experience it as something "known by the other," is something "alien" to me; for it is radically different from my body as I subjectively experience it." (222) In other words, the other objectifies my body in such a way that I become distant from it as a concrete object rather than how I subjectively perceive it.[47] There is a "double identity" that I go through (Schacht 223) where I identify with my body in one sense as I see it, and in another sense as a non-identity when considered through the gaze of the other.

Part of this view does track some of the features of alienation and the othering process that I have argued for so far. The double identity aspect is particularly intriguing as a way of looking at yourself in terms of wholehearted practical identities. There is something I care about, but it changes when it is perceived by another. But this is trying to twist Sartre's point into my own. The othering process as I have described it is one in which part of the self is externalized to

[47] Throughout this sub-section I will be relying on Schacht's interpretation of Sartre. I am not going to argue that it is the right interpretation, but it does place Sartre's viewpoint within the context of the history of alienation.

such a degree that it becomes like an other. Something that is distant from me. While it is interesting to think about the implications of this process from Sartre's perspective, Sartre seems dismissive of the idea of self-alienation at all: "My being-for-the-Other is a fall towards objectivity, through an absolute void. And as this fall is an alienation, I cannot make myself be for myself as an object, because in no circumstance can I alienate myself from myself." (374) On the one hand, the externalized self is by no means "objectifying" the self that it is distancing itself from that externalized version. As I argued, the agent still must identify with that externalized version as a kind of past identity. But, if we were to take on Sartre's specific definition of alienation, then self-alienation would be altogether impossible. It is the other, in a literal sense of being perceived by another person, that puts me in a relation of alienation to myself. This might seem like linguistic trickery, but as Sartre put it, I cannot be the one that puts me in that kind of relation. It is as if he accepts the paradox of self-alienation. That said, this is some kind of self-alienation, even if it is a relation that is instigated by an other. So far, I have only been covering cases of self-alienation that involve an othering process that is self-caused to some degree. I make part of myself into an external antagonist, but what about cases where the self is alienated from itself by a truly *external* antagonist?

2.3 Essentialism and Self-Alienation

The unwilling addict type cases are not the only kinds of cases of self-alienation that involve external antagonists. Self-alienation is also commonly ascribed to the kinds of cases that I have described earlier involving dominant cultures and economic structures. I simplified both kinds of cases when I presented them as cases of mere alienation. The alienated suburbanite is not just alienated from the dominant culture, but they are also commonly described as self-

alienated. This is the same with the Marxist case. The laborer is not just alienated from the products of their own labor, but also themselves. I left the stories for these two kinds of cases incomplete because I was trying to establish the baseline for any alienation case, but now I want to tackle them head on. These are cases of self-alienation that clearly involve an external antagonist. Less clear is how they fit into the schema of an "othering" process. I will argue in this sub-section that the two kinds of self-alienation cases I presented are instances where part of the self is transformed into an other *by* an external antagonist. This does result in a kind of self-alienation, but a form of it that still does not confront the paradox of self-alienation. These kinds of cases can be categorized as ones that involve the suppression of our essential capacities by an external antagonist such that we are twisted into a mockery of what we ought to be. Because we are so detached from our essential capacities, we are self-alienated.

I described the Marxist view of alienation briefly in the previous sections as a form of self-alienation where the laborer is prevented from committing to a form of production that is truly his own. A kind of production that is not just for sustenance and self-maintenance, but for their own creative ends and not ends that only serve to devalue the laborer. Setting aside the aspect of an external antagonist for now, it is worth exploring how this is an example of self-alienation. In "Estranged Labor," Marx's most direct work on the subject of alienation, he begins by talking about how the laborer finds the product of his own work alien. However, Marx asks "How could the product of the worker's activity confront him as something alien if it were not for the fact that in the act of production he was estranging himself from him self?" (326) The question is how it is possible for the production that the laborer himself produces can be considered alien unless he was already self-alienated. The laborer's work is, in one sense, his own, and so the natural end of his work would be work that he considers his own. If that is not

the case, and instead the laborer is alienated from his own production, then that could only be because he is already estranged from himself. He does not see his own work as his because he is not himself. Part of the reason why the laborer is self-alienated comes right before: "The culmination of this slavery is that it is only as a *worker* that he can maintain himself as a *physical subject* and only as a *physical subject* that he is a worker." (325) Capitalism forces the laborer to maintain himself merely as a physical subject and that deprives the agent of the freedom to explore their other capacities. The insidiousness of this kind of self-alienation is that for survival the laborer must maintain the conditions of their own servitude: the laborer must survive as a physical subject (i.e. feed and clothe themselves), but in doing so they are devaluing their own existence. They are reduced down to using themselves as a mere means, and as such they can only see themselves as a means. Later, Marx makes the following comment: "The result is that man (the worker) feels that he is acting freely only in his animal functions - eating, drinking and procreating, or at most in his dwelling and adornment - while in his human functions he is nothing more than an animal." (327) In using himself as a means, the laborer is distancing himself from what it means to be human and debasing himself to a more animal form. This form of self-alienation is one where the agent is being prevented from exercising their *essential* capacities.

Unlike the unwilling addict case, the estranged laborer is not externalizing desires or past Wholehearted practical identities as interfering with what they really want to do. The estranged laborer is forced by a capitalist system to act against their own interests. These interests are not just things like career paths or relations[48] but the essential functions of a human being. Being

[48] Though, being prevented from pursuing these in a meaningful way can produce alienated agents, but most likely not self-alienated agents. I can be alienated from a university system that I owe a lot to but will not allow me to pursue work I find meaningful. I am alienated, but not self-alienated. The Marxist case points to deeper problem.

able to produce work freely (and creatively) is an essential capacity for Marx, and being prevented from engaging in this capacity can have negative effects. He states "Firstly, the fact that labour is *external* to the worker, i.e. does not belong to his essential being; that he therefore does not confirm himself in his work, but denies himself, feels miserable and not happy, does not develop free mental and physical energy, but mortifies his flesh and ruins his mind."[49] (326) To take this statement out of the abstract, we can compare it to Adorno's theory of the interplay between art and commerce. The artist, by selling their art, is engaging in a process that destroys the integrity of that art. The artist is no longer engaged in a purely creative act and has to curtail their artistic impulses in order to make that art more commercially viable. Similar to the mentioned quote, we might say that the art has become external to the artist. It is no longer an act of creativity, but might be an act of mere animal necessity as the artist must survive by selling their labor. If we take this example further and stipulate that not only is the creation of art an essential human capacity, but that by living in a consumerist society we are unable to create any art at all, then we have an example of Marx's estranged laborer.

This kind of self-alienation stipulates that the agent is prevented from doing something essential to their nature. For Marx, it is free labor, but we can extend this formula to any candidate for an essential human capacity.[50] A more modern example would be the use of

[49] This thought is echoed in the preface to Erich Fromm's work *Marx's Concept of Man*: "Marx's philosophy, like much of existentialist thinking, represents a protest against man's alienation, his loss of himself and his transformation into a thing; it is a movement against the dehumanization and automatization of man inherent in the development of Western industrialism." (v)

[50] It should be noted that I am not sure that Marx had an essentialist view of human nature that I am ascribing him here. In the literature on alienation, it is common to accept that he did have this essentialist view in mind. Rahel Jaeggi certainly rejects some part of Marx's view of self-alienation because it requires an essentialist viewpoint of human nature. That said, I find interpreting quotes such as the following difficult in that case: "We must avoid repeating the mistake of the political economist, who bases his explanations on some imaginary primordial condition. Such a primordial condition explains nothing. It simply pushes the question into the grey and nebulous distance. It assumes as facts and events what it is supposed to deduce, namely the necessary relationship between two things, between, for example, the division of labour and exchange." (326)

solitary confinement as a punishment for prisoners. If sociality is a necessary human capacity, then restricting the ability of a prisoner to exercise that capacity will not just be deleterious but also potentially self-alienating. As the prisoner becomes more and more lost in their own thoughts, they become a stranger to themselves. This relates back to the idea of an agent living a life that is their own. One can only do that if they are in control over their vital faculties. We can see how this can also be an example of the othering process mentioned in the last sub-section. The artist in producing art that is curtailed by commerce can come to see themselves as a kind of puppet, just as the laborer sees themselves as only possibly serving their animal needs in order to exist in a capitalist society. The othering is not partial, as in the unwilling addict case, but total. Their very being is lost to them because an essential aspect is denied to them. Self-alienation is thus a result of this external force preventing this exercise, and in the course of doing so, it makes the agent see themselves as a means.

It is this last point that really makes this an issue of self-alienation. The restriction of essential activity in itself is not enough to generate self-alienation. To use a crude example, if I am denied water, then I might suffer but not become self-alienated. I think this applies to more complicated cases as well. The alienated suburbanite need not be self-alienated. The dominant culture may be stifling their ability to exercise their creative freedom by denying them any outlet to express themselves. This is a restriction of their essential human capacities under the view that we need to pursue the aesthetic in order to live a good or full life. Yet, they may not be self-alienated. They could be sure of their ability as a poet or painter and rue the conditions under which they live in. This agent is merely alienated. They are alienated from the dominant culture, despite it being that which provides sanctuary and still holds a nostalgic place in their mind, but

While this quote is mainly about "state of nature" reasoning, I think it can be easily applied to a "full on" view of essentialism that suggests humans were once and always the same.

they are not alienated from the part of them that is expressive aesthetically. That is what they are trying to transform into and what is being prevented by the dominant culture.

Another example that displays this nicely comes from Franz Fanon in *Black Skins, White Masks*. In that work, Fanon addresses alienation in this way:

> "Therefore I have been led to consider their alienation in terms of psychoanalytical classifi cations. The Negro's behavior makes him akin to an obsessive neurotic type, or, if one prefers, he puts himself into a complete situational neurosis. In the man of color there is a constant effort to run away from his own individuality, to annihilate his own presence. Whenever a man of color protests, there is alienation." (46)

Fanon's explanation of alienation cannot be separated from the condition of colonization and the oppression that forces people of color to have an inability to function in white society. This is not to say that white individuals are not also themselves alienated, as the colonial circumstances places them in similar condition that separates them from others. This is expressed in the opening pages in terms of the inability to communicate, as a Senegalese individual using Creole, is trying to pass themselves off as something they are not. (21) The condition of colonization forces those under it to act as if they were someone else, usually in a degraded form of what they are trying to imitate. In doing so, they are effectively trying to "annihilate themselves." This is not just a situation where the dominant culture prevents someone from pursuing some essential capacity, but it forces the agent to act in a way counter to that capacity or state. In doing so, it degrades the individual. This can be done through a colonial power forcing its subjects to be who they are not, or through an oppressive economic force turning laborers into machines.

Both of these examples present compelling cases for self-alienation, but one thing I should pause for is to ask whether or not they fit into the picture of alienation I have painted in **Chapter 1**. The conditions of identity and conflict are not necessarily apparent in either example.

Distance is arguably the most recognizable condition as the alienated laborer is distant from himself and his own labor, and the alienated individual under an oppressive colonizing regime is not only distant from themselves but also those that oppress them. Identity and conflict, however, may appear harder to locate. The disunity I am trying to qualify is one between wholehearted practical identities, and the conflict has to be about the inability to choose one or the other. Some of the conflicts can be seen in the above examples. The external antagonist in both cases prevents the agents from realizing some features of their essential nature. This is half of the conflict in so far as the antagonists are not allowing the agent to transition into something else. The psychic pain experienced by the alienated laborer is that they want to be free to use their labor for their own ends. We can say that this is a kind of wholehearted practical identity with some qualifications. A wholehearted practical identity is not coextensive with our essential nature. I would stipulate that for any given alienated laborer there is *something specific* that the laborer wants to do with their life that is being prevented by their economic conditions. This is easier to see in Fanon's case, as the oppressed individual is pretending to be someone they are not, but who they are (or who they want to be) is best captured in terms of wholehearted practical identities.

The tricky part is the identity condition. It may be the case that a wholehearted practical identity is being suppressed by an external antagonist, but that is only one half of the conflict. The disunity requires two wholehearted identities to be in conflict with one another, so while one can be tied to the essential nature of an individual (the one being suppressed), there is another that is tied to the current role that the agent is inhabiting under an oppressive context (economic or otherwise). Just as the wholehearted practical identity tied to some essential feature is specific, we can also argue that the identity forged from this oppression is also specific to the

individual. For Marx, the laborer does not have a generic wholehearted practical identity that is just "a cog in the machine." That would be insane and maybe even impossible to care about to some degree. I mentioned this earlier, but the problem with oppressive conditions is that by trying to acquiesce to the demands of those conditions we are rewarded with certain tangible benefits. The worker gets to feed their family and the colonized gain some standing within the dominant (albeit still oppressive) culture. I think these are legitimate wholehearted practical identities to some extent, and the mutation of the self under these conditions is a conflict generated by them quite intentionally.

The issue of self-alienation only comes into play when the external antagonist denies the agent the ability to pursue their essential activities in such a way that it twists them into a mockery of themselves. The question still remains if this kind of alienation really confronts the paradox of self-alienation. Both the Frankfurt type cases, and the ones we have examined from Marx and Fanon, are attempts to show that self-alienation can be generated by either an externalized self seen as antagonistic, or an oppressive antagonist turning the self into something that it cannot recognize as itself. These kinds of cases are cases of self-alienation as they fulfill some of the conditions familiar to both alienation and what we would expect from self-alienation.

2.4.1 Weak Self-Alienation

The othering process, as it is manifested in both its partial and total sense (in the unwilling addict case and the estranged laborer case, respectively), is a way of solving the self-alienation paradox by utilizing an external antagonist such that self-alienation does not appear circular. In the unwilling addict case, the agent engages in an othering process such that they no

longer see a certain part of themselves as truly themselves. In the case of an estranged laborer, the agent sees themselves as alien because they are not in control due to the inability to exercise their essential capacities. They can only see themselves as tools for an end that is not their own. I am going to argue that all cases that use this othering process as a way of making the self an external antagonist, or where the othering process is done by an external antagonist, that this is a form of "weak" self-alienation. It attempts to solve the paradox of self-alienation not by engaging with self-alienation but by making self-alienation similar to "standard" cases of alienation. To see why this is, I want to compare this kind of self-alienation cases to certain kinds of akrasia cases.

Akrasia and self-alienation, or alienation cases in general, share some similarities. The unwilling addict case can be considered, for example, a case of akrasia. The unwilling addict knows that by engaging in their impulses they will be doing something that is harmful for them. This differs slightly from the original example in that I have added the knowledge condition, but it is assumed that the reason why the unwilling addict wants to refrain from that behavior is to be spared from the horrible effects of drug use.[51] They realize that being sober is better for them. In the estranged laborer case, in being prevented from exercising an essential human capacity, the laborer sees themselves as a mere puppet. It might be said that they are knowingly doing something bad instead of pursuing what is good for them. Of course, one might notice an immediate problem with saying this is a case of akrasia. The estranged laborer is coerced, but true akrasia only occurs when an agent willingly engages in behavior they know is harmful for them. This does not diminish the harm done to the estranged laborer, not even the harm done

[51] However, the addition is worth emphasizing because not all cases of self-alienation of this type are going to be cases of akrasia (or akrasia adjacent cases). If I am transitioning into a new kind of career, the habits from my old career might get in the way of that transition. We might consider this to be a case of self-alienation that has little to do with what I think is best for me in some kind of robust moral sense.

to their psyche, but they are not in control of their own lives in a literal sense. I would argue that this is actually similar to the unwilling addict case but with some minor alterations. The unwilling addict is not entirely free to resist their drug usage as they are still beholden to past wholehearted practical identities that have inculcated certain habits and patterns of behavior. Frankfurt's description is telling: they would refrain *if they could*. True akrasia would not be a conflict between first order and second-order desires, but the willful undermining of a second-order desire that is already the agent's will.

What this adds up to is a kind of self-alienation that is only possible under duress. Akrasia is easier to explain away if an agent only commits to harmful behavior when there is a gun to their head. For the Marxist case of estranged laborer, Capitalism holds that gun to the agent's head. The agent is only self-alienated because something external to them is driving that disunity (in this case, the disunity between their animal instinct and what makes them essentially human). They are forced to undermine themselves. The unwilling addict case is no different. The othering process serves to sever a past wholehearted practical identity as a legitimate identity and it thus plays a similar function to Capitalism in the estranged laborer case, albeit in a partial sense. Their older wholehearted practical identity still exerts an influence on them they do not endorse, and in that influence, they do not really see themselves as the antagonist that drives the conflict in their own alienation. In both case examined, something other than the agent, or at least what the agent truly identifies as, is driving the conflict.

Does "weak" self-alienation imply that these are uninteresting cases or, more radically, not cases of self-alienation at all? That is not the impression I want to give. I think the Marxist and Frankfurt type cases are legitimate cases of self-alienation. Feeling like your life is controlled by something else, that it is not your own, is both an interesting phenomenon to examine and a

genuine case of self-alienation. There is still an interesting question about what one ought to do under duress, even if it is not quite the kind of akrasia case Plato had in mind. The modifier "weak" is not meant to diminish the importance of examining such cases, nor suggest that such cases are irrelevant to everyday life. My interest is mainly in trying to draw a distinction between cases of self-alienation that fulfill this othering process and cases of self-alienation that do not. What I want to resist is examining all cases of the latter in terms of the former, and to explore the possibility that there is a "strong" form of self-alienation that poses its own unique challenges and comes with its own structure.

2.4.2 "Disalienation"

I want to end this chapter by considering the ways in which this form of self-alienation can be resolved and to look toward what a stronger notion of self-alienation looks like. Fanon proposes that disalienation is only achieved when "…things, in the most materialist sense, have resumed their rightful place." (XV) This process is summed up Jean Khalfa as

> "…his insistence on the vital processes at work in all disalienation, his interest in a consciousness that forges itself only by liberating itself from past identities; but also his concern to prevent the ossification of revolutionary structures and neocolonialism, and his constantly reiterated belief in a truly revolutionary dimension of the Algerian national movement."

In other words, it is both a process of decolonization in removing the material conditions of oppression, but also a psychic process to repair the oppressed individual's fractured psyche. I imagine that similar story can be said of Marx, where the estranged laborer must both be removed from the economic environment but also intellectually liberated from the worker's mindset. To put it in familiar terms to my own project, the removal of the external antagonist is

only one facet of resolving the agent's alienation. The process of disalienation must also include a repair of the self.

In **Chapter 1**, I outlined three possible ways in which alienation could be resolved: Ideal, Burning Bridges, and Recontextualization. For the kind of alienation that has been presented in the last section, it appears that none of these solutions work very well. Ideal requires that both wholehearted practical identities form a stable unity, but if one of the wholehearted practical identities is a forced identity, then an ideal resolution would merely continue the problem outline by Marx and Fanon. Buring bridges may resolve alienation in these cases, but we would need to specify how exactly this is done. Cutting off one of the wholehearted practical identities from one's concern can work, in most alienation cases, either way. Catherine can drop her new political persona or make peace with seeing and caring for her family less. A possible resolution to the above cases cannot be cutting themselves off from some essential feature of themselves as represented by some wholehearted practical identity.[52] There is a sense in which the agent ought to cut off the part of themselves that is twisted by their oppressive conditions, but as we have seen, some of those wholehearted practical identities contain parts that are legitimately worthy of care. A provider who can only provide working under oppressive conditions should not necessarily stop thinking of themselves as a provider. Thus, recontextualization appears to be the only path to a solution, but only partially. First, the agent must be removed from the influence of the external antagonist, it is only then that recontextualization can actually occur.

[52] I am not sure if this would be an *impossible* solution. That is to say, we can imagine the agent who willingly mechanizes himself to such a degree as to lose his humanity. My intuition is that even in that case, for Marxist thinkers, this would only be possible by sinking deeper into self-alienation. Regardless, it does not seem like an ideal resolution to alienation.

Chapter 3 – Total Alienation & Moral Alienation

Introduction

Weak self-alienation is my description for theories of self-alienation that rely on an othering process or external antagonist to explain the division of the self. This explanation does side-step the paradox of self-alienation, but it leaves us unsatisfied. Are there no instances where there is an intentionally split self? Instances where we self-sabotage? I want to begin this chapter by exploring a case of "total self-alienation" or total alienation from the self. If we are to build a notion of what strong self-alienation could possibly be, then we need to find an instance where a self truly undermines itself. We need a case where an agent is completely and totally alienated from itself. While examples like the alienated suburbanite or the case of Ivan Ilyich give us decent cases of agents who are seemingly alienated from everything around them, they are still examples of weak self-alienation. They do provide a starting point for understanding what a case of total self-alienation might look like, one where the agent is alienated from their own good and pursuits of the good. In this vein, I want to introduce the example of Underground, who is an agent that is completely hostile to his own reason and to any pursuit of anything that might be considered "good" to him. Even though this still does not give us a *plausible* case of strong self-alienation, it does give us an idea of what total self-alienation can look like, even if it is the most extreme example of it.

The next two sections (**Section 2** and **Section 3**) in the chapter explore the possibility of moral alienation, or a kind of alienation that I think comes closest to the Underground example. If it is possible to be alienated from morality, and alienated from an essential pursuit of a higher good that we must be committed to, then we might have an example of strong self-alienation.

To this end, I first go back to Enoch and look at the second form of his shmagency objection. This second form is usually identified as a kind of alienation objection, one where the shmagent does not feel the motive force behind the constitutive end. While this objection is still susceptible to the same responses from the constitutivist introduced in the last chapter, the objection is taken up by Sergio Tenenbaum and transformed into a more serious concern for "standard" accounts of constitutivism that employ the constitutive end in a hierarchical model of ends. The basic worry that Tenenbaum presents is one where the agent is only distally connected to an end that appears removed their own primary concerns. Tenenbaum argues that we should abandon the standard framework for constitutivism and shift to a formalist account of practical reasoning. One where the pursuit of any good must be understood in terms of the absolute good.

The question I want to ask is if Tenenbaum's alienation objection gives us a true form of alienation. I will argue that is does not. The moral alienation present in Tenenbaum's account is on of "procedural alienation" that turns alienation into a kind of reductio. The basic idea here is that moral alienation in this case is not supposed to be a legitimate form of alienation that one can inhabit but is only the result of bad theory crafting: if a faulty view of practical reasoning was true then it would necessarily result in alienation. I will go on to argue that other thinkers working on moral alienation also treat the possibility of moral alienation not as a genuine phenomenon but as a way of showing the deficiency of a given moral theory. I will examine the treatment of moral alienation from Williams, Railton, and Piper. All of whom are concerned about the distance created by seemingly impersonal moral theories between the agent's primary concerns and the obligations created by moral frameworks.

I end the chapter by considering what a genuine case of moral alienation might look like. To do this, I look at an interpretation of Williams' alienation objectification through the interpretive lens of Nicholas Smyth. Moral alienation is not just about the demands of some impersonal moral theory, but a larger problem concerning different perspectives one is forced to take during moral deliberations. The ultimate problem being that it appears that both perspectives have a tendency to destroy, or more pointedly, undermine, each other. It is the conflict generated by these dueling perspectives that gives us a valuable insight into what a case of strong self-alienation might be.

Section 1 – Total Self-Alienation

1.1 Starting Points

When I first introduced the term "alienation" in **Chapter 1**, I presented a case of "partial" alienation. Catherine's alienation from her family was partial in the sense that she was not alienated from herself nor many other things in her life. Despite her troubled family relations, she might maintain healthy friendships and still take pleasure in certain hobbies. In **Chapter 2**, this trend continued a little bit with the Frankfurt type examples. The unwilling addict maybe self-alienated, but that does not mean they are alienated from *everything*. When we looked at examples from Marx, Fanon, (and to a limited extent) Sartre, that is where we were introduced to the idea of *total* self-alienation. The idea that alienation is being alienated from everything to some degree is not entirely strange to the literature. We see it in Jaeggi, Marx, Rousseau, and Kierkegaard.

The idea of total self-alienation is also present in some of the examples from art that I have discussed. Ivan Ilyich is completely alienated from himself and others because of his commitment to living a pleasant but ultimately unfulfilling life. Travis Bickle cannot meaningfully connect with the larger society around him and others (outside of relations of violence). Antoine Roquentin cannot get out of his own mind to participate in society at all. The idea behind this total estrangement from the self and others is that when this condition takes a hold of you it has a way of affecting all of your relations.

As I noted, not all cases of self-alienation need to be cases of total self-alienation. The unwilling addict example shows that we can be partially alienated from a part of ourselves that has undergone the othering process mentioned in the previous chapter. Still yet, the cases of total self-alienation do not necessarily meet the category of strong self-alienation that I am trying to establish. The issue in front of us is to try and find a case of true self on self undermining. A case in which, free of external antagonist, the agent faces an internal dilemma over two wholehearted practical identities that mutually undermine each other such that it causes a split in the agent.[53] A good place to start looking for such a case is within the realm of total alienation cases, but with a proviso. The kind of total self-alienation I am looking for is specifically restricted to is the total alienation of the self rather stipulating any kind of external effects. It seems empirically unlikely to find many individuals so alienated from themselves that they are also alienated from everything around them. Usually those kinds of cases also come with severe

[53] As I have noted in other parts of this essay, many standard cases of alienation involve two wholehearted practical identities mutually undermining each other. Catherine's family life and her new political views forms a disunity. Her identities cannot be expressed fully with the care she would like. But, this kind of alienation is not expressed as a split in the self, as the relations involved in her alienation are not directed back at her.

psychiatric conditions, like R.D. Liang's schizoid, or involve individuals so troubled that they cannot function in normal society (like Travis Bickle).[54]

The case that I think is the most plausible is that of Ivan Ilyich, a person who tries to live a pleasant life but in so doing becomes alienated from a myriad of objects. The claim is not necessarily that Ilyich is alienated from everything, but from the things that he comes to realize matters most. Total alienation of the self will have externalized consequences and interfere with an agent's ability to connect with the world, but those consequences are going to naturally vary from cases to case. The case of Ivan Ilyich also gives us another starting point, that a case of total alienation from the self would involve meaning and what to do with one's life in a way that mirrors the condition of an internal dilemma. Marx and Fanon did present cases of total alienation that I am not going to argue against[55], but these cases all involve external antagonists that are forcing a split in the self. The interesting aspect about the Ilyich case is that it involves his own internal choices about how to live a meaningful life. A fuller example comes from the adaption by Akira Kurosawa, *Ikiru*. The Ivan Ilyich stand-in, Kenji Watanabe, after hearing about his cancer prognosis, goes through various stages of trying to find what will give his life meaning. After spending his youth in a bureaucratic morass, he dabbles in partying and petty pleasures. He ultimately finds this unsatisfying before settling on helping some locals build a small park. While this ultimately turns into a more optimistic outlook on the process of being alienated and getting out of alienation, the take-away is the uncertainty involving how one should

[54] There is also the fantastical examples like Gregor Samsa. I am not saying that there are not real life corollaries that are like this case, but I also think some of the examples from literature are heightened to a point of absurdity as to prove a point about the human condition in its absurdity, as if we are taking a case to its logical extreme; a reductio if you please. You can see this in the example of Sisyphus that Camus uses, it is not that our normal everyday lives are exactly like pushing up a boulder over and over again, but if we were to think about our condition in the abstract, then the absurdity of it would be similar to the case of Sisyphus.
[55] Though, if you are interested in a strong rebuke of Marx's notion of alienation, see Walter Kaufman.

live their life. There are competing options presented to us by society, pleasures, and morality. Figuring out which option is the best can start in alienation. And it is this starting point that I think gives us a place to look for strong self-alienation.

1.2 Underground

Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* is in some sense a poor place to start given my previous comments. It is about an individual that is so resentful of himself that he intentionally chooses the wicked over any supposed good that is presented to him. Julia Annas' article "Action and Character in Dostoyevsky's Notes From Underground" analyzes the book from a philosophical perspective stating that "What is at stake is whether an agent must have in mind some good, his own or not, in order to act in the full sense." (259) She is arguing that the first part of the work is presenting a kind of akrasia case that is meant to rebut the notion that rational agents must act toward some kind of good, either of their own good or another's.[56] Underground is presented as a character who tries to be irrational, to undermine himself at every turn, sometimes taking pleasure in doing so and sometimes not. The tricky part of the example of Underground is that he is both an unreliable and inconsistent narrator of his own thoughts and actions. But rather than this proving a problem, such as a case we can easily dismiss and an insane man or a liar, Annas argues that the

> "…opponent ought to worry about the case of a man acting knowingly but not so as to achieve any recognized good, for even if what happens has to be described formally in terms of seeking good of some kind, the opponent still cannot account for it, because the "good" here is one he has not considered and which comes into conflict with all the goods he has considered. He can draw no comfort from the fact that the perverse

[56] Although Annas does point out that Dostoevsky does not make such a fine distinction, but I think the claim holds for either in the case of Underground. (260)

> insistence on flouting all one's conceptions of good can itself be called "good"; he can win only a verbal victory." (261)

Underground is the akratic par exemplar. His inconsistency is but a virtue in demonstrating that he is not acting from a consistent notion of the good that the standard rational account can point to. If he was just pursuing pleasure, then he would be pursuing a coherent good, and one that can be said to be a result of misunderstanding what the good actually is. But Underground's self-undermining behavior is total.

My interest in Underground has more to do with his psyche than the potential argument that this is a legitimate, troubling, example of akrasia. Though the two are related. At the beginning of the book, Underground says "I am a sick man…I am a wicked man…I refuse to be treated out of wickedness" (Dostoevsky, 3) Regardless of his wickedness, it is interesting to me to see Underground as a sick man. Ultimately, as demonstrated in the second part of the book, Underground will have a turn toward faith, making his example not dissimilar to Kierkegaard's notion of despair. It is as if he had a sickness in the soul uncurable by the mere tools of reason. That is not quite the argument I want to make. Instead, I want to see this individual more as an Ilyich or even a Roquentin[57], as someone who is wrestling with, and coming up unsatisfied with, how to live one's life. Underground comes to peculiar position, and one that is self-harming, but also one that I think gives a good basis for understanding total self-alienation. A person who is not just alienated from the good, but any notion of his own good.

Let us analyze this along two dimensions looking at two passages. First, Underground states:

> "The spite in me, again as a consequence of those cursed laws of consciousness, undergoes a chemical breakdown. Before your eyes the object vanishes, the reasons evaporate, the culprit is not to be found, the offense becomes not an offense but a factum, something like a

[57] For the Roquentin connection, see: ""I am strongly convinced that not only too much consciousness but even any consciousness at all is a sickness" (Dostoevsky 7)

> toothache, for which no one is to blame, and, consequently, what remains is again the same way out - that is, to give the wall a painful beating. And so you just wave it aside, because you haven't found the primary cause." (Dostoevsky 18)

I think this is a kind of descent into senselessness and meaninglessness. It is a resignation to fate and determinism in such a way that it diminishes the standard claims of reason. There is no blame or final cause to point to. In viewing the world this way it is nothing more than something to be waved away. To put it in more familiar terms to my project, there is a loss of care in an identity. This identity is the perspective of a reasoner, someone who would care about such things like the origin of an offense as to assign blame, a perspective that would make that question matter at all. Similar to Jaeggi's position, this is a breakdown of the agent's ability to properly relate to the world. But the particular way in which this happening has to do with a total breakdown of the internal world of the agent in question. The relations he has to the external events represent the let down of his own consciousness. It is a loss of perspective, and perhaps a loss of a wholehearted practical identity, one of a reasoner.

There is more to total alienation of the self, as we need a split and some kind of sense that there is a self-undermining process occurring. The latter point seems clear enough. Underground's spite manifests in self-harm, both in a physical sense (like letting a toothache persist) but also in one's commitments to their own capacities and self-worth. Underground just is not living a good life, a life to his own admission is antithetical to any notion of the good. The split can be seen in his statement that "For if wanting someday gets completely in cahoots with reason, then essentially we shall be reasoning and not wanting, because it really is impossible, for example, while preserving reason, to want senselessness and thus knowingly go against reason and wish yourself harm . . ." (Dostoevsky 27) This might seem like an odd example of a split, but there is a clear divide being set up between reasoning and wanting. If you want to pursue your wants, then reason is a poor player, because then you will not be wanting. We might also set

up the opposite case: wanting cannot satisfy reason as then you will only be wanting. Part of the purpose of this statement is to continue with Underground's abrasive attitude toward reason. The phenomenon to be examined is the ability just to want for the sake of wanting, without any frame of reference to some good that reason may supply. But even a cursory glance at this passage cannot help but evoke Kant, another thinker that would describe the ends of reason and happiness ill-suited to pursue the ends of the other. I also think we can read some of Enoch into this passage as well. We have the constitutive rational agent railing against his condition wondering why he cannot just be a wanton.

The reason why I think this is a good starting place for exploring strong self-alienation is that this appears to be a kind of total alienation of the self (or at least it can be read that way).[58] This is also a good starting point for thinking about what strong self-alienation could be. In tying it with Enoch, I want to transition into the possibility that strong self-alienation is a kind of moral alienation, and perhaps more strongly, an alienation from reason itself. Underground's assails the idea of acting from any kind of good, and with it, the idea that reason can be used to guide us toward one true good. As he states: "Oh, tell me, who first announced, who was the first to proclaim that man does dirty only because he doesn't know his real interests; and that were he to be enlightened, were his eyes to be opened to his real, normal interests, man would immediately stop doing dirty, would immediately become good..." (Dostoevsky 20) His hatred and anger would make this seem as a therapeutic issue more than one of true moral alienation. But regardless of one's read on the example, it at least seems plausible from the outset that one could be alienated from morality. It makes demands on us that might appear to go against our

[58] This is not what Dostoevsky had in mind for sure, but I think the example works as an extrapolation.

own interests. With this as a starting point, I want to transition into exploring this topic deeper, and questioning how this topic is dealt in the philosophical literature.

Section 2 – Strong Self-Alienation as Moral Alienation

2.1.1 Strong Self-Alienation and Constitutivism

Weak self-alienation is when the agent undergoes an "othering" process such that they conceptualize a part of themselves as an alien influence. Strong self-alienation would thus be when an agent sees themselves as themselves and still finds themselves as alien. This can be seen as a form of conscious and intentional self-undermining behavior. The question of who is undermining who (and what and how, for that matter) is still pressing, but I think this bare bones description gives us a good starting point. An example of this that has already been brought up in the previous chapter is David Enoch's "shmagent." The shmagent is a person who behaves and acts like an agent but is not an actual agent. As I wrote previously, this example in its first form was to try and show that while agency as an activity might have constitutive properties, humans are not tied to those constitutive properties in any way. The constitutive response to this objection is to point at the impossibility of behaving exactly like an agent and yet not being an agent. Humans are not contingently agents, they are constitutively agents. In this sense agency is inescapable, as are the norms of agency. However, Enoch raises a second kind of shmagency example in "Shmagency Revisited." The constitutivist needs to account for two common conditions of morality: universality and *authority*. The latter condition suggests that moral norms ought to be authoritative in the sense that the agent will see moral reasoning as

worth acting on, all things considered. In other words, morality cannot just provide another reason in a space of reasons. It must also dictate and separate itself out above all other reasons. Enoch's second example takes aim at this second condition, and in doing so, I think provides a starting point for understanding strong self-alienation.

The crux of Enoch's second example is that even if we are constitutively agents, that does not mean we have to care about agency. At the beginning of the article, Enoch lays out his main point: "For agents need not care about their qualifications as agents, or whether some of their bodily movements count as actions." (209) This form of the shmagent may be forced to be an agent but when confronted with the norms and demands of agency they merely shrug their shoulders. This would be like the ambivalent house builder who only half-heartedly completes their work and only to the degree that they must. This kind of house of builder (the worst kind) might even decide to undermine the constitutive activity of house building itself by purposively sabotaging their own project. Similarly, the shmagent might actively try and sabotage their own constitutive nature by undermining their projects. They would be, all things considered, a "bad" agent, but the problem is that they care little as to whether that is the case. This problem is not defeating. The constitutivist can double down on the original point about agency being constitutive to get around this issue. To be an agent is to care, desire, and want (among many other things). As such, agency provides the standards of understanding the success any of these activities. To undermine agency is to undermine these activities, which begs the question as to whether or not Enoch's second shmagent example could possibly exist. To be a bad house builder is to be bad in a certain domain, to be a self-undermining agent is to self-undermine everything to a degree that is non-sensical. What could that agent want if wanting itself is a constitutive activity of agency?

This version of shmagency objection is a kind of internal challenge of constitutivism. A challenge that is based on the internal reasons an agent has for following the demands of constitutivism. Luca Ferrero spells out the standard formulation of this challenge as such: "If the constitutive motives of agency are psychologically inescapable in the mode of a compulsive motive, why should we grant them any special status as fundamental grounds of practical reason?" (143) If constitutivism only provides a mere *compulsion*, then that could mirror the same urges that unwilling addict undergoes in Frankfurt type examples. If alienation could occur in those kinds of cases, why could it not be in the case of constitutivism too? Ferrero considers two types of cases of the alienated agent. The first is the passive agent who "watches" the exercises of their agency as if from afar. (147) But, this runs into the same paradoxical problem as self-alienation. Who is this watcher and what are they watching? The agent is still the agent, and even if you could divorce yourself in that way, the exercise they are watching passively are still the expression of their own agency. The second is the resistance to identify with the capacities of agency. These agents see the workings of their agential powers in the same way that the unwilling addict sees their drug addiction. Ferrero explains: "This is the operation of their capacity for identification, although one that is exercised to systematically refuse the identification with their own psychological operations." (148) It is as if the agent sees the workings of agency as a series of "mental episodes" that flash before them with a refusal to identify with any of these episodes. This, however, is still not example of alienation *from* constitutive agency, but merely alienation from particular acts. Besides, regardless of how the agent feels about these episodes, they are still exercises of their agency.

Ferrero does not argue that no alienation can occur within constitutivism, only that either the alienation is contained, or it is not a true form of alienation from the constitutive

agency itself. The former is a psychological quirk of the agent, and the latter runs into the same paradox as self-alienation: who is undermining what? From what standpoint could the agent take to be alienated from their own constitutive nature? These responses to Enoch's second challenge may prove defeating, but there is something to the internal challenge nonetheless from the perspective of self-alienation. Let us disregard this as a challenge to constitutivism for now. Total alienation of the self, or strong self-alienation, is not a position where a new self looks at an old version and evaluates it negatively, but it might be operating within the domain of the self and seeing itself as something not worth pursuing. If we are to pursue this line substantively, then we need to look at a version of it that might actually be successful in showing that we can be alienated from our own constitutive natures. This would provide us with an example of strong self-alienation. Thus, I want to bring in Sergio Tenenbaum's version of this alienation objection as a potential example.

2.1.2 Tenenbaum's Retort

Sergio Tenenbaum's "Formalism and Constitutivism in Kantian Practical Philosophy" attempts to address Enoch's second shmagency challenge. This might appear curious at first because the constitutivist has a response to this objection. How can an agent not care about agency when to care about anything at all is itself an agential activity? It would be paradoxical to try and undermine the game of chess by making chess moves. It is true that you can make "bad" chess moves, but to what end? Any answer to that question must come in a form that is responsive to the norms of rational agency. This response is not unlike saying that you cannot use the master's tools to dismantle the master's house, and the trick of constitutivism is to say that there are no other tools at your disposal. Tenenbaum, however, recognizes that the Enoch's

argument is less about intentionally undermining rational agency, and more about how an agent can become alienated from her own constitutive end under the "standard" framework of constitutivism. This alienation would cause the agent to value subordinate ends over and above her own constitutive end.

According to Tenenbaum, the standard view of alienation defers to a hierarchical modelling of ends. The structure of agency is one where all ends are subordinate to the constitutive aim of agency, or that is to say that all ends are in service toward supporting oneself as a rational agent. To be a good housebuilder is both in service of the end of housebuilding insofar as you are excelling at meeting the norms of housebuilding (itself a constitutive activity), but it also can fulfill the norms of a larger constitutive framework. However, Tenenbaum notes that "Human agents pursue various ends concomitantly. We not only pursue multiple ends in the same interval, but also pursue multiple ends in the same activity, narrowly conceived." (165) Presumably, if you undertake the activity of housebuilding, you are also trying to pursue more personal goals. Your interest in housebuilding is partially determined by your own interest in being a good craftsman, and your interest in that might also be described as an attempt to fulfill higher norms like that of personal excellence or maybe even some kind of aesthetic value. These higher order ends all lead back to that of being a good rational agent, an end that for the standard constitutivist structures all subordinate activities and make your actions sensical. This framework is comparable to that of the naïve Aristotelian framework, that all of our activities are in service of the highest good of personal eudaemonia. Even in cases of akrasia, your end is still to pursue what you believe to be good. As such, this Aristotelian framework can have a similar response to Enoch's alienation problem. It appears as though the shmagent (or in this case, the shmdaemonist), in trying to undermine their own good, can only ever still pursue the good.

Their acts in rebelling against happiness is paradoxically one in which the agent would have to believe that they are pursuing happiness for them to be acting at all.

The problem with this standard view is that it creates a distance between the agent and their own highest end. Tenenbaum modifies Enoch's original objection in two ways. The first is to alter how the agent can undermine their own constitutive nature. In the original objection, the agent is "going through the motions of agency" but is disinterested in the actual activity. In putting this rebellion in terms of interest, it leaves itself open to the counter-objection that interest (and thus disinterest) itself is a function of rational agency. At the very least, the objection does not make it clear in which ways the agent can even conceivably undermine her own agency. Tenenbaum argues that there is a way of doing so under the confines of the standard constitutivist view. One example he uses is that of sports. These kinds of games are a constitutive activity where we might suppose that the structuring aim is to win a given match.[59] But these activities have subordinate ends that are supposed to be limited by, or in service of, the constitutive aim of winning. One such subordinate end might be "athletic flourish" where a particular athlete would pull off a flashy and tricky maneuver during a given match to show off their skill. An example might be taking a risky shot in pool, not because it is the best move in terms of winning, but because the pool player would like to show off. The player is not intentionally losing per se, but they are prioritizing a subordinate end that can jeopardize their chances at succeeding or fulfilling the constitutive aim of winning.

[59] There are going to be some variations depending on the sport or situation. Sumo wrestling, for example, within a tournament structure sometimes has an issue where a contestant who is already advancing to the next round of the tournament might intentionally throw a match to help out a wrestler who has not yet earned a spot in the next tournament. There certainly are cases like this where the aim is not always "winning." My instinct here is to say that is still in service of a wider aim of "winning the tournament" or, in special case, it falls under what Tenenbaum will say. That cases of losing intentionally are going to be in service of subordinate ends that undermine the actual aim of the sport.

The above example corresponds to the standard constitutive framework in that the way we can undermine our own constitutive end is by prioritizing subordinate ends. Friendship, for example, is a subordinate end to rational agency. We cannot have friendships outside of the context of rational agency, but just like the soccer playing aiming for the athletic flourish, it is possible (under the standard constitutive framework) to prioritize the subordinate end to a degree that would undermine the constitutive aim of agency. Tenenbaum notes that "It is part of the nature of human agency that we must knowingly pursue ends in a less than perfectly instantiated manner; typically, we can have multiple ends only by compromising in the pursuit of each." (168) If you decide that friendship is the most important feature of your life, then you might decide that other pursuits should be mitigated to a degree that lessens your ability to be a good agent. You can pour yourself into your friendships such that you lose sight of personal projects, familial relations, career prospects, or even your desire to improve your own capacities.[60] Just like the sports example where it is possible to engage in an activity in a deficient manner, you are still an agent despite prioritizing a subordinate end. You are just being a less good agent.

This leads us to Tenenbaum's second modification to Enoch's objection: the constitutive aim is neither one we choose, nor the direct object of our will. I would argue that this is what makes this an alienation objection. To begin with the latter clause, Tenenbaum argues that under the standard constitutivist framework the constitutive aim is not the direct

[60] While I am not interested in proving Tenenbaum correct or incorrect, it is hard to get around the issue of what certain virtues and pursuits entail in terms of how to make those pursuits actually good. Friendship, for example, might require you to both enable another's virtue and to be enabled in your own virtuous activities. This is why the example of helping a friend commit a crime does not quite work here. A friendship that requires such a vicious act may not be a friendship at all under certain theoretical frameworks. These goods that are subordinated are only contingently good depending on the constitutive aim and your ability to achieve that aim. This is a "rising tide raises all boats" response. If you wanted to be a good friend, then you would also be a good agent. This is why the second alteration to Enoch's objection is so important.

object of our will. What that means is that on the priority list of motivations or reasons to engage in an activity, the constitutive aim is often secondary or distant to the reasons why we engage in an activity in the first place. In the example of friendship, when we engage in this activity, it is not the constitutive aim that is our primary concern, but the activity of friendship itself that appears to be grounding our actions. Friendship is the direct object of our will in this case. In conjunction with the previous modification, what we have is both the ability to undermine our constitutivist aim and the motivation to do so. The constitutivist aim under this standard framework does not really inform us as to what we care about. It lurks in the background, and it might allow for the existence of what we care about, but because it is rarely (if ever) what we are directly aiming at, the constitutive aim remains a distant artifact of what we are but not what we necessarily want to be.

Tenenbaum's objection is classified as an alienation objection because the agent disregards the constitutive aim altogether. It is a facet of their lives, but it serves no actual purpose. For now, I am going to treat this as a legitimate form of alienation. It partially fits within my own classificatory structure in so far as it creates a kind of distance between the agent and something they are committed to. The constitutive aim is still part of the agent's experience and identity (to some degree), but despite this they cannot pursue this highest aim without undermining the subordinate ends that they are more immediately indebted to. This objection also fits into the more loosely affiliated definitions of alienation in literature and philosophy. The constitutive aim, because of its distance, is "alien" to the agent. In this way, perhaps it is even a form of self-alienation. The agent is only distally related to their supposed highest function or their most essential nature. This makes it a twisted form of the Marxist view of self-alienation, one where the agent's own essential nature is that which undermines the agent's ability to thrive

in the way they want to. Yet, this brings into relief another aspect of the paradoxical nature of self-alienation. How can we undermine our essential selves? How can any theoretical framework allow for this possibility?

2.1.3 Tenenbaum's Solution

In the previous sub-section I explained how Tenenbaum argues that some forms of constitutivism have a structure of practical reason that would necessarily alienate the agent from her own constitutive end. It is not the constitutive end of agency that is most familiar to agents, but rather the activities of constitutive agency. Alienation occurs because the constitutive end is so ineffectual at moving agents even though it is portrayed as a necessary part of human agency. We are more interested in friendship than some far off end. If practical reason demands that we set as our reason for acting that which is more familiar, then the constitutive end is too far off to fit that criteria. Agents seem bound to identify more with the activity than that which allows the activity to take place. For Tenenbaum, what is needed is not another defense of constitutivism as is but a reconceptualization of the fundamental elements of constitutivism. In this vein, Tenenbaum's solution is to rethink how agents relate to practical reason. Rather than thinking about it in terms of constitutive and subordinate ends, Tenenbaum argues that we ought to think of the constitutive conditions of agency as formal conditions on the representation of action. Here, Tenenbaum attempts to draw a parallel between theoretical reasoning and practical reasoning; in the former case correct judgement or assent is produced when a necessary relationship is understood and found in the content of two theoretical cognitions. Tenenbaum supposes that practical reason ought to work the same way. The content of a representation of

action should necessarily produce the required action, moreover it should produce the right action. In this sub-section, I am going to unpack this slowly as there is a lot here to understand.

Tenenbaum states that "A possibly better option for the constitutivist is to argue that moral norms function in a way analogous to the rules of formal logic in the theoretical case." (pg. 170) The principle of non-contradiction operates as a condition for representing objects rather than an external rule that we apply to theoretical cognitions (as if I could misapply that rule and accidentally think of a square circle), and so "the rules of formal logic" that Tenenbaum is referring to are not an independent normative standard but an internal condition on representing any "general" object. Ideally, in cases of theoretical judgment the connection between two objects would be explained through the relation between the content of the representations and the faculty of cognition that represents those objects. For example, Tenenbaum states "…for instance, in contemplating the simple proof that the three sides of the triangle add up to two right angles, I understand the connection between the representations and this understanding secures my assent" (pg. 169). The formal rules of logic (or maybe geometry in this case) constitute the kind of necessity that a cognizer is supposed to be aware of between the above theoretical cognitions. The advantage is supposed to be that my understanding is not explained only by appealing to the object, but also by how we represent objects. The necessary connection demonstrated in logical or geometrical proofs is thus a function of the way we necessarily have to represent those objects. Of course, all of this is a far cry from practical cognition. There seems to be no violation of any formal rules of representation in pursuing objects of desire. It seems as though the faculty of desire is working perfectly well for the wanton. Tenenbaum's solution will take some explaining.

Tenenbaum begins by trying to draw a connection between constitutivism and the principle of instrumental reasoning (PIR). If we were run the shmagency objection for the PIR, or the principle of adopting sufficient means to an end, we would encounter a funny result. An agent who adopts ends but takes no steps to achieve those ends by taking on means to accomplish those ends would be a funny agent indeed. In fact, it would be worth asking if such an agent cares about her own ends at all. The purpose of PIR is to demonstrate how we can pursue an end that we already find to be good by representing the means sufficient to achieving that end. The PIR is not a further principle that we adopt, or that we ought to adopt, but a condition on the representation of action itself. For Kant, any object of our desire is one that we represent ourselves as the cause of, and this object is represented as good. But, as Tenenbaum notes, "we can only have the particular end clearly in view as good insofar as we also judge the means of bringing it about to be good." (pg. 172) In other words, there is a formal condition on representing any end as 'good' in that we must see the end as sufficient to achieving that end as part of that good. We cannot separate out the goodness of the end from the goodness of the means to achieve that end. Of course, I can pursue ends inefficiently or defectively, as in cases of procrastination, but that is not an indicator that I am failing to conform to the PIR in the same way that Tenenbaum's alienation objection supposes that I fail to conform to the constitutive end when I subordinate it. Procrastination is a failure to pursue certain work-related ends, but the PIR is about the inherent structure of all ends, and in that sense I cannot subordinate it to any other end that I may find to be more appealing.

Tenenbaum's version of a formalist constitutivism is supposed to draw on a similar kind of reason to the above. There is something incoherent about representing an end as good without also adopting the sufficient means to pursue that end. Similarly, there might be

something incoherent about representing an end as good if that end violates moral norms. More pointedly, evil is an incoherent object of the will because to conceive of something as absolutely good would mean that it is a fully rational object of pursuit that is also necessary. For Tenenbaum's formalism to work, you would need an idea of a pure practical reason, one in which the will can determine itself from reason alone. It is in this self-determination in accordance with reason alone that an action can be understood as absolutely good. Any deviation from this is not explained by our "turning away" from the constitutive end, but from a kind of interference from inclination that muddies are ability to act from a self-determining rational cognition. While one may be skeptical of the strong slide into Kantianism, the advantage for Tenenbaum in solving the alienation objection is clear. Constitutivism is no longer about the effective authority of a given end, but instead relies on the formal condition on what we can sensibly take to be "good", or at least absolutely good. A Humean agent might succeed in doing what she pleases, but the object of her will is in some sense incoherent.

We can now see how formalism answers the alienation objection. On this view, an agent cannot prioritize one end over the other. In fact, under formalism, the process of priority itself seems unfit as there is no sense in which one can prioritize the end friendship over the conditions of representing something as good. Further, one cannot even represent the end of friendship as absolutely good as following that end to its logical extreme (as in the case of the sympathetic man) would violate the conditions of the categorical imperative (and fail to satisfy the conditions of self-determination). The aim here is not to deny the possibility of a wanton, but to deny the wanton's claim on what is good. Tenenbaum's worry with the standard constitutivist response to the shmagency objection is that it fails to resolve the issue of normative authority because it places that authority at a distance from the agent's own will.

Alienation occurs because of that distance. Formalism, then, resolves the issue by closing the distance and making it a matter of how one's own will represents actions. I want to mention that Tenenbaum's solution is not just a matter of resolving alienation, as if Formalism is better equipped at ameliorating one's alienation from constitutivism, but that the solution voids this kind of alienation altogether. This is not so problematic as it is an odd solution for what we would typically think of as alienating, especially under my definition. I now want to consider whether or not Tenenbaum is addressing alienation at all in his objection, and more broadly consider if the solution he proposes is adequate to a more robust version of alienation.

2.1.4 Is This Alienation?

Formalism as a solution to the alienation problem brings to mind the question I asked at the very end of **2.1.3**: How can any theoretical framework allow for this possibility? The short answer for Tenenbaum is that no viable theory of practical reasoning ought to allow for this kind of distance between the agent and their constitutive end. While it is not explicitly formulated in this way, I would argue that for Tenenbaum an inescapable feature of the hierarchical view of ends is that it *necessarily* results in alienated agents. This might seem, on its face untrue, but lets take a look at the more mild claim that under a hierarchical model of ends only some agents will be alienated. This is far from a devil's advocate exercise for a position no one would defend. If we can establish contingent forms of alienation with this kind of distance, then perhaps similar solutions to what Ferrero proposes in his article would be available to the defender of this hierarchical view. This would just be another example of "bad" agency where the requirement

of making the constitutive end closer to the object of your will still stands.[61] This would mean that there are some agents who are not alienated or do not experience the distance Tenenbaum talks about in his article. From this perspective then we can establish an agency working well versus deficient agency in a way that still provides a meaningful standard. Even if the former is hard to achieve, that still does not give the objection that much force.[62]

While toned in language, I want to argue for a stronger interpretation of this passage from Tenenbaum:

> "For insofar as it is correct that we are alienated from the constitutive aim agency but not from the more direct objects of our will, the latter might command our allegiance to a higher degree. Similarly, for the constitutive norms implied by the constitutive aim of agency will have a lower priority in our reasoning than the norms implied by the pursuit of our particular ends." (168-69)

The weak interpretation suggests that the phrase "might command our allegiance" takes the stance that alienation is contingent. That subordinate ends are only taken up by the agent as the direct objects of our will voluntarily. Again, I think there are arguments that the proponent of the standard view can make against this contingent alienation viewpoint. Rather, I would argue that the dagger in the back of the standard account comes in the form of the position that any agent would be in a state of alienation if the standard account was true. That any hierarchical modelling of the constitutive end would, as Tenenbaum suggest in the above passage, force that constitutive end to be in a lower priority in terms of which ends to make the direct objects of our will. This can be applied to any hierarchical view of the good in which all ends are

[61] I would imagine that the naïve Aristotelian view would be better able to accommodate a view of this kind. Your own good is somehow the direct object of your will, and for those who are alienated, they are mired in ignorance.

[62] There is the possibility that an agent adopts the standard constitutive framework in the same way that someone might try and live their lives according to utilitarian thinking. In such a case, the agent could be said to develop a kind of self-alienation in an actual way. This seems far-fetched to me, and the purpose of Tenenbaum's paper is not to serve as a warning to those who are contemplating which moral theory to live by.

subordinate to a distant end. Eudaemonia is great in theory, but part of its appeal is the way in which it appears to be cached out in terms of its subordinate ends. Agents like friendship and other virtues but might just adopt those subordinate ends as the direct object of our wills over and above an abstract end. It seems to explain a very obvious intuitive and empirical fact that agents care about these subordinate ends more so than any overarching good. There just is a distance that cannot be crossed when we think of ends as leading to one ultimate end. We never act from that highest end.

The point of strengthening Tenenbaum's argument is to better grasp the kind of alienation that is being employed in the argument. You might notice a shift from Enoch's second shmagency objection to Tenenbaum's objection in terms of what exactly is alienating. Enoch's formulation is about motivation, why should anyone care about rational agency? There is no internal motivating force that appears to point toward the constitutive end. But this itself is not alienation, if rational agency were as such, then someone who was merely "playing along" with the charade so to speak would not be alienated. At least not anymore than the bored office worker pretending to work while their boss is present. Tenenbaum shifts this narrative to one where there is some residual care about the constitutive end, but that care will always be supplanted by one that is subordinated by that end. The distance itself is what categorizes the alienation as alienation. Going back to **Chapter 1**, is this enough for alienation? Distance as an internal relation is an odd attribute, but a necessary one for self-alienation. But, we are distant from a lot of the personas we adopt. As an office worker, I may inhabit a kind of practical identity that regulates my behavior when that role is relevant, but it can also be a practical identity that I am only distally attached to. This might be a kind of play-acting in the sense that I do not really identify with that practical identity. If someone were to ask what kind of person I

am, my profession would not come up in my answer. Thus, I can feel distant from a lot of practical identities that I inhabit without any condition of alienation. For that to occur, I would need to see my office worker persona as a wholehearted practical identity. The agents described in Tenenbaum's example may be distally related to their constitutive end, but it is unclear why they would be alienated at all.

We already have two examples of possible alienation that can occur within constitutivism: the passive watcher and the agent who refuses to identify with their actions. While Ferrero's examples are not meant to be examples of an agent who is alienated from their own constitutive nature, they are examples that involve something closer to the notion of alienation I have been working with so far. There is at least an attempt to split the self from the self. Tenenbaum's example only has this split tangentially. The agent is neither passive nor rejecting of the constitutive end. It simply is not one they care about very much. There is distance, and perhaps there is also a sense in which the agent does not identify with their constitutive end, but there is no conflict. The agent does not appear to even make the constitutive end a wholehearted practical identity. Instead, this is what I would call "procedural alienation." It is alienation by default. Procedural alienation is a kind of alienation that can only ever be the result of bad theory-crafting. What I mean by this is that it turns alienation less into a condition that the agent can possibly find themselves in, and more into an impossible condition that an agent can only ever be under if a given theory of morality or practical reasoning is true. It is alienation by reductio.

Before moving on, I want to make a distinction between essential alienation and alienation from the essential. Interestingly, this kind of procedural alienation is a kind of total alienation in the sense that the agent is essentially alienated. That is, there is no agent under a

given theory of practical reasoning or morality that is not alienated in the reductio against that theory. Essential alienation, then, is when the supposed essential features of the human condition (being moral, being a practical reasoner) led to alienation. Of course, this is not a desired aspect of any theory. Alienation from the essential is when we have an agent that is alienated from some kind of essential feature of their agency (or human nature, etc.). Like Marx's estranged laborer, the self-alienation present is one where the agent is forcibly divorced from their ability to do what they please with their own labor. Note that the former category can contain the latter category. Tenenbaum's alienation example is both a case of essential alienation and alienation from the essential. But, examples from the latter category never contain the former. Strong self-alienation, if it is to be plausible needs to be the kind of alienation that is alienation from the essential.

The dangling question at the end of this section is whether or not there is a threat of alienation that Tenenbaum' shift to formalism is susceptible to. I am going to argue that strong self-alienation does pose such a threat, though I am not specifically interested in crafting an argument against formalism. The main reason for bringing in Tenenbaum's solution is to set a base standard for what kind of challenge strong self-alienation must meet. Beyond the initial paradox, the idea present in Tenenbaum (and Ferrero) is that an agent cannot be alienated from their constitutive selves. Formalism solves this by collapsing the distance between the agent and the absolute good. My goal then is to try and show that some distance does actually remain. The first step is to further examine the notion of alienation as it is used in moral philosophy. I am going to argue that most of that usage is not unlike Tenenbaum's in that it reduces alienation down to mere distance, and in some cases, mirrors the idea that alienation is a kind of reduction used against theories of morality or practical reasoning. I want to bring in broader notions of

moral alienation because moral alienation is still a useful baseline for what strong self-alienation could be.

Section 3 – Moral Alienation

3.1 – Bernard Williams Against Utilitarianism

Put simply, Willaims' notion of alienation can be described as a conflict between an agent's "ground projects" and the values of impartial morality. A ground project for Willaims are those projects which give meaning to an agent's life. These projects can be things like artistic pursuits, maintaining friendships, or starting a family. We can, of course, have ground projects that align with more altruistic aims. Working at a charity or devoting oneself to helping the sick are both altruistic and give a sense of direction to one's life. Willaims further adds that ground projects for an agent are "…providing the motive force which propels him into the future, and gives him a reason for living." (13) A common theme for Williams is the impact of motive on an agent's decision in a given moral situation, and specifically the difficulty that impartial morality has in providing any motive force whatsoever. Further, it is unclear under what conditions can an agent find it reasonable to give up their ground projects in favor of an obligation altogether alien from these projects. This creates a conflict that Willaims sums thusly:

> "A man who has such a ground project will be required by Utilitarianism to give up what it requires in a given case just if that conflicts with what he is required to do as an impersonal utility-maximizer when all the causally relevant considerations are in. That is a quite absurd requirement. But the Kantian, who can do rather better than that, still cannot do well enough. For impartial morality, if the conflict really does arise, must be required to win; and that cannot necessarily be a reasonable demand on the agent." (14)

There is a problematic relation between the agent and impartial morality, and a lot of that problematic relation can be related to similar instances of distance that Tenenbaum and Enoch were trying to bring up in their own alienation objections. To see this in practice, let us take a look at Williams' example of Jim, the unfortunate South American tourist.

Jim finds himself in a town square up in South America and sees ten tied up individuals. He discovers that these individuals are accused, if not known to be, protesters of the local government. A representative of said government offers Jim, as an "honored" guest because he is visiting from another country, the opportunity to kill one of the tied-up individuals. If he does so, as in if he chooses one to kill (and perhaps even does the act himself), the government representative will let everyone else go. Of course, if he refuses to kill one of the individuals then the government representative will execute all ten of those tied-up. This is a classic utilitarian example, kill one to save many or stick by your values and watch the many die. This example is partially to demonstrate what "negative responsibility" is: that even if Jim is not personally responsible for the deaths, he is still somewhat responsible for the consequences of his actions, intended or not. This is a quirk of utilitarian thinking that Willaims has an issue with: "That the doctrine of negative responsibility represents in this way the extreme of impartiality, and abstracts from the identity of the agent, leaving just a locus of causal intervention in the world – the fact is not merely a surface paradox." (*Utilitarianism* 98) In other words, impartiality of this kind runs roughshod over the values that the agents holds, and further cannot be explained adequately by this impartial system of abstractions. For example, if Jim has a personal commitment to not killing as a rule, then that commitment has no place within the context of utilitarianism. Williams says: "Such a principle will claim that there can be no relevant difference from a moral point of view which consists jus in the fact, not further explicable in general terms,

that benefits or harms accrue to one person rather than another – 'it's me' can never in itself be a morally comprehensible reason." (96) Jim's commitment partially informs his identity, the "it's me" factor, but as such it is alien to an impartial morality.

Like for Tenenbaum, we can ask the question if this is really alienation.[63] Willaims' example does set up more of conflict that merely subordinate norms taking a more prominent role in practical reason than the constitutive end. Granted, it is hard to really compare the two examples directly. Willaims is taking aim at a particular moral theory that is not constitutivism and trying to demonstrate the moral objects of that theory are not all that connected to the individual. However, there are more than a few similarities. Both Tenenbaum and Willaims are concerned about the gap between an agent's interests and the commanding authority of a given moral framework. The distance proves to be problematic in both cases. Further, there is a concern about motivation. When the chips are down, will an agent's ground projects or subordinate ends move one's will over such a distant source of obligation? These similarities might also extend to explain why Willaims' example is not a good instance of alienation at all. The conflict set up is not between two wholehearted practical identities, but between one's wholehearted practical identities (which I am using as a substitute for ground projects here) and an obligating force. Jim is not necessarily beholden to utilitarianism as something he cares about or identifies with. In fact, utilitarianism (according to Williams) cannot find a place for such practical identities anyway in its system of values. Once again, we have an example of a kind of

[63] Similar to Frankfurt, I am not sure that "alienation" as a substantive concept is Williams' primary concern. I do not want to suggest that Williams failed at giving a substantive notion of alienation and that we should criticize him along those lines. His usage of the terms "alien" and "alienation" are rather limited. In *Ethics and The Limits of Philosophy,* William's main usage of the form terms relates specifically to agents who are alien from a given culture. But, like Frankfurt, there is a tradition in the literature to take his examples as examples of alienation. Williams also frequently caches out the values of impartial morality as "alien." See Willaims: "He could think that utility was another value, very different from and in certain respects perhaps even alien to other values, but that it did uniquely provide a last appeal from any conflict." (78) I think it is fair to argue that there is a way of reading Willaims as concerned about the issue of alienation.

procedural alienation, one where the moral system in question is not considered to be correct because of its inability to close the distance. Alienation is not being treated as a legitimate phenomenon to be considered, but as an example of a failure of a moral system to explain away its existence.

While I am sure that Williams' usage of alienation in *Utilitarianism: For and Against* is of the above kind, I do think that there is a broader notion of conflict present in his overarching philosophy. I am bookending this section with Willaims so that I can begin with a hackneyed version of the moral alienation question and end with a more substantive notion of the kind of conflict Williams is alluding to in the above work. For now, I want to try and trace some of the history of moral alienation and show that it suffers from the same kind of problems I have with Tenenbaum's usage of alienation. Outside of just historical setting, I also want to start trying build a notion of what a more substantive notion of moral alienation can look like. This can only be achieved if we have a firm grasp of where the concept is going.

3.2 – Railton & Piper

One way to define moral alienation is as a disconnect between our rational self and our sentiments. In "Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality," Railton gives two examples of moral alienation involving agents who express their commitments to friends and lovers through impersonal moral language.[64] For example, Lisa wants to thank her friend Helen

[64] It is worth noting from the outset that Railton's definition of alienation is not very substantial: "…at a perfectly general level alienation can be characterized only very roughly as a kind of estrangement, distancing, or separateness (not necessarily consciously attended to) resulting in some sort of loss (not necessarily consciously noticed)." (Railton 134) Part of my project is to provide a more substantial notion of moral alienation that fits with a better codified definition of what alienation is. It is not that I think that the examples brought up in the last section and this section are not worth discussing or do not pose the threat these authors believe that they do, but I would argue that they do not do justice to the topic of alienation. My aim is to use

for helping her out when she was feeling down, but Helen responds by stating that she was merely doing what is required of her as a friend. What is the problem exactly? Railton puts it like this: "…there would seem to be an estrangement between their affections and their rational, deliberative selves; an abstract and universalizing point of view mediates their responses to others and to their own sentiments." (136) The two examples he sets up are about two agents who justify the kindness they show their loved ones using only moral language without mention of any feeling of care they directed toward the specific individual they are helping. It would seem that Lisa has cause to be hurt, as Helen's help was not about Lisa, but merely the result of a kind of rule following. Interestingly, Railton takes his examples to show *self*-alienation. The supposed problem of impartial morality being the denial of the self's ability to relate to its own desires and cares as mediated by a commitment to certain forms of morality. This mediation, and this self-alienation, makes it difficult to pursue goods necessary to live a happy human life or, at least, seem to disregard how humans actually live their lives. As I will talk about later, there is an issue as to what the problem of alienation is exactly for a given moral theory because Railton's formulation is vague, but for now I want to ask what kind of alienation is present in these kinds of examples.

Railton's examples make for poor instances of self-alienation at a glance. Helen's expression of a commitment to a moral principle in itself would not produce self-alienation. We can describe the example with no reference to conflict, or even without stating that she is denying herself some kind of good. In an alternative example, Helen might offer a co-worker a ride to the airport not out of a deep care for that co-worker, but merely because it is a nice thing to do and she believes in doing nice things. Such examples constitute daily life and are usually

these examples as a helpful starting point, but maintain that we can ultimately come up with better examples of alienation.

free of self-alienation. Even in the case of close-friendship, Helen might just believe that is the right thing to do and the right way to express her commitments. Helen would not experience any self-alienation, though the expression of her commitments might cause others to be alienated from her. The crux is that, in Railton's example, Helen wants to express here commitments in a way that is caring but is prevented from doing so because morality demands that she express those commitments using only impartial and universal language. I think this would be alienating if I thought this was an example that could be replicated in real life. Most people do not have any trouble expressing their cares using individualized language. Railton's point is not show that there are real moral zealots out there unable to communicate their individualized commitments, only that there are certain moral frameworks that do not allow for this kind of language. We want these cares to be moral in some sense, but if morality does not have space for them then what we have is a deficient moral view.

But let us consider two different examples that fit Railton's general formula of moral alienation that are more likely to be plausible cases of alienation and self-alienation. We can describe the general formula as follows: agent *x* has care *y*, but has trouble relating to *y* because of moral theory *z* mediating the connection of *x* to *y*. Traditionally, this structure produces a state of alienation because the agent sees morality as an external (read: alien) set of demands preventing her from pursuing ends she values. The most plausible case of resulting alienation from this formula has to do with others more than alienation from the self. In Helen expressing her impartial moral views without the language of personal care, *Lisa* appears to have the right to be alienated. She is the one experiencing the distance between them when she though that they were close in a particularized way. I think this is not an uncommon example, though not in the exact way framed by Railton's example. People's feelings and thoughts are opaque to us, and

because of that, we might be surprised when someone who we thought we were close to rebuffs our advances to greater friendship with language that denotes duty rather than care. You might have done such a thing yourself: in looking after someone who was down and out, you might have given the wrong impression that you were initiating something more. In fact, what you were doing was out of a personal commit to help when you can. How often does this result in alienation? It is hard to see, but I would argue that it is plausible more than a few examples of alienation can be borne from this kind of example. What we have here is an interesting kind of moral alienation where someone else's commitments misalign with your own. It might also be possible to be alienated from a moral system as an external object itself. If you were once a firm believer in a given moral system and then decided to pursue another system, you can rightfully say that you are alienated from the former system if you still feel beholden to it at times. But none of this gives us an example of someone who is alienated *from morality itself*. Not quite in the same way that Underground was, and certainly not in the way that constitutive moral alienation would entail.

The second example might be more on track with Railton's, and that is of the moral guru. One character that comes to mind for this example is professor Pangloss in Voltaire's Candide. An eternal optimist, he is often quoted saying "All is for the best." This is a riff on Leibniz's "best of all possible" worlds argument, but as *Candide* is a satire, the phrase is often juxtaposed with immense human suffering. This can work as an example of the type of moral alienation that I was referencing in the above paragraph, Pangloss is alienating those around him who are suffering by repeating a phrase that only offers empty optimism. An agent of such a disposition can certainly alienate someone who is trying to relate to them with their own troubles and woes. Pain, it could be argued, ought to be recognized as pain. Pangloss also can work as a

case of moral self-alienation of a type. His refusal to drop his own optimism in the face of grave misfortunes has an air of self-denial. His commitments are divorcing him from the reality of his situation. This seems to be a more realistic example following Railton's formula. There is a conflict between one's moral commitments and their own nature to some extent. Pangloss might be a particularly absurd example, but we can substitute him out for the religious zealot with blind faith that refuses to see events that cause suffering as anything but God's will, and in doing so, also cannot see their own pain.

As an example of self-alienation goes, the moral guru is a good starting point, at least for moral self-alienation. Some care does, though, need to be taken. Self-denial and self-alienation are not necessarily the same phenomena. Underground's issue with reason does not need to be one of self-denial but could be frothing rage and malice. Self-hatred, as a further example, might be an excessive focus on one's faults, and not where one is blind to their own psychology.[65] Still, there is a kind of conflict one can create from the tension evident, at in the same way that the estranged laborer is alienated. That agent is suppressed from doing what their nature demands of them by an outside economic force, whereas here we can say that the moral guru's internal commitments prevent them from expressing themselves as they ought to. The question is if this conflict results in alienation all the time, and if it does not, what is the deciding factor? In the case of the religious zealot, they may be denying themselves something, but if they are willing to take that commitment on, they may find that pain bearable because of that overriding commitment. This can turn the issue of alienation into one of pathology. Adrian Piper in her article "Moral Theory and Moral Alienation" argues that moral alienation is not necessarily an issue with a given moral theory, but rather points to an archetype of a self-possessed person. She

[65] I take it that you can hate the fact that you hate yourself.

argues that in cases where agents can only mediate their personal commitments through impersonal[66] language that "…the very real problem to which the moral-alienation criticism calls attention is not just personal detachment, but a deeper, more generalized pathological narcissism, of which the condition identified as "moral alienation" is merely a contingent and localized symptom." (108) In this way, the religious zealot can just be narcissistic rather than self-alienated. Their commitment to an overarching religious order has a tendency to make them treat friends and family as mere instruments of that order. They are more concerned with adhering to their own tenets than relating to anyone else.[67] If we are trying to figure out the deciding factor, then we should not let self-alienation merely be a kind of pathology.

Let us put these examples in some context: what are the goals of Railton and Piper? Railton argues that there are two standards by which a moral theory should be aligned with. (1) That it does not divide the self unnecessarily, and (2) that it takes personal commitments seriously. (Railton 139) Railton's solution to the moral alienation problem is to differentiate between two different kinds of moral structures for consequentialism. The first is *subjective* consequentialism, and the second is *objective* consequentialism. The divide here is between how consequentialism mediates itself between the agent and their deliberations on how to act. Subjective consequentialism demands that the agent, for every action, maximize the good. This gives us the problem of moral alienation, and an agent that is required to deliberate directly from the maximization principle has no room for personal commitments within the space of that deliberation. Objective consequentialism, on the other hand, is concerned about the general

[66] I will not be covering her full argument in the main body of this essay, but a good part of her argument hinges on the distinction between "impartial" and "impersonal." Morality can, and ought to be, impartial, but it is a mistake to think that it is impersonal. The requirement to act through the latter is the mark of the narcissist.
[67] See Piper: "Nor is it difficult to understand in what sense a narcissistic self might view others from a detached or impersonal perspective, and how its concern with the opinions of others might be accompanied by an inability to establish genuine and unmediated contact with them." (109)

tendencies of the agent insofar as their actions tend to promote the best consequences. (Railton 152) The difference is brought out in yet another sports example. A tennis player may find that the best way to accomplish the goal of winning matches is to promote other ends that lead to a greater satisfaction in playing the sport. The tennis player may find that exerting themselves to hard just for the sake of winning as demoralizing and is alienating them from what motivated them to play tennis in the first place. By focusing in on a more personal end, like the beauty of the sport, it can indirectly help them achieve that larger goal. This is what objective consequentialism is trying to accomplish. There are times in which maximizing the good is best done through focusing in on one's commitments.

Piper's concern with moral alienation has to do with closing the gap between moral motivations and the kinds of motivations that generally move us. Her example of the narcissist is one where the agent is directly motivated by the moral theory in question, seemingly skipping over the supposed care that we ought to display when helping out a friend or saving a loved one from a deadly situation. Her solution is to contextualize these situations in terms of backward and forward-looking motives. The former are like standing principles whereas the latter are normal desire-object satisfaction motivations. You can explain your motive to help your friend both through the standing moral commitment you have in generally maintaining healthy friendships (backward) and the love you have for your friend (forward). There is also an explanatory connection between these two motivations. Ideally, an agent would partially explain their cares in connection with their standing commitments. Thus my duties (deontologically speaking) are partially constitutive in explaining the kind of actions I want to commit toward my loved ones, and might even explain why I love them the way I do.

Thus, we have two separate ways in which the moral guru can be said to be failing as an agent. On the one hand, such an agent is taking up a subjective viewpoint that forces them to instantiate their principles immediately in deliberation. Thus, Pangloss is unable to deliberate about those around him suffering in the right kind of way and is thus alienated from himself and others. On the other hand, we might also call Pangloss a self-obsessed narcist exhibiting moral alienation because he is not motivated by his commitment to others, but only through his slavish devotion to his optimism.[68] Notice that both "solutions" have a way of writing off the concern of moral alienation. Railton's original example is both unrealistic and one that is obviously not a desirable feature of a moral theory. Piper disregards many forms of moral alienation as a pathology. Even in the case of the moral guru, we can say they are either pursuing a seemingly intentionally alienating moral theory or that they have an undesirable pathology. Either way, this does not seem like a substantive case of self-alienation (or total moral alienation). The moral guru is not alienated *from* morality per se, they are being alienated by an alienating moral structure that they are committed to. Again, I would argue that this amounts to a kind of reductio. If your moral framework produces agents that are alienated in this kind of way, then you have a bad moral framework. While the reductio is not as acute as the one Tenenbaum brings up, a kind of reductio that suggests that moral alienation of a type is impossible, it does try and suggests that morally alienated agents are not unlike the absurd professor Pangloss.

Both Railton and Piper admit that some distance is necessary for any moral theory. Piper tries to distinguish between impartiality and impersonal distance, with the former being a normal part of any moral theory. Railton goes further and notes that moral alienation of a certain type is

[68] I am not committed to this chain of reasoning, but it strikes me as correct that optimism as a general outlook can produce narcissistic individuals. If the main charge against optimism is that is fails to allow the agent to perceive harms, then there is a sense in which that agent is failing to appreciate the concerns of those closest to them (and themselves) in favor of their own biased interpretation of events.

going to be common for any moral theory. There just are going to be conflicts between personal interests and what is required of you by morality.[69] Notice that there is a funny quirk about Railton's solution in relation to Tenenbaum's alienation problem. Objective consequentialism appears to promote subordinating one's overall moral end in favor of ends subordinate to that moral end. It cannot be a one-to-one match; consequentialism is very unlike constitutivism. The similarities, though, are uncanny. It is interesting that Railton's solution is Tenenbaum's problem. At a first glance, I would argue that Tenenbaum's alienation problem is relevant for Railton. Objective consequentialism appears to operate in such a way that the immediate object of practical reason are the subordinate ends like friendship, art, truth, and beauty. There is an overarching structure that is supposed to manage these subordinate ends, but we can ask the same question Tenenbaum did for standard forms of constitutivism: Why would the agent ever care about this overarching structure? For Railton, and Piper, the problem is less acute (and might also be a feature built into their respective moral theories) because the distance created is not one between the agent and their constitutive natures.

3.3 The Goal of Strong Self-Alienation

It is time for a reset. This chapter began with a description of a harsh example of total alienation from the self in *Notes from Underground*. I concluded that this was a form of alienation from morality. We can separate out different kinds of moral alienation depending on the theory in question. Both Piper and Railton take on moral alienation as an inevitable part of any moral theory because there will always be clashes between what one is obligated to do and what one

[69] I would hesitate to call some of these conflicts alienation proper under my terminological definition of alienation, but I am willing to let this play out because it will help my overall argument.

wants to do. There just is a distance between the person and morality. Their projects aim to make this distance unproblematic. This creates a kind of moral alienation that is not total alienation from the self, like in the case of Underground. I argued that the examples shown are still kinds of reductios based on absurd characterizations; essentially that no moral theory ought to produce such agents (and in some sense, that such agents are either highly eccentric or pathologically sick). If we contrast this with Tenenbaum's worry concerning of moral alienation, any distance is devasting because what the agent is distance from is their own constitutive nature. This is the kind of total alienation from the self that I think would satisfy a kind of example of the strong self-alienation that I am looking for. Outside of just bringing up and dismissing Railton and Piper's examples as potential candidates, I also wanted to explain the importance of distance through the usage of these examples. The possibility of distance, the first condition of alienation that I delineated, needs to be established as a possible feature of moral alienation when we consider that moral framework to involve the essential features of who we are as rational agents.

The need to close the distance between morality and the agent is not an unidentified need. Railton states that:

> "If to be more perfectly moral is to ascend ever higher toward sub specie aeternitatis abstraction, perhaps we made a mistake in boarding the moral escalator in the first place. Some of the very "weaknesses" that prevent us from achieving this moral ideal- strong attachments to persons or projects - seem to be part of a considerably more compelling human ideal." (140)

This is echoed in Jack Samuel's article "Alienation and the Metaphysics of Normativity: On the Quality of our Relations with the World" as he states that "The threat of normative alienation calls for a theory of normativity that brings it closer to us, intermingling it with the messy, embodied, and perhaps contingent features of human life with which we each individually have

the most direct familiarity." (11) Constructivism correctly centers ethics within the sphere of individuality but has a problem in explaining the normative values that we express toward others. His solution is partially to close the distance by incorporating sociality as a feature of agency. In an indirect way, I am more interested in the solutions proposed by theories like constitutivism and constructivism to moral alienation because they appear to deny the possibility of an agent alienated from morality full stop. By closing this distance, it makes it hard to imagine how the agent can be alienated from their own interests by a morality that constitutes those interests. The project in this case is to find space for that kind of distance within the context of those kinds of moral theories.[70]

Formalism makes for a good test case for a variety of reasons. First, as I have stated, is that it collapses the distance between the agent and the absolute good. Finding how the agent can be distant from morality in this case, and what that would even mean, provides a great challenge for the kind of strong self-alienation that I am looking for. The case of Underground, for example, is not problematic as it merely demonstrates a man who is severely irrational. Try as he might to undermine himself, he simply cannot get outside of these constraints. This would make a genuine case of Underground impossible. This leads into another compelling feature, that is it makes a lot of moral alienation examples unproblematic. Pathological cases of moral alienation may still apply, but those are not instances of true alienation from morality. This form of constitutivism simply does not allow for agents to abstract away from their own position so

[70] Part of the reason that I said "in an indirect way" is to avoid sounding as though I am outright dismissing consequentialism, deontology, or external realism on the grounds that they allow for the possibility of moral alienation. This feature would be altogether better for my project in establishing a form of strong self-alienation, but it would probably be of a different kind. My worry is that such theories, and this is especially true of external realism, is that the alienation present would look more like an external antagonist case of self-alienation. But, to be clear, I think the form of strong self-alienation that I would argue for is problematic for any moral theory that leaves out certain meta-ethical features like the highest good.

far as to leave their own good behind. The absolute good is the only notion of good relevant to the agent. This, however, is not meant to be a defense of formalism (or constitutivism, or consequentialism, etc.). I am merely setting the stage for the kind of challenge that my notion of strong self-alienation must meet in order to be problematic across a wide range of moral theories. In fact, collapsing the agent's good into the absolute good already sounds alienating. The question is just how?

I would like to end this sub-section with a note about what the problem of strong self-alienation is supposed to pose to any given moral framework. A contention in this chapter is that examples of moral alienation in the literature come down to a kind of reductio. This is a problem for moral frameworks in so far as they point to undesirable features, and in the most extreme cases, suggest a fundamental flaw in the way practical reason is supposed to operate. The problem of strong self-alienation is not supposed to work like this. My aim is not to show that any particular moral framework is lacking, and moreover, I want to show a true form of self-alienation that plausibly describes the condition many agents may find themselves in. As I have maintained, self-alienation does not intuitively appear as a far-fetched reality only for mystics and philosophers. There is a real problem that agents must face in relating to themselves. What I want to argue is that strong self-alienation poses a problem of this kind: that the common tools of many moral frameworks do not offer the agent any guidance out of conditions like strong self-alienation. We must look beyond these moral frameworks for a solution.

3.4 Identity, Conflict, and Williams

If the first challenge of establishing a case of strong self-alienation is finding a way to creating distance between the agent and morality (and in the case of formalism, the absolute

good), then the second and third challenges must relate to identity and conflict. To do this I first want to return to Bernard Williams read under the interpretation of Nicholas Smyth. Outside of *Utilitarianism: For and Against*, Williams does not flesh out the alienation problem he presented. Smyth's reconstruction in his article "The Inevitability of Inauthenticity: Bernard Williams on Practical Alienation" fleshes out Bernard Williams' original argument. In this reconstruction, we can see the beginnings of how a rational agent can occupy, and perhaps identify with, competing perspectives during deliberation. This also segues into how conflicts can arise. Lastly, I want to end this chapter on a discussion about the plurality of goods. If there is a plurality of goods, then this can enhance the conflicts present in potential strong self-alienation cases.

Smyth brings up two related contrasting pairs. The first is between inside and outside perspectives. An inside perspective is the perspective of the agent from their ground projects. This is the perspective of their wants and cares, which we might also refer to as the direct objects of their practical reasoning if we follow Tenenbaum. Outside perspectives are a little harder to explain. Smyth writes: "In evaluating a particular disposition "from the outside," we simulate the practical reasoning of an agent who does not have the disposition."[71] (191) The idea being that this outside perspective is a tool we use in the reflective inquiry of our own beliefs and disposition. We simulate a discussion with an imagined agent where we try and justify our dispositions to someone who is not disposed to act in a certain way. The second contrasting pair is between direct and indirect vindications. Direct vindications are justifications for an agent's dispositions that are specific to that agent's cares and wants. For example, a direct vindication for an agent's loyalty to their friend is because of their love for them. Indirect vindications are

[71] This is Smyth's attempt to make the argument that Willaims never explicitly stated. There is a temptation to think of the outside perspective like Nagel's *sub specie aeternitatis* or the view from nowhere, but Smyth argues that Willaims would reject that as pure fantasy. (190)

those we seek using outside perspectives. Since we cannot use direct vindications to sway this simulated agent, for they do not have our dispositions and thus cannot feel the force of our direct vindications, we must find ways to indirectly vindicate our dispositions by appealing to the closest set of values that they simulated has that might act as a kind of vindication. For example, while the simulated agent does not love my friend, I could appeal to the overarching value of helping friends to vindicate my disposition to help out my friend.

Outside of whether or not this provides a plausible view of practical reason, it is an attempt to provide a naturalistic account of how ethical deliberations occur within the agent. The way in which it involves the switching of different kinds of perspectives, even if this style of deliberation does not occur as a literal conversation between imagined agents, strikes me as somewhat true to life. Part of philosophical skill is in the ability to inhabit the position of interlocuters to see where they are coming from. Regardless of whether this comes down to a kind of mind reading or taking on abstract levels of thought, there is still a sense in which agent's have the ability to inhabit perspectives that are both their own but distinct. The trouble that Railton (and others) where presupposing with moral alienation is that it forces the agent to inhabit a perspective that is divorced from their lived experience. This is not supposed to be a perspective that the agent could possibly identify with, but this again marks it as a poor instance of self-alienation. What we need instead is a perspective that is attempting to portray a kind of moral stance that is undoubtedly from the agent's own perspective. The notions of an outside perspective and indirect vindication seem to provide a basis for which to start. The need to

justify a disposition that you have yourself from a perspective that, while simulated, is still your own might provide both identification[72] and the beginning of a tension.

Smyth contextualizes Willaims' example of moral alienation, that of Jim in South America, as a conflict between the outside perspective and our personal commitments. Reflective inquiry into the justification of a standing personal commitment of non-violence would destroy that commitment if the outside perspective was favored. The larger point made by Smyth is that this seems to be a common feature of any reflective inquiry into our base commitments, that "Ordinary human commitments can be psychologically undermined if the outside, reflective mode is given priority, as Jim's commitment to nonviolence may be destroyed by his wholehearted acceptance of indirect utilitarianism." (193) This puts the conflict in a dire perspective, that if this higher perspective is given justificatory force then it will undermine our ground projects. The problem is that our ground projects, according to Willaims, are the things that make life worth living. Even more direly, Smyth states that "…this entails that human ethical practices and institutions can never be fully transparent to those who participate in them since reflective inquiry into their value has the tendency to undermine or destroy them." (194) The argument that Smyth is making is that this appears to be a feature of human life.

This sets the stage for a particularly troublesome conflict within the self. If we are to identify with the outside perspective in some respect[73], then it might very well undermine the

[72] Note that we still have not satisfied the identity condition fully as a condition of *strong self-alienation*. It is unclear, for example, that we actually would or could identify with the simulated agent. I might have a voice in my head that constantly tells me to do better, but I might regard that simulated voice with the same derision as the unwilling addict does to their addictive impulses.

[73] Reading Smyth, it is unclear how much we identify with this outside perspective. I have been inserting more of an identity clause then he is committed to, but the basic idea still suggests that somewhat. The outside perspective is a simulation that we engage in and could, theoretically, feel the force of. I think this is not dissimilar to "taking a step" back and reflecting on your actions and dispositions. Both perspectives are your own, but they have different contextual relevance to the self. Still, it is a perspective of a self reflecting on the self.

very projects we hold dearest. The last paragraph points out two features of a conflict that should constitute strong self-alienation: (1) That there are instances of perspectives that undermine each other, and (2) that this undermining appears to be a feature of what it means to live a human life. The first is contained in the notion of dueling perspectives potentially overriding each other and yet remaining valid as a justificatory force to some extent. This poses an ethical challenge. If part of the goal of a moral framework is to close the distance between an agent's personal commitments and the commitments of morality, then it would be a failure of that framework if one was destroyed in the process. But this seems like another reduction, as no moral framework would find this acceptable. The point of an example of strong self-alienation is not to undermine the whole of morality. Rather, if we can find the condition of distance in this landscape, then the tension can be maintained through the agent switching between two different perspectives or identities. We can prevent it from collapsing fully. The second point is also needed. Strong self-alienation cannot just be a condition for the neurotic moral enthusiast who reflects on their commitments constantly. This would seem to get us closer to the pathological. Railton makes the point that moral alienation just is a feature of any moral theory, and I would like to argue that this extends to examples of strong self-alienation as well.

Chapter 4 – Absurdity

Introduction

The previous two chapters presented a rough definition of alienation, introduced the paradox of self-alienation, presented the distinction between weak self-alienation and strong self-alienation, and finally looked at the supposedly impossibility of strong self-alienation in ethics. This chapter is about presenting a plausible view of strong self-alienation where the agent conceives of themselves as having mutually undermining projects that they can neither reject nor repair into a coherent unity. The agent is forced to see themselves as the main driver of conflict in this situation. We can understand the paradox of self-alienation as only occurring within certain models that either take an essentialist viewpoint on the self or ascribe an inherently hierarchical structure to goods and projects. In this chapter, I will argue against this by suggesting a view of the self that is more akin to Korsgaard's radical constructivism and borrows from Jaeggi's work on anti-essentialist views on the self. My proposal is that the way in which we "see" ourselves is inherently perspectival. We see ourselves according to the various Wholehearted practical identities we inhabit. Self-Alienation occurs when we are left with no viewpoint to back into because every other viewpoint appears meaningless. This is the perspective of absurdity and the state which makes us susceptible to this form of strong self-alienation. Absurdity is not an uncommon topic in the alienation literature, but it is often overlooked. As we will see, "solutions" to the problem of absurdity appear relatively straightforward and do not treat it as an existential issue. To the agent in this condition, the issue is not meaning per se, nor the specific level of perspective that she is undertaking. The issue is what to do next. Part of my project in writing about self-alienation has been to clarify what

conflict drives alienation and to explain how the resolution of that conflict is to find a coherent unity amongst various Wholehearted practical identities. Strong self-alienation is about how that conflict can lead to a situation where no resolution from no perspective appears plausible.

In **Section 1** I will start by arguing that you can both be alienated but also take yourself to be pursuing the good. The purpose of this is to establish that strong self-alienation need not be the agent herself undermining herself like in the case of Underground. This is to remove one part of the paradox, as the issue of alienation is not self-sabotage, but mutual sabotage of the possible identities an agent can inhabit. It is an issue of coherency in the sense that I have defined it in the first chapter and elaborated on in the second. In **Section 2** I will spell out a view of the self that is non-essentialist. My work here mainly draws on Korsgaard's constructivist view of the self and Jaeggi's anti-essentialist view. While the basic view of the self here will be an amalgam of the views of others, my own contribution is that the way in which we "see" ourselves in through the lens of our practical identities. This is building upon the phenomenology of morality that I argued for in chapter 2: that we see ourselves through the lens of whatever viewpoint we end up inhabiting. In **Section 3** I will introduce the issue of absurdity starting by using Nagel's *The View from Nowhere* as a foundation. The basic idea here is that the notion of absurdity gives us a unique way of understanding the problem of alienation as it presents itself existentially for the individual. I will also spend some time in this chapter discussing why absurdity is overlooked in the in the literature on alienation. Finally, in **Section 4** I will present a view of strong self-alienation that poses a global problem for the agent, and a problem that cannot be handled by the usual tactics that resolve cases of weak self-alienation.

Section 1 – The Phenomenology of Goods

The last section of **Chapter 3** dealt with the possibility of conflicting identities between our ground projects and morality, and the troubling notion that this is a feature of human life. That last section left the notion of conflicting perspectives vague. It is not yet clear how different perspectives can conflict in a way that the paradox of self-alienation seems to demand. Does the agent switch between different perspectives? Is there not some Ur-self that maintains these perspectives? These perspectives might conflict, but can they undermine each other? In this section, I would like to tackle some of these questions head on. The first thing that I want to argue for is a kind of moral phenomenology that suggests we form wholehearted practical identities according to the way in which we see ourselves as particular moral agents. I then want to extend this notion of identity to the way in which we pursue a plurality of goods. The argument I ultimately want to make is that while there may be essential feature, capacities, or ends that as rational agents we may have, that these constitutive features are actualized in us through these contingent and subjective wholehearted practical identities. The constitutive features themselves may not be able to conflict, these identities I am arguing for can. The last section of this chapter will try and argue that even Tenenbaum's notion of absolute good can admit these identities as evidenced by Kant's own view of the difference between virtue (or morality) and happiness.

1.1 Existential Identities

This chapter will greatly rely on a notion of 'existential' that is more specific than the various definitions of the term usually denote.[74] At the outset, I will say that I will use the term 'existential' just to mean the subjective identity an agent creates to represent to herself the way in which she is pursuing various goods. This notion is largely influenced by Sartre's notion of subjectivity in parts of his own works. Of course, Sartre's full view of existentialism is defined by the commitment to the idea that existence precedes essence, or that the act of choosing defines who we are. (*Humanism,* 22) I am not interested in taking on the full commitment, but I am interested specifically in the kind of subjectivity Sartre presents both in *Existentialism Is a Humanism* and *Notebook for an Ethics*. This is a kind of subjectivity that bears a certain relation to the good and morality, and one that I want to import to my own structure of wholehearted practical identities and their relation to morality and goods.

What is the nature of this kind of subjectivity? Sartre states that existentialism "…is a doctrine that makes human life possible and also affirms that every truth and every action imply an environment and a human subjectivity." (*Humanism* 18) And he later states that subjectivity must be our "point of departure." (*Humanism* 20). In the full picture of a view where existence precedes essence, this is meant to capture the idea that man must create himself and that choice is the foundation of a great project in creating a self.[75] To begin, let us say that subjectivity is the way in which we create ourselves and in this creation of ourselves do we realize the projects

[74] Indeed, Kevin Aho's SEP article lists six overlapping ideas that existentialists are usually committed to. I do not want to be associated with many, or all, of such ideas.

[75] David Jopling points out that Sartre has a transcendental project in mind when he discusses the "fundamental project" of creating a self. (113) Again, I want to just mark out the notion of subjectivity from any of this. The idea of a fundamental project, potentially determining the authenticity or inauthenticity of the self, is teleologically laden to a degree that makes it seem like an essential feature in much the same way of an Aristotelian or Marxist project. I understand that this fundamental project is still reliant on the choice to become a self, but I am not interested in incorporating anything further at this point.

afforded to us by human natures, essential features, and the like. This is a point of departure from Sartre, no such things could exist prior to the creation of the self, but still the basic idea is that the stated items are only valuable insofar as there is a subjective self to instantiate them *in a particular way*. This last point is another dimension that I want to add, that subjectivity here is related to the idea of individualization. In **Chapter 1** I argued that practical identities had the unfortunate fate of becoming like job descriptions. "Housebuilder" is a kind of constitutive activity, and it can be a kind of practical identity, but in its bare bones descriptive feature it loses the way in which the activity is instantiated by a particular agent. Agents imbue these constitutive activities with specific features individualized to the way in which they conceive of that activity. A housebuilder who sees themselves as an aesthetic will pursue the constitutive activity differently than one who sees themselves as pragmatic.[76] This is not to say that the guiding principles of the constitutive activity are not common to all wholehearted practical identities associated with that, only that there is a sense in which the subjectivity of the nature of wholehearted practical identities does individuate them to a degree.

Thus, I am using "existential" to point out the subjective way in which an agent individualizes their wholehearted practical identities. How the agent conceives of herself, her condition, and what she is doing matters to alienation. This leads to a bigger claim, that it is through (and solely through) wholehearted practical identities do we actualize any given essential

[76] This works as a quick example, but I think that the detail of this individuation goes further down into the nitty gritty features of the activity. Agents have a series of priorities that vie to constitute an identity, and in that way, the identity is an amalgam of many different kinds of interests and modes of being. A professor kind be humorous, easy going, an easy grader, stern when reviewing published articles, hard to get along with if you're an authority figure, combative during talks, etc. ad infinitum. The point is that often times these traits do add an individual flavor to a wholehearted practical identity that makes the content of that wholehearted practical identity different from another.

feature[77] as rational agents. This requires buying into some of the existential project that Sartre is arguing for. There is a sense that any essential feature of rational agency is not real until it is actualized by an agent in a subjective way. As with my distinction between external antagonists and internal dilemmas, there are going to be edge cases that I am happy to leave ambiguous. Perceiving seems to be an essential feature of human nature, is it actualized through a wholehearted practical identity? Maybe parts of it are, and maybe it is wholly independent of such subjectivity. I am less interested in making a global claim and more interested in how the self interacts with complicated social phenomena like morality.[78]

1.2 Moral Phenomenology

In *Existentialism Is a Humanism* Sartre presents what is now a well-known moral dilemma. A soldier must decide between serving his country and going to war or staying behind to care for his sick mother. We can examine this dilemma under different lenses. As one between a deontological duty vs. a utilitarian demand, perhaps as one between honor and personal sacrifice, or even one as the impersonally alienating vs. the ground projects that make life worth living. Sartre puts the dilemma this way: "And, at the same time, he was vacillating between two kinds of morality: a morality motivated by sympathy and individual devotion, and another morality with a broader scope, but less likely to be fruitful. He had to choose between the two." (33) It

[77] I am simplifying the terminology here. I am not just concerned about constitutivism but a broad range of theories that might posit some kind of teleological end, pointed human drive, or essential function. "Essential feature" is hobbled phrase to capture these various viewpoints, but one that will get my point across.
[78] And other associated goods. There is a barebones description of goods in terms of self-maintenance. Water is a good when thirsty. But generally, when people talk about a plurality of goods they mean things like truth, beauty, and aesthetics. These goods can only be produced through a combination of social forces. Sociality itself can be considered a good. I am less interested in the question "do we drink water in particular, individualized, and subjective instantiations?" than "how do we consume art under a unique wholehearted practical identity?"

seems natural to read this vacillation between moral theories as a vacillation between, say, deontology and utilitarianism. It is as if the soldier to be or not to be is flipping through various reasons to take up one moral theory over another. The conflict is about which morality to become obligated to. But, as I argued in the previous chapter, this seems to be an unrealistic scenario. In the abstract, we might be interested in what theory obligates what, but the soldier in question is undergoing a very different kind of dilemma. It is one of personal identity. As a son, the agent feels as though he is obliged to take care of his mother. As a member of a certain nation, he feels obliged to fight in the war.

For now, I want to set aside the question as to whether or not there is an objective obligation that the agent in the example *must* follow. In *Notebook for an Ethics*, Sartre spends some time trying to explain the relation between man and 'the good.' Man has an interest in the Good, neither for egotistic reason but also neither for its own sake. (*Notebook 558*) One interesting thing he says concerns the way in which this relation is borne out in the world, stating: "He defines himself by this interest in the very moment that he defines the world and ethics by this interest. For me, he will never be an interested man, but rather a man who chooses to be interested." (558) I am extrapolating a bit here, but the relevance that this has to the given example is that there is no agent who *is* a deontological or utilitarian agent, only agents who choose to be one or the other (or any other moral theory of your choosing). This choice is one of identity. The soldier has two wholehearted practical identities that are of certain archetypal moral theories. The conflict is not an academic one in him, but a conflict in the way that he expresses his values through his wholehearted practical identities.

This does not mean that Sartre thought that the good was subjective: "Subjective in that it must always emanate from a subjectivity and never impose itself on this subjectivity from the

outside, it is objective in that it is, in its universal essence, strictly independent of this subjectivity." (556) Outside of what the Good meant for Sartre, I would like to maintain the same distance for any goods of any objective moral theory that can be applicable here. For example, my contention is not that the constitutive end is relative and subjective, but that there is a subjective way of actualizing that end. Agents choose to actualize the constitutive end, or some other kind of objective good, in a particular way through a wholehearted practical identity. I would argue that this fits with an intuitive sense of moral phenomenology. We are moral in particular ways and do not often think of ourselves as acting directly from some abstract good. It is not just that lying is bad, but I also think of myself as someone who is honest and straightforward. There is an identity there that I want to embody, and it is through that identity that the prohibition against lying gets actualized in my behavior. I think this is translated in simple terms by Sartre: "What we can take from the examination of this idea that "the Good has to be done" is that the agent of Good is not the Good." (555)

There are two important results from the above that we should consider. The first is that I am bringing the conflict of morality down from the abstract to the realm of Williams' ground project. What I am explicitly rejecting is that there even is a conflict between abstract moral theories and ground projects, only ones between different ground projects, or in my own terminology, wholehearted practical identities. As I have argued, the idea of an agent agonizing over the demands of utilitarianism and their personal commitments seems farfetched. But, such conflicts do exist. We are often faced with choosing between a moral action and one that serves our own interests (egotistical or not). What I am arguing is that these kinds of conflicts are ones between subjective identities, or the ways in which agents see themselves as moral. The effective altruist will have trouble deciding between their identity as someone who donates large sums of

money and the obligations to raising a family and promoting your own good. It is a felt conflict because the agent in question really does *see* themselves as an effective altruist. You can see this as a minor distinction to make, but part of my project has been trying to realize moral alienation from a perspective that is faithful to the way in which moral alienation actually occurs. The devil and the angel on your shoulder are not reductios to prove a point about the failing of impersonal moral theory, but phenomena related to the ways in which agents conceive of themselves. There is a conflict here that has to do with subjective identities.

The second result has to do with our relation to objective morality or objective goods. As I have stated more than a few times, I am not denying that such things exist. If there is indeed a constitutive end that provides a normative framework through which defines the standard of good and bad action, then such a framework still has authority and normative force. The question is not if that structure exists or has efficacy, it is how the self actualizes those principles through a subjective system of interrelated wholehearted practical identities. What I am denying is that there is a universal character by which we directly act from that objective good (or system of morality, whichever phrase you prefer). While this might be contentious, I do think you can see something like this in the notion of "conditional goods." In the next section, I would like to consider the notion of a plurality of goods on this moral phenomenology.

1.3 Good(s)

Toward the end of his article on moral alienation, Railton makes a case for expanding the notion of 'good': "

> Rather than pursue these questions further here, let me suggest an approach to the good that seems to me less hopeless as a way of capturing human value: a pluralistic approach

> in which several goods are viewed as intrinsically, non-morally valuable-such as happiness, knowledge, purposeful activity, autonomy, solidarity, respect, and beauty." (149)

The conflict needed to generate a case of strong self-alienation will be helped by this pluralistic notion of good. It is easy to imagine that we can have different cases of wholehearted practical identities attached to different kinds of goods that mutually undermine each other. This is why Railton thought that alienation was just part of life to a certain extent. The goods mentioned can each conflict with one another, and not to mention conflict with an impersonal moral system. I want to focus in on happiness in particular as a competing good among others. There is a way of seeing happiness as that which all other goods are sought for. To surround ourselves with beauty is, in some respect, to make ourselves happy. The intuition that Railton is capturing, and one that I endorse, is that happiness is a competing good among many. We have wholehearted practical identities related to beauty and aesthetics that operate independently, though sometimes in tandem with, wholehearted practical identities related to specific notions of happiness. It is not hard to see how these wholehearted practical identities may come into conflict. Sometimes that conflict will come down to a kind of precedent that the agent has set up in advance. Catherine might just value her identity as an honest person more than her identity as someone who deescalates family conflicts. Or, I might find that my search for rare art prints is not as important as taking care of my family. Certain obligations, even against well-established wholehearted practical identities, can be placed on a higher pedestal such that any conflict is resolved seamlessly. The kind of conflict I am interested in cannot be resolved in this fashion.

Let us begin with a simple example of mutually undermining wholehearted practical identities that are the subjective instantiations of the mentioned goods. Mary has a wholehearted practical identity related to art in that she favors artworks that represent particularly disturbing and graphic representations of difficult subject matters. This can be watching films on the

horrors of war, looking at paintings where the content is explicitly macabre, or listening to music where the lyrics are explicitly about depression and suicide. She takes a deep interest in these moody pieces because she thinks they are what art is supposed to depict; that the most powerful and worthy forms of art display content that deals with the basest aspects of human nature in its rawest appearance. She is known and wants to be known as someone who curates a collection of this kind of art, and she considers part of her raison d'être to be experiencing this form of art as much as possible.[79] Mary, in her aesthetic pursuit, finds that her life is unsatisfactory from the point of view of her own happiness and well-being. She longs to make connections with people and not be in a constant state of morose despair. Her own wholehearted practical identity about what it means to be happy might include ideals that are antithetical to her own aesthetic conception. In trying to be happy, she may just need to pursue art that represents cheerier content, and yet her aesthetic commitments shuns such art as inferior. She may want to pursue certain relationships that would involve being with people who like such inferior art, but her commitments yet again tell her to shun such people. In pursuing different kinds of goods she has to come to a decision about which one takes precedence, but there might not be a further guide or authority she is willing to follow. Her aesthetic sensibility is as equally important to her as her happiness. This brings the issue closer to what I mentioned could have been a better notion of alienation in Frankfurt. This agent may come to a disillusioned state, unable to harmonize these two wholehearted practical identities, she may resign herself as a being in conflict with itself. Every time she pursues her aesthetic interests, she becomes unhappier, but every time she tries to cheer herself up, she feels as though she is becoming distant from her aesthetic ideal.

[79] Granted, I am making an extreme example. This kind of person, however, is not unfamiliar if we tone down the extremes. There is a sense that immersing yourself in this kind of depressing aesthetic world is going to affect your relationships to other and yourself.

I would argue that you can come up with similar type examples for any of the listed goods from Railton's list. The problem is motivating that kind of pluralism. There are two main problems.[80] The first is a problem for my project. Mary, in the above example, is experiencing a conflict that does not have to result in alienation at all. Mary can recognize that there is a conflict between her own pursuits of different kinds of goods, but not become mired in the conflict such that it results in self-alienation. The strong case that I am looking for involves a total alienation from the self, but by bringing in a plurality, we have at best a partial alienation from the self. The danger is that this case may become more like the unwilling addict than Mary's case might first appear. It might be more correct to say that she alienated from a given good rather than herself. She would regard her pursuit of that good as an other. Still, I think the above example gives us a good template. There is some sense in which pursuits of different goods can undermine each other. But there is a further problem. Some goods appear conditional on other goods. It is easy to reframe Mary's predicament as one where her pursuit of the aesthetic good undermines her pursuit of happiness but not the other way around. Aesthetic goods can be considered contingent on one's happiness. This brings the example closer to Tenenbaum's case of alienation, where a subordinate good is taking priority over one's constitutive good. The difficulty is that this can turn Mary's case as described into a non-sense case. It is not possible for happiness to undermine itself if aesthetic goods are considered to be part of *the* good. I want to maintain a kind of plurality of goods, but to do so I need to motivate how some contingent goods can remain independent of the absolute good. This independency and contingency will end up helping me motivate a case of strong self-alienation.

[80] You might consider a third problem for my own project: that goods in a pluralistic worldview are not necessarily connected to the essential features of an agent.

The previous sub-section's emphasis on subjectivity fits with this discussion on happiness as it relates to Kant's definition of happiness: "…a rational being's consciousness of the agreeableness of life uninterruptedly accompanying his whole existence is happiness…" (23) Kant's definition of happiness is worryingly straightforward. In one sense, it is surprisingly naturalistic. Human beings have desires and the satisfaction of those desires lead to a kind of agreeableness that can be measured out in terms of pleasure. There is a quantitative aspect to his definition, happiness is both about maximizing pleasure and about the uninterrupted flow of pleasure. (Herman, 179) It gets more complicated when you add in the fact that it appears that happiness is a necessary end: "To be happy is necessarily the demand of every rational but finite being and therefore an unavoidable determining ground of its faculty of desire." (Kant 23) The problem is that this conception of happiness is vague and unattainable. Unattainable in the sense that a life of uninterrupted pleasure, a life in which all of your desires are continuously satisfied, is empirically impossible. Its vagueness, however, appears to be a feature rather than a defect, and one that I want to take advantage of. Happiness for Kant does not have a specific content because that conception of happiness will be different for every agent. As Barbara Herman puts it: "In this way the demand for satisfaction with one's existence drives a process of individuation." (182) We have our own desires individuated to the agent, and there is no universal notion of happiness that is applicable to everyone. There is a form of happiness, but it is an empty notion until we fill it with our specific desires.

This aspect of individuation pairs nicely with the kind of subjectivity that is related to the way in which agents instantiate the good through wholehearted practical identities. Happiness is a kind of good that we all necessarily have but its content needs to be determined by the agent herself. A distinction that Korsgaard makes between the functional sense (which she refers to as

the motherly sense of good) of good and the final sense of good also helps us make sense of this. The functional sense of good refers to goods that help us achieve or maintain certain ends as it helps us function as human beings. (18) Health or psychological well-being fit into this category. They are not directly good, but good for us as a functional system. The final sense of good is more relevant here. Korsgaard states "From the other, we view the things that are good for Alfred from Alfred's own point of view." (19) and "She conceives the things that are good for her to be good things in the final sense, and as such she decides to go for them." (26) The final sense of good mirrors Williams' ground projects to a certain extent, they are the goods that from the agent's perspective makes life worth living. Happiness is not unlike this final sense of good, as they incorporate the individuated projects of the agents related to their own desires that reflect the way they conceive of the good life.

While happiness might be subjective, individuated kind of good that I was trying to identify, Kant's notion of happiness is also commonly known as a conditional good. Korsgaard defines conditionality thusly: "Now a thing is conditionally valuable if it is good only when certain conditions are met; if it is good sometimes and not others." (179) Happiness is not absolutely good, or good without qualification. This is partially due to its subjective nature. The specific content of my happiness is going to be individuated to me, it cannot be shared with you. But conditionality also brings with it the inherent idea that it is a lesser kind of good insofar as it is dependent on other goods for its own goodness. Korsgaard goes on to say:

> "Since the good will is the only unconditionally good thing, this means that it must be the source and condition of all the goodness in the world; goodness, as it were, flows into the world from the good will, and there would be none without it. If a person has a good will, then that person's happiness (to the extent of his or her virtue) is good." (181)

The good will, for Kant, is the only unconditionally good thing, as so all other goods are conditional on the agent having a good will. There is, however, a small equivocation here that has consequences for the subject of happiness. Happiness has been treated as a good in the sense of being good for the agent to be happy, but in both Korsgaard and Engstrom, happiness as a good is defined as happiness in proportion to one's virtue. The good will is a condition for this proportionality, but not a condition for happiness itself. You can see that in the Korsgaard quote above with the qualification that happiness is good *to the extent* that it is related to the agent's virtue. Engstrom makes a similar point here about happiness, that "Its goodness depends on the way in which it is combined with virtue into a whole. The goodness of happiness must be derived from the place happiness has as a part within the whole and is thus a consequence of the goodness of the whole." (750) This seems to transform what the goodness of happiness can possibly be. Its conditionality is not one where the goodness of happiness depends on the absolute good, but one where the quantitative measure of one's happiness is what is (possibly) good.

I call this a small equivocation not because I think there is a fallacious use of reason at play in either of these thinkers, but because setting the context of the good of happiness in this way diminishes the naturalistic way of understanding Kant's definition of happiness.[81] As pointed out by Rachel Barney, this proportionality thesis makes happiness much more like the ancient conception of happiness where virtue is a modifier for experiencing happiness at all. But, Kant emphatically rejected many ancient conceptions of well-being that make happiness conditional in this way. As Barney states about the ancients: "They failed to give moral value the

[81] So much the worse for Kant is the tempting answer here. But, the reason I want to hold onto Kant's notion of happiness is because it is a simple, subjective, and a necessary end. While the specifics might be disagreeable, I want to make these general features work.

independence and authority appropriate to it; but they also failed to recognize that happiness is a very different thing, and travels independently." (159) Happiness may not be the highest human good, nor one that is unconditioned, but I think there is an independence to it, even in a Kantian system, that is worth preserving. The point that I ultimately want to make is that the conditionality of goods does not mean that they do not retain a kind of independence. In a formalist system, even if there is one absolute good, we can still have identifiable kinds of goods independent, yet conditional, of that absolute good. Further, these conditional goods can relate to the essential features of rational agents. The conditionality does not extend to its necessity of the end that a rational agent must have. That is, the end is not conditional on the constitutive end. There are, however, different notions of conditionality at play here. For one, there is a conditionality on something being a good full stop. Happiness is conditional on being a good depending on the agent's conception of happiness, and perhaps even how that good is pursued and the desire satisfied. Happiness is also conditional as part of the absolute good in that an agent needs to be happy in the right kind of way and under the right kind of system for it to be considered part of the highest good. There is an issue of conflating these too as to erase the good of happiness specific to happiness.

This digression into conditionality is only to establish that some goods can be independently considered good outside of the umbrella of an absolute good. For Kant, there really is only one other kind of independent good outside of the absolute good (or the good will), and that is happiness. If one is not tied to a Kantian system, there might be others as well. Further, these goods as thought of as subjective and individuated by the individual ties these goods to the self that gets us closer to understanding what strong self-alienation is. There is,

however, a missing element that I will address in the next section: how can we pursue any good while alienated? How can we intentionally undermine our own (individuated) good?

Section 2 – Pursuing the Good While Alienated

A major facet of the paradox of alienation is the possibility of an agent having two wholehearted practical identities mutually undermine each other. The paradoxical aspect is why the agent would endorse this, especially if it meant undermining some good they are trying to pursue. Depending on your framework, this seems impossible in a way that makes cases of self-alienation (especially moral alienation) appear like faults in theory rather than a practical possibility. Cases of weak self-alienation attempt to get around this by suggesting that an "external antagonist" is making the agent look at a part of herself as an other. That other is not aiming at a good that the agent really wants. In the case of the unwilling addict, for example, the addiction is aiming at some kind of good that the agent might recognize from another perspective, but it is not a perspective they identify with and a perspective they actively reject. In the Marxist case, this othering process distorts the agent in such a way as to interfere with the way in which they pursue a good tied to their essential features as an agent. Either way, the agent is not really engaged in a kind of self-alienation where they are seemingly deliberately undermining a good they identify as good.

In both of the cases just presented, the agent sees this form of self-alienation as bad. The unwilling addict wishes that they were free from the addiction that plagues them, and the estranged laborer is depressed and twisted by an overarching economic force. This keeps with the tradition of describing the agent in entirely depressed or painful terms. I do not want to depart from this tradition in some ways. The experiential component of alienation, as I outline in

Chapter 1, is one of pain. What I want to establish in this section, however, is a space in which we can separate out the experiential component from the conception the agent has about what she is pursuing. What I am arguing is that there is a conflation between the experience of pain and describing the end the agent is pursuing as one of pain. Contrast the example of the unwilling addict and Mary. The unwilling addict is both pained and also, in succumbing to their baser desires, sees the end of their addiction as bad. Mary is pained, but she sees both the pursuits of her aesthetic self and her well-being as goods. In this section, I want to explore these latter kinds of cases as possibilities.

2.1 Narcissism and Alienation Revisited

Sandra Lee Bartky's article "Narcissism, Femininity, and Alienation" sets out to describe a unique form of self-alienation as it applies to women. This is (somewhat) in contrast to Marx's theory of estranged labor in that it both tries to refine the way in which Marx's theory can be thought as it applies distinctly to women, but also in the way in which self-alienation differs from an existential standpoint from Marx's theory. The parallels between Bartky's project and Marx's are informative. Bartky takes Marx's theory of estrangement to have two core features: (1) fragmentation and (2) prohibition. Marx thinks that a constitutive feature of human activity is to create or produce objects beyond what is necessary for bare subsistence. But, in a capitalist system, we are forced to create labor not for our own ends, but for the ends of others. In this context, our products of our labor merely allow us to pursue the means of subsistence. Laborers, under this view, are fragmented because the product of their labor are no longer mirrors of their own creative acts but that which is owned by and for another. They are also prohibited from fulfilling a constitutive aim of human nature as all their labors are subservient to the larger social

structure of capital. A distinctly feminist application of this form of estrangement looks at the ways in which women are culturally prohibited from partaking in the creation of their own image and the fragmentation that results from having "alien" norms forced upon oneself. Bartky coins the phrase "the fashion-beauty complex" to capture the system of norms that regulate feminine beauty standards. These standards produce a state of alienation within the subject, as the subject is both defined by those standards but also is indebted to maintain them. For Bartky, this kind of self-alienation produces an interesting deviation from Marx's theory of estranged labor: it seems to produce a state in which someone can take pleasure in the standards that alienate them from themselves.

Bartky states: "We can understand the interest women have in conforming to the requirements of sexual objectification, given our powerlessness and dependency; less easy to explain is the pleasure we take in doing so." (37) The point is that there appears to be a large number of examples where women revel in meeting the beauty standards opposed upon them. This is problematic from two points of view. First, feminists would need to explain how systems of oppression can produce agents who take pleasure in meeting the demands of those oppressive systems (while maintaining that those systems are indeed detrimental). Second, the Marxist theory of alienation does not allow for laborers to similarly have states of pleasure under the oppressive conditions of capitalism. Workers drearily march onto their work but are necessarily prevented from enjoying their rote labor.[82] They are disillusioned and beaten down; their self-

[82] This is somewhat at odds with statements that I made before concerning the empirical effects of alienation as it relates to Marx's conception of self-alienation. I still maintain that we should not think of Marx's estranged laborer case as one beholden to empirical testing, but I also somewhat deviate from the literature in presenting this case. As I stated a few times, I am suspicious of any theory that ascribes alienation to an agent without that agent realizing it. Thus, I am happy to say that some laborers are estranged and others, who exhibit pleasurable moods while engaged in what we might consider dehumanizing conditions, as unalienated. Bartky takes a different line, that the empirical effects of alienation insofar as some workers are happy to do rote laborer, is something to be explained. Outside of a critique of Marx, I think this is a good pursuit.

alienation conforms to what we standardly take to be a painful state. The fashion-beauty complex cited by Bartky is undoubtedly oppressive, but for some women it does not come with that immediately painful condition. Bartky outlines this kind of self-alienation as a form of narcissism induced by beauty standards. Women can experience a satisfaction in sculpting themselves according to a set of norms. They then inhabit a kind of "other" that sees themselves from an oppressive point of view and take pleasure from that standpoint. Notice that this is similar to Sartre's othering process, where the other's point of view is not from the self's perspective, but from some imagined third personal perspective.

Bartky's view of self-alienation is not so different from Marx's according to my own taxonomy of alienation. There is an "othering" process that occurs where women are fragmented by an external antagonist (here, a patriarchal system that imposes an oppressive beauty standard). The self-alienation present here still does not conform to the hard problem of self-alienation that I set up earlier. There are interesting "existential" twists introduced in this conception. In distilling Beauvoir's heady conception of alienation, Bartky says "The stranger who inhabits my consciousness is not really a stranger at all, but myself." (38) This gets us closer to understand the other process not as a total imposition of the external, but as Bartky argues later that this process is "…not just the splitting of a person into mind and body but the splitting of the self into a number of personae, some who witness and some who are witnessed, and, if I am correct, some internal witnesses are in fact introjected representatives of agencies hostile to the self." What we have is a split self where parts of the self take on the role of the oppressive standard. However, this conversation still takes place under the guise of a "broken self" caused by an external antagonist. Self-alienation is still not problematic in the way the hard problem suggests because one part of the self is still co-opted by an external viewpoint that the agent

herself does not endorse (it is in some sense literally not hers). The other existential twist that I think deserves a much deeper dive is the focus on the pleasure an agent can receive in subordinating herself to an external antagonist despite the resulting self-alienation.

In some ways, this gets us closer to understanding why self-alienation is not always immediately resolved. In the Marxist case, we might say that the total psychic devastation incurred on the individual only persists because of the limited means available to the laborer to resist her means of oppression. Certainly, some amount of this is true in the case of patriarchal forms of oppression, as women have historically also had limited means to resist that kind of oppression. But, the point that Bartky is trying to make is that some women may actually find some instances of this oppression pleasurable due to the unique way in which it fragments the psyches of women. This can explain examples where it appears as though some women prefer the standards set by the fashion-beauty complex and resist any feminist stirrings to dispel those standards. We need to be careful here, and I think starting to dissect the idea that pleasure and self-alienation can be intertwined is worth our effort.

One distinction I want to make is whether or not the pleasure described in this case is independent of the self-alienation itself. In one case, the pleasure experienced is incidental to the self-alienation. You might make the case that narcissistic pleasures are universally pleasurable and activated in a variety of circumstances, not just self-alienation. On the other hand, you might argue that there are some pleasures that can only ever be achieved through unique kinds of fragmentation. My interest here does not lie solely with pleasure. It is not a stretch to think that some pleasures are activated in, and maybe even only arise in, perverse circumstances. The issue that I am interested in here has to do with the relation between specific kinds of goods with alienation, and whether alienation can be compatible with the pursuits of those goods. Pleasure

is a kind of good, and it would indeed be surprising if the pursuit of it can be accomplished while self-alienated. I want to explore this distinction and take it to its limit to see what I can get away with (if I can get away with it at all).

Are the pleasures associated with narcissism, as in Bartky's case, common to other forms of experience? It is a little unclear what those pleasures are in the first place. For Bartky, it has to do with meeting a certain set of standards and having pride in meeting those standards. If standard Catholic doctrine is to be believed, pride would certainly qualify as a specific kind of pleasure. We can take pride in many different kinds of activities and achievements. Bartky focuses on a particularly pernicious case, where the agent is prideful of their own body in a way that is both self-demeaning and perhaps too self-directed. Pride, however, is easily rehabilitated to a more palatable broad affective state. We take pride in our children doing well, our good acts, and our expertise in treasured hobbies. These prideful states can be labeled as "healthy" even. This is partially the distinction I am trying to draw. "Pride" as an affective state might be a broad pleasure that can be activated in a variety of contexts and is not unique to alienation (or any other malignant condition of the self).

I want to draw attention to this because I think that if this is the view, then Bartky's analysis of self-alienation would be severely underwhelming. Again, one of the distinctive elements of Bartky's analysis of self-alienation, in contrast to Marx's, is the pleasure women can take in their own self-alienation. If this was just a pleasure broadly conceived, then it would be susceptible to similar responses a Marxist might have to claims about feeling joy in their rote labor despite being in a self-alienated state. It is easy to have skepticism for the idea that all laborers experience in all-encompassing negative affect all of the time. Outside of the worst of working conditions, this is just not empirically true. Some workers, some of the time, will

experience pleasures associated with their own working conditions. The issue is the general malaise and defeated tone in which a worker carries themself outside of specific experiences of pleasure. The issue is not that the worker has compartmentalized a part of their life such that within a specific demarcation of a given compartment they can be said to experience pleasure, but that the total sum of their well-being is on the whole stunted by the condition of self-alienation. A similar move can be made in response to Bartky's analysis. Sure, a woman can take pleasure in their own oppressive condition, but all things considered they are *ultimately* unhappy in a similar way to the oppressed worker. This would make Bartky's response more of a species of Marx's conception of self-alienation rather than its own conception.

The alternative, as I see it, is to make certain forms of pleasures associated with narcissism dependent, not just for their activation, but for the particular experience of them. This is just to say that there are pleasures associated with perverse states that are unique to those perverse states. (I am not entirely sure this means that we *cannot* say that say pride* is a sub-species of pride, it is just that pride* can only be activated by narcissism and differs enough from pride to be considered somewhat independent from normal pride.) A more illustrative example might help. There is a difference between describing to someone the taste, and pleasure, of strawberries to someone who has never tasted them before and someone who doesn't even have the ability to taste. In the former instance, that person is able to understand certain broad forms of pleasure associated with the taste of strawberries (e.g. their sweetness, berry like quality, their juiciness, etc.). In the latter instance, that person is unable to even comprehend what those pleasures are (assuming they never had the ability to taste to begin with). Can we make the same case for narcissism? Intuitively, this is a bit like asking the shmagency question. There are usually a broad range of experiences with general forms of pleasures that most agents are familiar

enough with that it would be hard to imagine a scenario where a certain kind of pleasure is exclusive to a kind of psychological perversity. I may not be able to inhabit totally the perspective of the narcissist, but I certainly have familiarity with feelings of self-pride despite my many years of graduate study. This alone might be enough to build a framework of mutual understanding even if it does not amount to total understanding.

The above response is either lacking or, at least, has enough questions associated with it to try and look for other solutions. I am not sure that what Bartky needs to secure her view of self-alienation is peculiar kind of pleasure. Rather, I would argue that what makes the kind of self-alienation she is describing so disturbing is that it gives the agent an alternative kind of good that she undertakes unwilling. The associated pleasures of this state may not be unique, but how they add up to a certain view of happiness or a tumorous conception of the good is unique. If we accept the viewpoint that there is a plurality of goods, then you might also wonder if there are goods that we can aim for that are not mutually commensurable without being in a certain kind of state, some of those being psychologically perverse states. I think that this perspective would preserve two aspects of Bartky's viewpoint: first an instance of self-alienation that is sui generis, and second a state that is deeply troubling. The Marxist laborers might be all to happy to break their chains, but those in thralls of a certain kind of good that can only be realized within a perverse context would be harder to convince.

As much of an interest as I have in this thought, I still think there are obvious issues. The reason why viewpoints about "the" good are so resistant to criticism from the perspective that there are many different types of good is because a lot of goods just seem generalizable to a degree of universality. Again, I may not be able to inhabit the perspective of the narcissist, but I can have a general understanding of the good they are aiming at. Even if Bartky's project is

preserved, it is still worth wondering how self-alienation relates to someone's pursuit of happiness or the good.

2.2 Pursuing Goods Despairingly

Let us trace the evolution of pursuing the good while self-alienated. Weak self-alienation is weak precisely because the agent is being forced by an external antagonist to take actions (in a broad sense) against their own good. This would be the full-on Marxist conception of self-alienation. It poses no paradox, and fits into any moral theory, because the agent is not undermining themselves intentionally. The Bartky case is one where the agent thinks they are pursuing the good, but their notion is perverted yet again by an outside influence. The point that I want to emphasize here is that there is something interesting about being inside that perverted world view where agents really see that perspective as good. The point that I was trying to make at the end of the sub-section was that it is possible to take oneself as pursuing the good while still being in a state of self-alienation, as being in a perverted state. This still comes up against some problems that I have mentioned in earlier chapters. The experiential component of any kind of alienation is one of pain. There is a sense in which an agent can, for a little while, rationalize that pain away (and, as we have seen, there might be legitimate pleasures associated with certain perversions that make this rationalization more amenable to the agent). All things considered, however, the person under that perverse notion is going to eventually experience a kind of pain at the realization of their own self-alienation.[83] Further, if the agent realizes the perverse nature of their pursuit, then they would drop it. This kind of self-alienation is still weak

[83] If they realize it at all. Alienation requires that the agent see themselves as alienated to a certain degree (not in the sense that they are literally utilizing the concept of alienation itself, but that they see themselves as in conflict), but the experiential component can still exist even if they do not have this conception.

in the sense that it is a conception of the good that is forced upon them by a domineering and oppressive social framework. This does not give us an agent who is self-alienated in the sense that they are in conflict with themselves to a degree that they are undermining themselves. But it is a beginning to seeing how such a state is possible.

The last form of this evolution is the idea that we can pursue the good despairingly while in a self-alienated state. The first thing that might come to mind here is the distinction between the psychological and the moral. There are lots of good we can pursue while in some kind of diminished form psychologically. Even a naïve form of Aristotelian would readily accede to the idea that hardships can make an agent depressed even though they are still, ultimately, aiming toward their own happiness (and perhaps even succeeding). The soldier who must fall on the grenade need not be happy about it for them still to be pursuing the good in some sense. This is not quite the distinction that I am aiming for and wanting to explain. Bartky's notion of self-alienation had a direction of fit insofar as it was some external antagonist that brought about a perverse viewpoint about what the good is. In this way, the perversity is corrupting the agent from the outside. I am interested in how an internal dilemma can set a kind of depressed tone when pursuing a good. The idea is not that there are exigent circumstances producing hardships or external oppressive conditions, but that there is a conflict within the self by the self that the agent sees as perverse to some degree. This specific conflict is also one in which it is between two goods; a conflict the agent cannot adjudicate in the ways weak self-alienation examples are resolvable. There is a "bad" self, a bad end that is being pursued. Resolutions in those cases is to remove the conditions that have split the self such that there is an undesirable other. Pursuing the good despairingly is a different kind of conflict, and would demand a different kind of resolution.

Let us start with two diminished examples that might not fit within the confines of the stated goals of strong self-alienation but should help with the idea that I am arguing for. In the first, we have the corrupted DA who believes that what justice is amounts to convicting the most people.[84] In doing so, they fervently pursue every case as though the defendant was the worst criminal and always seeks the harshest penalty possible. Let us suppose that the effect of these actions has a negative effect on society, and unduly harm minorities and the poor. This DA is not intrinsically corrupt, in so far as they are not overtly racist or biased against poor people, but they are rather corrupted by an external framework of structural racism and classism. The DA is corrupted, but in the moment they genuinely believe that are pursuing the best course of action. We can further suppose that if they were to be made aware of the negative effect that their actions led to, that they would then drop their policy of pursuing the harshest conviction possible. The standard frameworks of alienation and morality we have been looking at considers a lot of cases of moral corruption and self-alienation this way. The agent is *corrupted*, but if they were to realize that this was the case, then they would transition out of that state. Like akrasia cases, there is a sense in which *this* lawyer would change their ways if they knew the full extent of their wrongdoing.

The second example is that of the disillusioned defense attorney. This would be an example of someone who knows and wants to pursue justice but is unable to do so because of the inherent constraints of the system available to them. Imagine our defense attorney as a carpenter working with tools that somehow work against each other. The constraints of the system obliges our attorney to strike bad deals with the DA office and shortchange their clients

[84] I am making a slight distinction here between means and ends. If the example said that convicting people was the best way to pursue justice, then that would frame the example as one where the DA was using the wrong means. Here, the DA is confusing actual justice (presumably, unless you have a rather vindictive theory of justice) with a corrupted notion of it.

because of limited time and manpower. This is in despite of working in a field that actually does provide much needed services to clients who do not have the money or power to go elsewhere. This agent wants to do good, but is unable to because of the kinds of resources afforded to them. This differs from the previous example because they cannot internally change their politics or outlook to align themselves better with the good. At first brush, this might appear to be just a problem of insufficient means, but my example is supposed to point to something deeper: the incoherencies of what it means to be a public defender at all. This is departing reality, but let us suppose three things were true: (1) that the stated purpose of being a public defender is to provide legal representation to those who otherwise would not be able to afford that representation, and (2) that the stated purpose of our current justice system is to severely underrepresent those who cannot afford legal representation, and finally (3) being a public defender means supporting the current justice system. This would create a vicious cycle. Forget for a moment the larger apparatus, and think about the public defender seeking certain goods that they internally recognize as good and worth pursuing: helping people who cannot afford help and advancing the interests of the justice system. It just so turns out that both of these stated goals have a way of undermining each other.

The limitations of the above example are evident because it either appears to be a problem of means, or a problem of systems that are not supposed to rationally cohere (or cannot). However, the main takeaway that I want derive from this example is the agent's position. The public defender may believe that the justice system is a good thing to support, and they may also believe at the same time that defending the poor is important. From their perspective both are good. They cannot be convinced to drop one of them in favor of the other, they need to pursue both. The context that they are forced to be under, perhaps the only context

that those good ends can be realized, is one of mutual incompatibility. The two ends only serve to undermine each other despite the agent's goal of pursuing both ends. The important point about this context is that if the agent in question where to drop one of the ends then they would cease to be a public defender. Perhaps, given the context, that is the best option available for our agent, but the analogy to constitutivism should be clear. On one end of the scale there are constitutive activities that the agent may want to engage in but find themselves in an impossible circumstance where the ends that are supposed to support such an activity end up undermining each other. Most of these cases are going to involve instances where the activity is hindered by some further context, or in some other cases, the activity in question cannot even be regarded as a constitutive activity. On the far end of the either side of the scale, there is the possibility that the constitutive activity of being an agent itself is made up of ends that can work to mutually undermine each other. Both can result in self-alienation, but it is this latter case that I would argue produces strong self-alienation.

This would be a perverse state to be in, but different from the examined example of Bartky's narcissist. The perversity there is drawn from the corruption provided by an overarching patriarchal system. It twists the agent's self-conception in such a way that they take their own subservience as a kind of good, or a source of pleasure. If we can say that this is a top-down kind of perversity, then the public defender example is a bottom-up kind of perversity. The goods the public defender is pursuing remain good, but it is the execution of the activity that reveals a problem. The perversity is in the activity itself rather than the goods to be obtained. This is a kind of absurdity.

Section 3 – The Absurd

The issue of absurdity in regards to alienation is usually located in Nagel's *The View From Nowhere*. While much of the work is not concerned with alienation per se, it does treat the issue of absurdity in a similar manner. The "problem" of absurdity is a result from taking a universalistic perspective on all of our projects. We normally inhabit a subjective perspective, one in which our desires, aims, and ends appear to us as rich in personal value. Things seem to only matter to us greatly when seen from an intensely subjective perspective. Morality, as a project, forces us to take a slightly higher perspective. One in which we are no longer thinking of our own ends, but also the ends of others. Even from this perspective, however, there is a sense in which we are still taking certain (moral) activities as essentially meaningful. Many moral theories direct us to cultivate friendships, love art, and respect those around us. These are projects worth engaging in from the perspective of morality. The problem only comes in when we start to abstract further and further away, ultimately getting to (if such a thing is possible) a sub specie aeternitatis or a view from nowhere. If we were to inhabit such a view, you might see your projects and ends as futile in the face of eternity. When taking in consideration all of reality, we start to see ourselves as very small and unimportant. It is here that alienation becomes an issue. Our projects lose meaning, our sense of direction is disrupted, and continuing on with our worthless tasks become harder to do.

It is easy to read Nagel's view of absurdity as a commentary on self-alienation. It is the dueling perspectives an agent can inhabit that brings about the absurdity that is so troublesome: "Consequently the absurdity of our situation derives not from a collision between our expectations and the world, but from a collision within ourselves." (722) The two perspectives in question are two perspectives we ourselves inhabit, and any clash between the two gets us closer

to self-alienation. The conflict present also appears to be closer to the notion of strong self-alienation than any previous conceptions. Both the subjective and objective viewpoints mutually undermine each other, with the subjective viewpoint bringing us closer to our ground projects while the objective viewpoint takes us away from them to a higher and more universal perspective. We can also say that these perspectives are attached to distinct goods that are independently worth pursuing. The subjective allows us to instantiate a perspective where our goals matter, whereas the objective viewpoint allows us to gain a perspective that makes sure we are not falling too deep into pretension or self-importance.[85] These perspectives are further that which we inhabit at the same time: "We do not step outside our lives to a new vantage point from which we see what is really, objectively significant. We continue to take life largely for granted while seeing that all our decisions and certainties are possible only because there is a great deal we do not bother to rule out." (723) One may wonder, how is this not self-alienation?

Absurdity can be treated more like a curiosity than a real subject in relation to alienation. The most direct connections are often made through examples, like Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. Rahel Jaeggi, in one breath, cites Nagel and dismisses the issue of absurdity in alienation: "From the pragmatist perspective, however, these questions of meaning could turn out to be pseudoquestions, in the same sense in which pragmatists accuse epistemological skepticism of raising pseudoquestions. Nagel himself cites such an objection raised by Bernard Williams: "Perhaps, as Williams claims, the view *sub specie aeternitatis* is a very poor view of human life, and we should start and end in the middle of things." (pg. 136). Jaeggi's take mirrors Bernard Williams' idea that this issue of perspective is an error of application. Abstraction is itself a useful

[85] It is hard to say what kinds of goods these are exactly, but I think they are goods of practical reasoning. The subjective perspectives is necessary to care about ends at all, while the objective perspective is like a meta observer that makes sure we do not become attached to our ends in ways that violate other norms of reasoning.

tool, but its extremes are domain specific (better left to science and metaphysics). In this sense, asking the question of whether or not our lives have meaning from such a lofty perspective is to demand an answer from an archeologist on epistemic certainty. The field is not equipped to the answer question, but it would be insane to demand the answer in the first place.

This kind of response is, I would argue, very similar to the responses outlined in **Chapter 3** concerning self-alienation and moral alienation. Alienation of a certain kind is not a real issue, but a theoretical mistake. Taking up the view from nowhere for too long would be alienating. We would not be able to see our own projects as worthwhile, nor our own activities as even pleasurable perhaps. But, this is not a real issue. Either the view from nowhere itself is not really possible to inhabit in such a dangerous and alienating way, or if it is, then there is no particularly interesting conundrum. The agent merely needs to shift to the right perspective to fit the domain of inquiry. This is to not take absurdity seriously (forgive the paradox in meaning). One reason why this is has to do with Nagel himself. As I stated earlier, Nagel's project is not about alienation. It is about questioning the value[86] of certain projects when viewed from abstraction and seeing if that value can remain. Our life looks absurd from a certain perspective, but that does not mean it is absurd, nor does it suggest that we always see it as absurd from that perspective. Further, it is not clear that absurdity always results in alienation. Nagle himself states: "It need not be a matter for agony unless we make it so." (727) Sisyphus is in an absurd position, but the meaninglessness of his toil may not produce within him the conflict to drive alienation. His suffering may just result in suffering. If you take Camus' position, then even that monotonous activity can produce joy. To see how exactly absurdity can produce alienation, I think it is worth looking at it from a literary perspective.

[86] By value, I mean to refer to what Nagle refers to as meaningfulness. (*Nowhere* 215)

In commenting on another author, Martin Esslin distinguishes between two senses of "absurdity." One where absurdity is produced as a heightened version of dramatic irony. The audience to a production of *Waiting for Godot* knows the meaninglessness and pointlessness of Vladimir and Estragon's futile waiting game in the same way that the audience knows Agamemnon will be slain by his wife. The irony of absurdism is not to be located in the specifics of the plot, but in the general understanding of the absurd situation that the characters are in despite the characters' seemingly own understanding of their actions as non-futile. This is also to explain the supposed humor that many find in absurdist works, we laugh at Vladimir and Estragon because their actions are inane and yet they cannot see those actions as inane. Esslin disagrees with this definition of absurdity and instead argues to supplant it with one that sees absurdity as what a work is about. The "theater of the absurd" concerns works that are about the futility of human nature. We are not supposed to distance ourselves from the characters of absurdist works, as if we know better, but to see those characters as reflections of our own existence. Esslin argues that the humor that the audience takes in absurdist works come from the discomfort that we take in seeing ourselves in them. More like polite and nervous laughter than true humor. For my purposes, I am more interested in the difference between how the audience relates to the perspective of absurdity than how it relates specifically to the form of the artwork in question. Whether or not absurdity is about dramatic irony or the subject of the work itself is a critique of literary criticism, but whether or not absurdity is a relation of superiority or a more direct and personal relation is similar to my own concerns.

It is interesting to note that the first definition of absurdism presented here is more like Nagel's version. It is about a higher perspective. Our lives is the work, and we are the audience: "In viewing ourselves from a perspective broader than we can occupy in the flesh, we become

spectators of our own lives." (725) You can see how the audience in the first instance are not supposed to be alienated. They are above the characters in their position of knowing something about them that they themselves know. In Nagel's view of absurdity, a higher level of abstraction is supposed to provide us with a view that is similar to that of the audience with respect to ourselves, but I think the view falls short. It never truly discomfits us because that higher realm of abstraction was never supposed to be a view that critiques ourselves from a position in which we ourselves inhabit. The view from nowhere gives us safe distance for which to find humor, in other words. A more troubling problem is that it is unclear if this higher vantage point is something we can reasonably adopt in abstraction to ourselves. If we return back to the response of the Constitutivist to Enoch's shmagent, what would it mean to examine agency outside the perspective of agency? Maybe, at best, we can create a kind of simulacrum of a view from nowhere, but even that perspective would be restricted by our own capacities as rational agents. It becomes a kind of impossible self-critique in which the agent is trying to degrade her own agential powers using her own agency. Abstraction is just another tool of rational agency, and in that vein, using it unwisely is not itself truly a practice of self-alienation.

The relevant question becomes not how we get alienation from absurdity through more and more abstract perspectives, but how can we get alienation from absurdity from the very muck we operate in daily?

3.2 Existential Absurdity

The notion of absurdity that is missing from the abstraction account is the existential perspective that the agent herself takes toward her own condition. This perspective is not one that abstracts away from a higher position, but is instantiated from the position she is in. What I

want to argue is that this gives us a strong form of self-alienation when properly described. But it might be hard to see why at first. The perspectival account of alienation that is described by Esslin fits more into the mold of standard literary definitions of alienation that appear experiential in nature. The audience watching a production of *Waiting for Godot* feels discomfited. They are alienated because they feel as though their own actions carry toward the same kind of meaninglessness that the characters in the play exhibit. Another example might be watching Jean Renoir's 1939 classic *The Rules of the Game*, where the aim is to show how European and aristocratic frivolousness appears absurd in the face of a rising fascist threat.[87] The perspectival account would fail as an interesting case of strong self-alienation[88] if we can just adopt a different perspective to get to some true meaning. The audience in the 1930s might have been painfully aware that their own frivolity got in the way of addressing serious issues, but there is a sense in which they could have addressed those issues. The same reasoning might apply to *Waiting for Godot* as well. The discomfort can be addressed by correcting what the agent is aiming at.

Let us call the above account of absurdity the "signaling" version of absurdity. What absurdity does, in this case, is to signal the ways in which modern society has failed to impart true meaning onto our lives. That we engage in either frivolous or oppressively industrious behavior that looks meaningless if we pull too far out of the context of that society. This is not to say that this is not true absurdity, but it does have a similar problem to Nagel's account.

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[87] For a more modern example, you might look at Hal Ashby's *Shampoo*. A reflective film on 1960s Hollywood where the characters are more interested in sex than the politics of the time, even as they are consumed by those politics. It is no wonder that the main character of the film, a Hollywood hairdresser, is based on Jay Sebring; one of the victims of the Manson murders. The critique of the film is partially about people who adopted the free love movement of the 1960s without really understanding the dark side of it.

[88] I am ambivalent as to whether or not this would count as a case of weak self-alienation. You might say that the audience in this case is engaged in an othering process where their culture places an emphasis on certain things that are inimical to human flourishing. But sometimes agents are just aimed toward a most imprudent end, and the discomfort is in just exposing that end as facetious. Not every case of this is going to be a case of self-alienation.

Signaling that a particular way of acting points toward an empty end can be alienating in that we might have identified with that empty end, but the resolution does not pose any philosophical problems. The empty end needs to be abandoned for one more purposeful, or at the very least, the agent must shift their reasoning about what makes something meaningful. It is a kind of alienation that points to the deficiency of another theory that demands a replacement. At best, this kind of self-alienation can be considered a weak form of it. The real danger here is psychological. An agent can become deeply depressed if their favored end that is supposed to structure their lives is found to be false, but the remedy is obvious. Find a different end. The challenge of the absurd is to say that no such remedy is possible. That any end will result in failure. Nagel is correct in saying that one way to get to this viewpoint is to abstract away from the immediate ground-level world of wants and desires into a more universalistic perspective. But confining our thinking to just this way of looking at absurdity opens itself up to the response given above. That viewpoint is simply the wrong domain to derive meaning from. The agent is making some kind of error in reasoning from a domain insufficient to provide answers to another domain.

Strong self-alienation is not about errors in reasoning between domains, but internal tensions that mutually undermine each other. The absurd, in this case, would be having your own aims ultimately be defeating without the prospect of switching outside of those perspectives. An aspect of absurd literature that we have not talked much about is that of fatalism.[89] Vladimir and Estragon are doomed to wait for someone who will never come, just as Sisyphus is punished to push a boulder up a hill endlessly. The fatalism of absurdism is precisely about not being able to overcome your current condition. The challenge of absurdity is often

[89] I should mention that I am not using fatalism in a literary fashion or a spiritual one.

taken to be one of trying to remedy the experiential component of this fatalism and to show it to be an error of some kind. Either that comes from Nagel's shifting abstractions, or Camus' point that we can feel joy in the monotonous. See: "…the Camusian absurd is a mismatch between theoretical reasoning and practical reasoning that stems from our theoretical reasoning becoming impotent in the face of questions we must answer (and give practical answers to) in virtue of living." (Hannah Kim 2) But both viewpoints treat the fatalism as illusory. The problem is that fatalism is often considered from an external perspective, as if we were the audience observing the characters in a drama. We see the dramatic irony and recognize its fictious form. In following Ellison, what I want to consider is how examples of absurd characters reflect our own sense of being stuck in a situation where we feel as though we cannot escape. The fatalism here is not an actual cosmic structure, but the internal perspective that there is no escape. That the Wholehearted practical identities we are attached to cannot cohere in any meaningful sense.

This is what I would call existential absurdity. This is a kind of absurdity that is focused on the internal relation of the self to itself, and how such a relation can generate a relation of meaninglessness and a fatalism where the agent cannot see herself as being able to move forward. In one sense, this is to take Esslin's two definitions of absurdity and combine them. The audience's discomfort toward the characters of absurdist dramas is explained by their recognition that they are under a kind of dramatic irony that the characters in the drama themselves are under. Not in a literal sense, of course, but the hopelessness of Vladimir and Estragon's fate is heightened both by the character's inability to see their situation clearly and the audience's reflection that they may be in the same condition. That they too cannot escape a fate of rote grasping at nothing. But this more internal notion of absurdity does not cause one to

reflect on how one's societal condition creates absurd machines, but gives the agent pause in trying to figure out if their own mode of being is to blame.

One interesting example that Sartre gives of the absurd is in his own review of *The Myth of Sisyphus*. He compares the absurd to looking at a man gesturing while talking in a phone booth (*Humanism* 91). The glass allows the gestures to be conveyed, but the full context and meaning of those gestures are still obscured from the observer. What is left is comical at best. From an internal perspective, it is interesting to start to consider this example as an example of self-alienation, as if we were both the observer and the person in the telephone booth. In occupying both perspectives, we would see ourselves from two different standpoints that are unable to communicate to one another. The absurdity, then, would lie not just in the meaninglessness of the gestures to one observer, but in the mutual inability of both perspectives to communicate to one another despite those perspectives belonging to the same agent.

3.3 The Absurdity of Strong Self-Alienation

Existential absurdity, and its relation to fatalism, can put Korsgaard's famous quote at the beginning of *Self-Constitution* in a more troubling context. "Human beings are condemned to choice and action." Indeed, this works both a commitment to a constitutive framework which hangs on the inescapability of agency and as an affirmation to the pointlessness of trying to work around agency. The problem is that it is that pointlessness that works in favor of agents seeing their own constitutive nature as absurd. We are condemned to act just as Vladimir and Estragon are condemned to wait. But this comment in itself is not an argument against Constitutivism per se, my interest (so far) is only to provide an account of what strong self-alienation can look like. There is still only a tenuous connection between existential absurdity and self-alienation. In this

sub-section, I want to establish a specific notion of existential absurdity that results in the kind of strong self-alienation I have been searching for in this entire project. A kind that is a result of the way in which we see ourselves and the limits imposed by those ways.

Let us turn back to Tenenbaum's alienation objection. I originally argued that a significant issue of that objection was that it was uninterested in providing a real case of alienation. This was followed by a lengthy discussion of the ways in which moral alienation has been talked about in the contemporary literature. My main claim was that the kind of alienation being discussed was mainly a theoretically impossible form of alienation that could only exist in hypothetical scenarios involving bad theory crafting. This recap is important for two reasons: The first is that one of the main takeaways for the possibility of moral alienation had to do with the perspectives agents must take up to engage in moral practice at all. We do not engage in moral projects without considering ourselves to be moral *in particular ways under particular identities*. Second, in considering this viewpoint anew, there is an intersection between the existential (or internal) kind of self-alienation I am arguing for and the non-essential self-viewpoint in relation to meta-ethical theories like Constitutivism. In this paper, I am not going to argue that we do not have a constitutive agential nature, but what I do want to argue is that the way in which we relate to our own nature(s) matters a great deal because we do not directly have access to our natures without some kind of wholehearted practical identity that mediates between that nature (or those natures) and a (non-essentialist) self. In the same way that we are moral in particular ways and under particular identities, the way in which we are rational agents only occurs through those identities.

The problem with Tenenbaum's original alienation objection is that it posits an agent who is directly alienated from their own agential nature. You can see this most clearly in the

original argument from Enoch. The shmagent is rebelling against their own agency without any mediation. Similarly, Tenenbaum's objection, while having some twists, still deals with an agent who turns away from their own constitutive end. It is this direct rejection of our natures that I would argue makes such alienation cases odious. The kind of total alienation of the self that I have been arguing for does not involve rejecting agential nature, but instead finding the agent in an absurd situation that appears perverse from the agent's own perspective. This involves the pursuits of independent goods that are instantiated by the agent in a peculiar way such that those pursuits undermine each other. The aspect of fatalism that I am trying to bring in is the way in which these goods end up being essential part of what it means to be an agent at all. While I think many kinds of goods can fit the criteria here ultimately, focusing in on happiness and morality allows us to cover a wide range of theories. This puts the problem in perspective: we *must* pursue our own happiness, just as we *must* be moral agents.[90]

I will now try and construct an example of strong self-alienation. Catherine is trying to be a moral agent, and she is trying to be happy. The way in which she sees herself as a moral agent is partially instantiated by her wholehearted practical identity that she must always give more than her fair share to charity. The way in which she tries to instantiate her pursuit of happiness is through the wholehearted practical identity of having a large family on a big ranch in Wyoming. In its nascency, both identities do not really conflict at first. When she was young, she had little money, and both pursuits could only have been furthered in a very limited capacity. The older she gets, and the more these identities begin to grow, she starts to see certain conflicts

[90] I am leaving the imperatives and the source of their authority intentionally vague. The idea that we must be moral is not meant to necessarily mean that we feel the pull of morality in every action. The idea I am aiming for is in the notion that because we live in a society of rational agents, and we are essentially rational to a degree, then morality as that which aims at the absolute good, we must be aiming at it to some degree. In this way I am splitting the constitutive end, so to speak.

arising. The more money she earns, the more she feels obligated to give, but she also feels as though she needs to spend some of that money on her own dreams. The conflict grows more radically once she reaches an age in which it is harder to have children and which she can feel her opportunity to build a ranch Wyoming slip away. For whichever end she chooses to prioritize, she sees how that pursuit directly undermines the other. A kind of despondency overwhelms Catherine as she tries to figure out what to do.

This cannot be the full example. After all, conflicts between happiness and morality are always going to occur. While harsh, it can seem reasonable to suggest that her dreams come at the cost of people less fortunate. Similarly, someone could add that an obligation to give to charity to such a degree that it becomes onerous is an obligation that goes too far in its demands. This example is a far cry from the absurd. But let us say that Catherine abstracts away from her immediate position to try and figure out how to reconfigure her wholehearted practical identities (something she undoubtedly learned during her wild philosophic years reading Nagel). As she abstracts outward she discovers two interrelated problems: The first is that there is a difficulty in shifting wholehearted practical identities. The worries that I brought up at the beginning of this paragraph are fair, but they treat the agent as more mutable than what seems possible without life changing alterations. Happiness is an empty end until it is instantiated in a particular way by an agent. Catherine might diminish her expectations for that kind of happiness in a stoic manner, but the ground projects, or wholehearted practical identities, that constitute her pursuit of happiness are not going to change much.[91] She cannot reason herself to a different idea of

[91] There is, unfortunately, much more to say here than I can write about. Obviously, not all agents have a clear idea of what would be constitutive of their happiness. I was young once too. To some degree, this is what Kant was aiming to capture in having such a loose conception, or a formal conception, of what the content of happiness is. Theoretically, it is mutable and changeable. As one goes through life, their idea of what a happy life would be will change. I would argue that this is still enough to get me to where this example will go, but I am fine with restricting strong self-alienation to people who do have established wholehearted practical

happiness without seeing the value of a different conception from her own internal perspective. In the same way, I think we can say something similar about her wholehearted practical identity concerning her instantiation of morality. The task of swapping out one moral identity for another is not a matter of reasoning to a different perspective. In some ways, her life has moral meaning because of her wholehearted practical identity related to giving to charity. Again, she might diminish that obligation, but she cannot get rid of it without some kind of transformation.

The second problem has to do with that transformation, or more accurately, the futility of it. Part of the issue with the abstract view is that it puts into perspective subjective pursuits as meaningless. I am not going to argue that such pursuits are in fact meaningless, but it is worth looking at the way in which they appear meaningless from that perspective. Some of it has to do with teleology, or the lack thereof (i.e. what is the point?). But I am going to suggest that there is another way of seeing futility from Nagel's view from nowhere. That is when you see an inherent contradiction in the way in which the ends that matter to you are pursued. The teleological problem that absurdity exposes is the further issue. Asking "what is the point" can be asked ad infinitum about any project. But, the inherent contradiction concern has to do with seeing all of your options as futile in the sense that they cannot be made whole in a sensible way. This is not telescoping further out into the abstract, but seeing things from above and not being able to switch back once you come down. I think this is part of the absurdity that Esslin was talking about. When we see Vladamir and Estragon from the outside, we cannot help but bring that absurdity back with us once the play is over. Nagel actually puts this nicely: "We then return to

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identities with specific content concerning their own happiness. After all, I am not interested in arguing that everyone does have or will have this form of self-alienation. There is also the issue of "contentment" that is seen in Kantian ethics. There is probably some stoic directive that appears plausibly in reducing our expectations such that certain losses in life will not be felt to an extreme degree. I am not going to give a full treatment of this here, but I think it would be a mistake to try and swap happiness with contentment. The latter is a kind of prudential principle that even if attained does not supplant the former.

our lives, as we must, but our seriousness is laced with irony." (724) What we bring back is that our lives are not just meaningless, but they are designed to be that way because of the systems we find ourselves in.

Let me call this the bureaucratic problem of absurdity. Literature on the absurd has one focus on grand sweeping notions of meaning, but there are also a lot of absurdist dramas that are about the meaningless contradictions of bureaucracy. A worker in this system may not be immediately aware of the inherent contradictions that the system they are working under place them in, but if they gain perspective they are faced with a dual problem. For one, they are aware of the absurdity of placing a pile of papers in one box only to find out that those papers are merely redirected to another such that they never get read. There is a futility to their actions. The second problem, however, is slightly more serious. Once you have the outside perspective, you have to take it back with you regardless of your circumstances. This is all the more cruel if those circumstances simply are the conditions of your life. That worker's subjective world can only exist within those circumstances. It is no wonder that many absurdist dramas end so poorly for the protagonists.

Here is the issue in Catherine's case: it seems as though what she needs to do is alter her wholehearted practical identities just enough so as to avoid substantive conflicts. To gain perspective on this matter, she abstracts away from her current context. The more "objective" view point gives her perspective, but the perspective itself suggests that her pursuit of the good of happiness is always going to be undermined by her pursuit of morality, and vice versa. For there not to be any substantive conflict, she must transform completely those projects which so far have given her life meaning or remain within a context where here pursuits undermine each other. Strong self-alienation is then this instance where her pursuits of independent goods

undermine each other and the agent recognizes the futility in trying to reconcile them. They are in a perpetual condition of inherent conflict.

The reason that this counts as *self*-alienation is because of the ways in which the perspectives are tied to essential features of rational agency (or humanity). As stated earlier, the problem with cases of standard alienation or weak self-alienation is that the agent does not regard the object of her alienation either as part of herself, or as an "othered" part of herself. While all cases of alienation involve the conflict between wholehearted practical identities, the self is not regarded as the main problem. Either there are external conditions that force the issue of alienation, or there is some external structural cause that forces a split between a true self and an other self. This is a different kind of case altogether. This is not an instance where two wholehearted practical identities are forced into conflict, nor is it a case where one wholehearted practical identity can just be dropped. The self must form identities around the essential features of happiness and morality (or whatever other goods you are willing to admit into this plurality). These are instantiations of what a rational agent must organize their lives around. In this way the problem is double: on the one hand it is what the agent subjectively decided to instantiate an essential feature as, and the identity is tied to an objective feature of the rational agent. From the agent's perspective, to give up the subjective is to lose meaning of the objective.

In more literary terms, the agent in trying to resolve their conflict came to a perspective that turns them into an absurd being. The conflict between happiness and morality is a common feature of the study of ethics. But usually this is one of a problem of motivation and authority. What I am hoping this inkling of strong self-alienation shows is that there is a further problem, one where the agent sees this conflict as intractable, but also as inevitable and irresolvable.

Section 4 – The Conditions of Self-Alienation

For this final section, I want to take a look back at my original three conditions of alienation (distance, identity, and conflict) and run this version of strong self-alienation through them. To provide a plausible instance of self-alienation that, as I have been putting it, confronts the paradox of self-alienation, then it would be helpful to construct strong self-alienation out of the original components of alienation simpliciter to see how exactly the above example counts as an instance of self-alienation. Part of this section will be a refresher of the original conditions, but this section should also clarify both the enormity of self-alienation and in what way an agent can be alienated from herself. I will use the original order that I presented the three conditions and at each stop cache out how the characteristics unique to each condition help build a plausible case of self-alienation.

Section 4.1 – Distance From Oneself

The distance condition is a relation between the agent and that which she is alienated from. It is also a condition marked by loss, intentionally created, and often times encapsulates the external effects of alienation. Our new version of Catherine is self-alienated partially because of the distance she creates from herself. You can see this in the nexus of perspectives that she herself undertakes in trying to resolve the conflict she finds herself embedded in. Conflicting wholehearted practical identities are not usually what the agent is alienated from, except in cases of self-alienation. In the original example, Catherine was alienated from her family but not necessarily alienated from her wholehearted practical identity as member of that family. What I want to argue here is that in cases of self-alienation, and in this instance of self-alienation, what the agent is alienated from is another wholehearted practical identity. Our new Catherine, in

instantiating a moral identity, is alienated from her instantiated identity that is aimed toward her own well-being. But, what makes this self-alienation as opposed to just another Frankfurt-esque case, is that she also can switch between her moral identity and her well-being identity to see the conflict from the other side. In other words, she is both alienated from her wholehearted practical identity to give to charity and she is alienated from her wholehearted practical identity to have a big family and a ranch in Wyoming.

This conflict is further exacerbated by her ability to abstract away from these two perspectives. It is not that she is then further alienated from her subjective self via her objective self. For one, this is not a conflict between two wholehearted practical identities, and also I take on Williams' point that the abstracted self is probably not actually a distinct perspective. The issue is that the abstracted viewpoint is what creates the distance in the first place. Distance, as a condition for alienation, must be an intentionally created distance. Usually, this is either by the object of alienation posing some kind of artificial barrier that separates the agent from that object, or by the agent herself withdrawing from that object. What I want to argue is that this abstraction is the agent withdrawing from herself. In Nagel's term, Catherine brings the irony back with her when she returns to the subjective viewpoint.

The aspects of loss and consequences should be apparent. Catherine's felt loss is that she is unable to pursue vastly important projects related to her essential functioning or core being without the two projects undermining each other. Her life is thrown out of balance. What she is ultimately losing is a sense of self. The idea being that her core identity is not just fractured but adds up to a kind of absurdity. What the actual consequences are is going to vary case by case. As I am not tied to any particular set of affective states constituting the experience of alienation, there is no telling what Catherine may feel. However, there is one experiential component of

alienation that I identified. The experience of this kind of self-alienation must be painful in some way. This is not hard to imagine in this case. Vladimir and Estragon are not enviable characters.

Section 4.2 – Self Identity

The identity condition was described as "what is at stake" in alienation. A disunity among wholehearted practical identities can be daunting because of the way in which they strike at the heart of who we are as agents. The case of strong self-alienation presented is threatening not just a valued care, but a core identity that may affect many other wholehearted practical identities. Again, Catherine's notion of well-being involved a fair amount. That of being a rancher, a parent, living off the land, etc. The kind of wholehearted practical identity is a kind of "umbrella" identity that is constituted by many other wholehearted practical identities. A collapse of this umbrella is not just devastating, but life altering. The old Catherine could conceivably trudge on, despite dropping her family from her life, as a similar kind of person. The Catherine who needs to give up on their conception of well-being might cease to be the Catherine others knew her as. This is all to say that what is at stake is a lot. Cases of self-alienation, I would argue, cut to the recesses of an individual's character. Not in terms of exemplified virtues, but in terms of the subjective states that the agent chooses to display herself as. It is a large part of the totality of guises the agent intentionally chooses to show to the world. They are supposed to be reflective who she really wants to be. A collapse of one wholehearted practical identity is a minor drama, a collapse of an umbrella identity is a kind of travesty.

This also sets the stage for a seemingly impossible shift in identity. Part of alienation is the failure to be, or the failure to transform. In standard cases of alienation, the prospect of an object forcing an identity shift is painful because it does not allow for the agent to develop into

her own kind of person. Cases of self-alienation are that much more painful because it is a kind of inner conflict where the agent is left between two core wholehearted practical identities set against each other. The history of the agent's choices is key here. Because wholehearted practical identities are sprawling in ways that the agent cannot fully manage (or realize), cases of self-alienation show that agent made a decision that is fundamental to her character and yet ultimately demand a shift in that character. At this stage, how an agent can even go about this kind of shift is hard to say. The stakes are very high indeed.

This case of self-alienation also provides some insight into the existential risk an agent takes in pursuing a wholehearted practical identity in the first place. External exigent circumstances are what put strain on an identity in normal alienation cases, but the same is true here as well. The mentioned sprawling nature of wholehearted practical identities applies just as well to those central to our characters, and so does the risks we take on in instantiating wholehearted practical identities related to our essential features. We are the kind of agents who need to develop these instantiations as well as live in a world in which those instantiations may not be able to cohere with one another (at least cohere in the way we would choose). As mentioned earlier, pursuing goods is not a matter of just aiming at an abstract end. We do not *just* aim at our own well-being. The ways in which these ends are realized are through these subjective instantiations that individualize our pursuits. We need to make them part of our identity in order to pursue them at all. The existential risk comes in due to the uncertain nature of the external world and the possibility of disunity. The former comes into play when these wholehearted identities cannot be realized at all because of some external obstruction, whereas the latter is when our chosen wholehearted identities end up in conflict in a way that undermines the other.

Section 4.3 – Conflict

The conflict condition of strong self-alienation has been well developed in this section, but there are still a couple of things that I want to mention. First is about the diachronic nature of the conflict. Toward the end of **Chapter 1**, I mentioned that in all cases of alienation, the nature of the conflict is diachronic. That is, alienation is not a sudden state that one finds themselves in, but a persisting event in one's life. It takes time to develop, conceive of, and resolve. In development, Catherine's conflict between two of her wholehearted practical identities does not immediately present itself as an intractable problem. As she moves through her career, it will become more and more apparent to her that there is a conflict. But this can, at first, only appear as a problem of management. The allocation of funds to charity and one's well-being can be seen as a minor practical problem at first. The "conceive of" aspect is the conscious recognition of a deeper problem, or one of alienation. Consciousness of this may not necessarily be the start of alienation, but it certainly is the height of it.[92] Unfortunately, this is an enduring condition.

The other aspect of the conflict condition is the divide between external antagonists and internal dilemmas. I made the argument that if main driver of the conflict is an "external antagonist" then that form of self-alienation is a weak form of self-alienation. I think there is a version of the Catherine example presented in this section that fits that external antagonist mode. I mentioned that external and exigent circumstances can induce the kind of conflict that Catherine is going through. She might very well conceive of her alienation as one that is

[92] This is an underdeveloped idea that deserves to be analyzed in a different kind of project, but while I think that a necessary condition of alienation is that the agent conceives of herself as alienated, this conception can look backwards so to speak. That is, alienation as a state might counterfactually be thought of as a condition where if the agent was made aware of their alienation then they would agree that they are alienated. Cases of self-alienation, however, put a strain on that idea. Self-alienation seems primarily a reflective state about one's condition, especially considering the case of strong self-alienation I just developed.

"caused" by economic factors. If only the world was a better place, then everyone would have the means to both pursue their moral obligations and their own well-being. This phrasing suggests that capitalism (or perhaps just the imperfect nature of our economic world) is driving the conflict. We can call this the "hopeless world" antagonist. I think this accurately describes some absurdist literature, as the defeated protagonist is not so much self-alienated as much as despondent over a world that involves inherent contradictions. The protagonist can try to do good, reform, or pursue their own well-being, but the world will ultimately beat them down. If the phenomenon that I am aiming to capture is a total alienation from the self, then this is a total alienation from the world.

Note that the same worry that I brought up in **Chapter 2** still applies here. External circumstances will almost always be a factor in the agent being able to realize their pursuits; Catherine can blame herself and her own choices or the imperfections of the world that forced her to make those choices. She can either conceive of her alienation as one of an internal dilemma or as an external antagonist. It appears as though the agent is free to choose her own kind of alienation. I do not think that this diminishes the power of strong self-alienation in any way. Total alienation from the self is not the kind of thing that an agent *must* experience. In this way, we might think of it like blame when there is no one else to blame. A man builds his dream house in tornado country. Does he blame himself or the act of God when his house gets destroyed? Regardless of fit, the agent is the deciding factor in terms of which direction they go in that dichotomy (even if both might be true).

Coda

Self-alienation is an elusive concept. Both seemingly paradoxical, and at times, intimately familiar. The sense of strong self-alienation that I (finally) arrived to at the end of **Chapter 4** was of an agent who is experiencing a strong conflict between their pursuit of happiness and their moral ideals. This conflict is one where the wholehearted practical identities in question formed around the essential features of the agent, features that must be instantiated in some way by the self. This makes them uniquely hard to transform or get rid of, and when such a conflict arises, or when they are disunified in this alienating way, the agent is left to consider herself as an absurd being. A being where the fundamental aspects of herself continually undermine each other without a chance (seemingly) for resolution. This state agrees with all three conditions of alienation that I set out in **Chapter 1**. The agent is distant from herself when she inhabits one perspective of either of her wholehearted practical identities. Her identity is at stake as both of these wholehearted practical identities (the particular instantiations of her pursuit of happiness and morality) form a strong core of who she is, and the tension is there because she cannot help but fail to pursue either of these identities without undermining the other. Our agent seems to be at wat with herself.

I want to end this dissertation by considering two final thoughts: (1) is this a plausible (or common) form of self-alienation? (2) How can strong self-alienation be resolved?

First, is this a plausible (or common) form of self-alienation? Here I want to defer to Martha Nussbaum's work *The Fragility of Goodness*. Her influence on my work is extensive, and if I had more time, I would include a lot of her arguments on the nature of Greek tragedy. Heroes

who try and fail to realize incompatible ends is an obvious parallel to my own sense of strong self-alienation. In her book, Nussbaum states:

> "There are, however, other important human values that lie at the opposite end of the self-sufficiency spectrum: above all, the good activities connected with citizenship and political attachment, and those involved in personal love and friendship. For these require, and are in their nature relations with, a particular human context that is highly vulnerable and can easily fail to be present." (343)

This is referring to goods that are contingent and require that certain external circumstances be in place for them to be pursued at all. Catherine's pursuit of her well-being as instantiated by a subjective wholehearted practical identity requires means that the world cannot provide for her, even with a well-paying job. There is then a kind of double roll of the dice, the world must provide with you the means for pursuing that end, and you also need to be lucky in how you instantiate that end. The power of this sentiment is that while Catherine's self-alienation may be severe, it might just be the course of things for those of us who are unlucky.

This can point to the need for a notion like contentment, where you can rein in your overly fanciful notions of the good life to something more frugal. Just note that there is no "solution" to the problem, even the most guarded of us can be susceptible to the changing winds of fortune. In this sense, while I would not argue that self-alienation of this kind is a matter of course, I do think it is not an uncommon experience.[93]

The second issue I want to address before ending is the question of how to resolve this kind of self-alienation. In **Chapter 1** I mentioned three basic ways of resolving alienation: reunification of the identities, dropping an identity, and recontextualizing the identities. At the

[93] I would say that the issue of reconciling morality with happiness is a matter of course, but that kind of disunity does not need to be one of self-alienation. I think it is a mistake for Railton to have such a broad notion of alienation as to suggest that any conflict between these two ends results in alienation. I might have to make decisions that weigh my own personal good with the good of morality, and I may even find that weighing difficult, but in the course of things I way not experience that deliberation as alienating.

outset, any of these three solutions are theoretically open to the agent. Catherine can stumble on way to make her wholehearted identities work, she cand decide that the way in she pursues her own well-being is wrong headed, or she can find a way to make them work by altering her identities. The problem is that the way I framed strong self-alienation is one of an intractable problem. The issue with abstracting outward is that it shows the agent a kind of conflict that is rather deep, one where the pursuit of contingent goods is both a necessary feature we must engage in but are always susceptible to being in conflict with the absolute good. Self-alienation is an inability to reconcile the self with the self due to this kind of conflict. The agent is not dropping a wholehearted practical identity that is tied to an external object, but one directed at the core of who she is. Dropping it would be a painful experience that would change who she is. Ideal reunification is also just a matter of luck, but the kind of luck that could only come about in extreme circumstances, as if utopia was just right around the corner at Catherine only needed to suffer for one more year.

Recontextualization seems like our best bet. The path of contentment or prudence would suggest reconceptualizing the end aimed at conditional goods such that we reduce the likelihood that such conflicts arise. I am a little skeptical of this position, however. Contentment still is a path that requires changing the agent's relation to herself, and I do not think that this cannot come without a painful change in identity. My worry is that this is like the dog biting its own tail thinking that it's for its own good. I cannot fully develop the argument here, but I think that such prudential stances are asking more from the agent than they can always give. That said, I think that recontextualization is the right kind of way to think about resolving self-alienation. It just requires a further abstraction of sorts.

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