“The Opposite of Poverty is Not Plenty, but Friendship:”

Dorothy Day’s
Pragmatic Theology of Detachment

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"The art of human contacts," Peter called [his mission] happily. "But it was seeing Christ in others, loving the Christ you saw in others. Greater than this, it was having faith in the Christ in others without being able to see Him. Blessed is he that believes without seeing."

—Dorothy Day, recounting her first meeting with Peter Maurin, in her autobiography *The Long Loneliness*. 
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ABSTRACT

The following essay argues that Catholic Worker co-founder Dorothy Day’s ultimate concern is to bring together in relationship the poor and the wealthy, who stood alienated from one another within the capitalist culture of the United States, and how she integrates Catholicism’s tradition of detachment into her work as an activist in order to realize this goal.

Adam Smith’s theory of sympathy serves as a framework to explain the capitalist’s perception of the poor, and why it degrades the poor and excludes them from society. Smith’s theory of sympathy is inherently social because sympathy cannot be bestowed upon oneself. The impartial spectator, a metaphor for a psychological mechanism which all people possess, determines one’s sympathetic or unsympathetic response to another’s emotions by allowing the observer to imagine himself in the other’s position in an effort to understand why one feels a certain way. Because one can more naturally imagine another’s joy than pain, one more readily sympathizes with the joyous than those in pain. The wealthy exhibit joy more often than the poor; hence, people seek wealth because of its association with joy. Smith’s theory of sympathy makes it difficult, if not impossible, for an observer to sympathize with the poor, instead making the poor appear contemptible and pathetic. Because of sympathy’s social character, its absence serves to distance the wealthy and the poor from one another.

Day hopes to change the negative perceptions the poor and the wealthy hold of one another in order to foster relationship between them. Day employs detachment in three principle ways in order to achieve this end. Focusing on the wealthy’s need to understand the realities of poverty, Day advocates detachment from material goods through voluntary poverty. The lived experience of poverty exposes the wealthy to the pain of poverty. Knowing that few would change their lives in such a drastic way, Day also writes prolifically about poverty for The Catholic Worker newspaper, granting her readers an imaginative detachment from their wealth through the knowledge of the hardships of poverty. In Smith’s framework, to understand another’s situation leads to greater sympathy between peoples. Day adds her own gloss to Smith by saying such understanding, achieved through detachment, ultimately leads to love of God and others.

Both voluntary poverty and reading serve to bring the wealthy into relationship with the poor. Day reestablishes the poor’s relationship with the wealthy by guaranteeing the poor’s privacy through the satisfaction of their immediate needs such as food and shelter. In doing so, Day creates time for the poor to build relationships with others, which are predicated on privacy. Privacy relies on the voluntary relinquishment of information about oneself in order to form relationships. While the detachment of privacy is unlike that of voluntary poverty in that it does not involve bodily deprivation, detachment in both privacy and voluntary poverty work toward the cultivation of relationships. Whereas the poor’s attention and time was once dedicated to securing their basic needs for survival, now it is spent satisfying their need for privacy, which is also to say their need for relationship and community.

Final reflections consider the Catholic Worker’s legacy and its empowerment of the laity within the Roman Catholic Church.
INTRODUCTION

Being panhandled—asked for change by a poor person—is a familiar experience to anyone who has lived in or passed through an American city. On the subway or on the street, confrontation with the poor can be an unsettling experience. For most middle class individuals, the interaction is upsetting for its aesthetic ugliness, the arousal of discomfort, and the helplessness one feels when faced with the intractable presence of the poor. All but a few recoil upon these random and unwanted confrontations with poverty. Yet, one’s aversion to a homeless person sleeping on a park bench or an immigrant cook working in a restaurant kitchen results in the poor feeling unrecognized and marginalized, faceless and ignored. When the wealthy and the poor meet, the situation foster reciprocal feelings of discomfort and resentment. As a result, the opportunity for the wealthy and the poor to truly know one another as friends is next to none. The crux of forming relationships across this economic divide is a matter of perception. Consider how federal aid, such as income support and unemployment insurance, widens the separation between the wealthy and the poor: the wealthy see the poor as lazy and the poor see the wealthy as greedy. While individually one might say that poverty is unjust, the collective attitude of American society suggests that poverty is anything but.

Changing one’s perception is the most challenging project of social justice work. Yet, shifting social perceptions is the overall goal of any activist working beyond the immediate satisfaction of the needs of the poor. Dorothy Day says as much in one of her

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1 The terms “wealthy” and “poor” are used throughout the essay to describe the two groups that Day hopes to reunite in relationship. Day rarely uses the term “the wealthy” in her writing; more often she leaves the group unnamed; occasionally she uses the term “non-poor.” I have decided to use the terms wealthy and poor for their relative ease and familiarity, and also because they highlight the economic divide (and its social implications) between the two groups. This is not to say that Day seeks only to bring millionaires and the poorest of the poor into relationship; she wants to bring all the non-poor into relationship with the poor. I ask the reader to keep Day’s intention in mind while reading this essay.
columns for *The Catholic Worker* newspaper: “To feed the hungry, clothe the naked and shelter the haborless without also trying to change the social order so that people can feed, clothe, and shelter themselves is just to apply palliatives.”² Day co-founded the Catholic Worker movement, of which the aforementioned newspaper was but a component, with Peter Maurin in 1933.³ The movement, as it existed in Day’s lifetime and as it remains today, consists of communities that manage soup kitchens, homeless shelters, retreat centers, and activist headquarters. Practice of voluntary poverty, love for God and the poor, and pacifist principles unite these communities, which are scattered across the United States and abroad. While Day died in 1980, her words, published in countless newspaper editorials and numerous diaries and autobiographies, continue to affect readers and serve as a guide for Catholic Workers. Day developed a pragmatic theology of detachment that served as her primary method of changing the American social order by altering society’s perception of the poor. What follows is an analysis, in support of this central claim, of how and in what ways Day uses detachment in order to reunite the wealthy and the poor in a meaningful and mutually rewarding relationship.

The events which led Day to dedicate her life to the poor read like fiction: As a child she was moved by the sight of strangers helping strangers in the wake of the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake; in her late teens, she participated in a hunger strike in Washington, D.C. in the name of women’s suffrage; she was friends with playwright Eugene O’Neill and belonged to the Greenwich Village scene in her twenties; she was once arrested for sleeping in a flophouse for members of the Industrial Workers of the

World and jailed amongst prostitutes; she had an abortion in early adulthood and later in life a child, leaving her common-law husband because he opposed her decision to convert to Catholicism in 1927 at the age of thirty. Her new faith and her work as a journalist brought Day to Catholic publications like *America* and *The Commonweal*, and her articles brought Peter Maurin, a French-Catholic peasant and follower of personalist philosophy, to her doorstep. During their first meeting, Maurin described his vision of a three-pronged movement of “cult, culture, and cultivation” based on Catholic social teaching; Day, he had decided, was to carry out his vision. The two founded the Catholic Worker, with houses of hospitality, a monthly newspaper, and agricultural farms that also served as retreat centers to satisfy Maurin’s three components. Day accepted Maurin’s proposal because, in the Catholic Worker, she found a way to satisfy her lifelong desire “to use what talents I possessed for my fellow worker, for the poor.” In this way, Day made the Catholic Worker movement her own.

Day’s experience as a journalist taught her that capitalism had alienated the poor from the whole of society. Catholicism, with its scriptural poetics praising poverty in such passages as the Gospel of Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount, provided her with a method to restore relationships between the wealthy and the poor. The idea of detachment was central, despite its apparent paradoxical nature, to the process of healing this torn relationship. The theology of detachment—doing without material wealth in

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4 Maurin is a fascinating character in his own right; he was a common philosopher who wrote “Easy Essays,” short prose poems that spoke about social conditions and Catholic spirituality. History remembers Maurin as the principle visionary of the Catholic Worker movement, whereas Day was its public leader. Day even suggests that Maurin was better suited for one-on-one interaction, instead of the role of organizer and communicator: “He liked catching you alone, serious and ready to think. He thought the role of teacher more effective than that of author.” Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness*, (New York: HarperOne, 1997), 201.

5 Zwick, 43.

order to grow closer to God—is of course not original to Day. Jesus’ forty days in the desert, the life of St. Francis of Assisi, and clerical vows of poverty are but a few examples of its practice. Day’s theology of detachment differs, however, because of its pragmatic quality; Day incorporates detachment into her social activism, deploying its practice in a variety of ways in an effort to repair the alienated relationship between the wealthy and the poor. The efficacy of detachment comes in its ability to redirect one’s attention from worldly concerns of attachment and appearance to the cultivation of relationships with others.

Day recognizes that both the poor and the wealthy suffer in their alienation from one another—poverty is not material lack alone—and she ministers to each side in order to satisfy their particular needs. What follows is an examination of three ways Day utilizes detachment in her work to reunite the poor and the wealthy in relationship. The first chapter analyzes Adam Smith’s theory of sympathy to demonstrate the psychological alienation which the poor and the wealthy experience in a capitalist society and why it is destructive to their relationship. The second chapter considers voluntary poverty, which Day practices and encourages the wealthy to adopt, and how its discipline of detachment allows the wealthy to understand experientially the struggles of poverty, leading to sympathy for and love of the poor. The third chapter explores how detachment within the act of reading enables Day’s readers to understand the injustice of poverty and the humanity of the poor, this time imaginatively instead of experientially. The final chapter focuses on how Day meets the needs of the poor through the guarantee of privacy, which in turn helps to repair the poor’s misperceptions of the wealthy. Day works with the wealthy and the poor to alter perceptions of the other in order to restore
relationship between them. The theology of detachment works, in each case, by allowing the wealthy and the poor alike to “see” the other clearly as human beings and members of a single, highly interdependent family, the mystical metaphor referred to by many Christians, and especially by Catholics, as the “Body of Christ.”7 Such changes in perception lead not only to greater understanding, but sympathy and love between two once-disconnected peoples.

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CHAPTER ONE

Dorothy Day had long been a critic of capitalism, her sympathies lying with socialism, communism, and labor unions prior to her conversion to Catholicism in 1927. Day’s conversion, however, did not diminish her dedication to social issues and her connection with the poor; rather, her newly adopted faith only served to strengthen it. Indeed, Day’s opposition to capitalism was one of the first publicly articulated in The Catholic Worker:

Marxist Communism has been condemned by Catholics for its destruction of family life. What then of capitalism, which creates an ever-growing proletariat ground down to such a level of insecurity and misery that decent family life is almost impossible? Day is writing here in 1936, in the midst of the Great Depression, the conditions of which prompt her to challenge the purported benefits of capitalism. Day highlights the fracturing of family life as a result of both the communist and capitalist systems, thereby exposing that poverty does not concern material deprivation alone, but the impoverishment of human relationships as well. Throughout her fifty-year career as a journalist for The Catholic Worker, Day echoes her concern about the ruinous state of human relationships. Larger than her work of ensuring that the poor had shelter and food, Day worked to create a new social order other than capitalism that did not destroy interpersonal relationships.

The 18th century philosopher Adam Smith is synonymous with the term “capitalism.” He is remembered as the father of capitalist economic theory, having critiqued the diverse economic practices in the Europe of his time, synthesizing them into

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8 Dorothy Day, “The Family vs. Capitalism,” The Catholic Worker, Jan. 1936, p. 4. As the century progressed, Day became increasingly outspoken about the futility of war and the danger of the military-industrial complex, emphasizing pacifism and nonviolent resistance in response to domestic and international violence.
a new academic discipline. However, Smith was not only concerned with matters of supply and demand and the invisible hand of the market; he was first and foremost a moral philosopher, and his central idea concerned the impartial spectator, a metaphor for a psychological mechanism that determines the appropriate conditions in which one responds to another person's emotions with sympathy. The impartial spectator, Smith believed, regulated people from acting purely in self-interest. Smith's theory of sympathy, however, has shortcomings, for the impartial spectator, intentionally or not, creates a psychology where the pain of poverty elicits a response lacking in sympathy from the public. Smith readily admits that the observer's unsympathetic response to another's pain places the relationship between the observer and the sufferer in tension. Day rejects this aspect of the capitalist psychology, and works to restore human relationships through Catholicism's theology of detachment.

In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Adam Smith appeals to the concept of sympathy to explain what he believes to be the psychological reasons why people seek wealth and power. Smith defines sympathy simply as "fellow-feeling" with another person's "passions." In other words, sympathy is the observer's ability to understand—by imagining himself in the other's position—an emotion as experienced by another person in response to a specific event. Therefore, sympathy is inherently social and cannot be bestowed onto oneself. Instead, it is offered, as if it were a gift, between two people, the observer and the person being observed. However, for Smith, certain conditions must be met in order for an observer to respond to another with sympathy.

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The observer does not sympathize upon witnessing each and every occasion of another person’s grief, hardship, happiness, or joy, but rather only when the emotion is one of moderation:

The propriety of every passion excited by objects peculiarly related to ourselves, the pitch which the spectator can go along with, must lie, it is evident, in a certain mediocrity. If the passion is too high, or if it is too low, he cannot enter into it.\(^{11}\)

Smith’s statement has implications for those experiencing extreme joy or extreme pain. While such emotional extremes are knowable through direct experience, they are less easily known and understood by those witnessing the emotion; this, in turn, creates a boundary between two people through which sympathy cannot penetrate. To further complicate the conditions for sympathetic responses, Smith asserts that some situations necessitate a sympathetic response, while others preclude it: “Sympathy, therefore, does not arise so much from the view of the passion, as from that of the situation which excites it.”\(^{12}\) Not only does the intensity of the emotion allow or prohibit sympathy, but also the situation in which the emotion is experienced. Emotions, therefore, must be appropriate and proportional to the situation in which they erupt. One’s happiness, for instance, upon earning a satisfactory grade on a difficult exam could not and should not match the happiness of receiving news about the birth of a niece or a nephew. If the happiness of the latter scenario were exhibited in response to the former, those who are witnesses to it, in Smith’s approximation, would find it difficult to share in that person’s happiness, as it appears excessive and disproportionate to the situation.

Smith’s theory of sympathy becomes one of consequence since the determination of which situations warrant a sympathetic response directly affects the quality of personal

\(^{11}\) Smith, 32.
\(^{12}\) Smith, 15.
relationships. To explain how one deems a situation worthy of sympathy, Smith fashions what he calls the “impartial spectator,” a metaphor for the psychological reflex inherent in all people that allows an observer to imagine another’s emotions in order to better understand that person’s response to a particular situation. The impartial spectator, in essence, allows an observer to understand another’s experience by imaginatively “walking in his shoes.” The observer’s ability to imagine what another feels in a particular situation allows him to understand that person’s emotional response and in turn to sympathize with that person, thereby approving, for all to see, that the emotion displayed is one that deserves sympathy. The impartial spectator also works conversely, allowing the person directly affected by a situation to consider how his display of emotion might affect the observer. Accordingly, one can subdue or heighten his emotions to the proper decibel so as to elicit a sympathetic response:

As [the observers] are constantly considering what they themselves would feel, if they actually were the sufferers, so [the sufferer] is as constantly led to imagine in what manner he would be affected if he was only one of the spectators of his own situation. As their sympathy makes them look at it, in some measure, with his eyes, so his sympathy makes him look at it, in some measure, with theirs, especially when in their presence and acting under their observation: and as the reflected passion, which he thus conceives, is much weaker than the original one, it necessarily abates the violence of what he felt before he came into their presence, before he began to recollect in what manner they would be affected by it, and to view his situation in this candid and impartial light.

Should the sufferer’s emotions be so intense that they disturb the observer and make him less inclined to sympathize, the sufferer, understanding the discomfort experienced by the observer by virtue of his ability to imagine himself in the observer’s position, can subdue his pain in order to receive a sympathetic response. The impartial spectator permits both the person experiencing an emotion, as well as the person observing it, to consider the

13 Smith, 28, 31.
other’s situations, and act accordingly. What’s more, Smith goes so far as to suggest that sympathy is necessary to calm emotions when he describes the sufferer’s comparison of his own “violent” passion with those the observer feels, a “weaker” “reflected passion.” The impartial spectator not only determines the permissibility of the magnitude of an emotion and when sympathetic reactions ought to be bestowed by the observer, but also works to pacify the sufferer’s emotions.

Thus, when the observer cannot imagine and understand the sufferer’s pain, he cannot bestow sympathy unto the sufferer, and the sufferer’s emotions run amok, leaving the two parties alienated from one another. Sympathy becomes unavailable to validate the sufferer’s emotions, and the observer feels taxed by the other’s extremeness. Resentment builds between the sufferer and the observer to the point of intolerability: “I can neither support your company, nor you mine. You are confounded at my violence and passion, and I am enraged at your cold insensibility and want of feeling.”

Therefore, the impartial spectator’s correct function—to imaginatively transport the observer into the sufferer’s situation in an effort to understand his emotions—is necessary not only to delineate acceptable emotional responses and the sympathy they garner, but more importantly, to manage and maintain relationships between both the observer and the observed.

Smith’s theory of sympathy concludes with his claim that people desire and thus seek wealth and power. Wealth and power are associated with respect and admiration, two things that give joy to its recipients and fuel observers with ambition to attain wealth and power for themselves. Smith links wealth with joy, and while the observer’s

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15 Smith, 26.
16 Smith, 73.
sympathetic response to another’s joy is often less “lively and distinct” than his response to another’s pain, the observer is better able to understand the experience of joy over the experience of pain. The observer’s sympathy with another’s joy naturally resonates with the emotions felt by the joyous; the same cannot be said of one’s sympathetic response to pain:

Pain besides, whether of mind or body, is a more pungent sensation than pleasure, and our sympathy with pain, though it falls greatly short of what is naturally felt by the sufferer, is generally a more lively and distinct perception than our sympathy with pleasure, though this last often approaches more nearly, as I shall shew immediately, to the natural vivacity of the original passions.

People naturally seek relationship with those whom they understand, and the impartial spectator, by imaginatively considering another person’s experience, serves to create understanding between two people. Thus, the difficulty of understanding another’s pain compared to the more natural understanding of another’s joy moves one to seek relationship with those who are joyful. In Smith’s words, “It is because mankind are disposed to sympathize more entirely with our joy than with our sorrow, that we make parade of our riches, and conceal our poverty.” The ease in which one sympathizes with another’s joy in comparison to the struggle of sympathizing with another’s pain creates both an individual and social mentality in which relationship with those in pain is undesirable and perhaps even impossible, resulting in admiration of those who are joyful (the wealthy) and shunning of those who are in pain (the poor).

Although her work upends the alienating effects of Smith’s theory of sympathy, Day does not necessarily disagree with the natural aversion to extreme emotions that Smith articulates in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Like Smith, Day believes that the
reluctance into which one enters and sympathizes with another’s pain is natural.

Describing an interaction with a disorderly and drunken prostitute at a New York City house of hospitality, Day writes:

I kept remembering how St. Therese said that when you had to refuse anyone anything, you could at least do it so that the person went away a bit happier. I had to deny [the prostitute] a bed but when that woman asked me to kiss her, I did, and it was a loathsome thing, the way she did it. It was scarcely a mark of normal human affection... I cannot say I am much better for it.

While Day describes the prostitute in terms that are aesthetically ugly—the prostitute has “a nightmare of a mouth”—her visual ugliness is not repulsive to Day. Rather, the prostitute’s kiss is “loathsome” and contains “scarcely a mark of normal human affection,” making it difficult for Day to understand, and in effect sympathize with, the woman. The kiss is so alien to Day’s conception of what a kiss should be—a physical and visible sign of affection—that imagining herself in the emotional state of the prostitute is impossible. Day only kisses the prostitute because of her own construction of acceptability, illuminated by her reference to St. Therese, much in the same way Smith says people only sympathize with those in pain to the extent that is socially necessary.

Day does not readily sympathize with the prostitute, as Smith predicts, and the interaction does not serve to foster a relationship between the two women. As Day admits, “I cannot say I am much better for it.”

Day’s anecdote about the prostitute corroborates Smith’s theory. Given the unanticipated agreement between Day and Smith on one’s natural aversion to extreme emotions, one must consider how Day overcomes her natural impulse not to sympathize

21 Ellsberg, 110. Overcoming one’s aversion to the aesthetically ugly is one aspect of detachment, which ultimately creates a mindset where both the wealthy and the poor meet each other with sympathy, enabling them to enter into relationship with one another. While Day does not have an aversion to the prostitute’s ugliness—after all, she does submit to the woman’s kiss—others may not immediately greet the prostitute in the same manner.
22 Smith, 58.
with the pain of the poor. In saying that one more genuinely sympathizes with another person’s joy than pain, Smith sets up an immediate resistance towards those who are experiencing “negative” emotions of physical distress and mental sadness. It is here that the relationship between the poor and wealthy becomes troubled. Despite the parallels between Smith and Day’s conception of natural responses—the preference to sympathize with joy over pain—Day nonetheless actively works to overcome these natural responses, knowing their degrading effects on relationships between individuals, particularly the relationship between the wealthy and the poor.23

To further distance sympathy from pain, Smith sets up a framework where restraint of emotion becomes associated with admiration and respect. In considering physical pain, “the man, who under the severest tortures allows no weakness to escape him, vents no groan, gives way to no passion which we do not entirely enter into, commands our highest admiration.”24 Similarly,

Nothing is so mortifying as to be obliged to expose our distress to the view of the public, and to feel, that though our situation is open to the eyes of all mankind, no mortal conceives for us the half of what we suffer. Nay, it is chiefly from this regard to the sentiments of mankind, that we pursue riches and avoid poverty.25

People pursue wealth not because it brings stability or greater freedom of choice as many might assume, but because poverty is impenetrable to an observer’s sympathy and

23 It is worth mentioning here that the popular characterization of Smith’s economic and moral theory as thoroughly selfish, advocating cutthroat economic exchange based on uninhibited self-interest, is not at all accurate. Some scholars argue the impartial spectator works to simultaneously encourage and restrain human agency, balancing individuality with a group dynamic in an effort to create social cohesion not forcibly mandated by the government. Jerry Muller, author of *Adam Smith in His Time and Ours*, argues that John Stuart Mill’s preference for adherence to one’s individual standards of behavior over those held by society, in essence, led to misunderstanding of Smith’s theory. I am not here to pass judgment on Smith or capitalism, rather, I find Smith’s moral theory particularly useful in uncovering the central goal of the Catholic Worker movement and the methods by which Dorothy Day worked to realize that goal. Jerry Z. Muller, *Adam Smith in His Time and Ours: Designing the Decent Society*, (New York: The Free Press, 1993), 192.
24 Smith, 37.
25 Smith, 61.
therefore leaves one outside of the social fabric. That Smith says people avoid poverty for this reason suggests that he concurs with Day’s emphasis on the importance of interpersonal relationships. Yet, the impartial spectator does not have a corrective mechanism to prevent such alienation between peoples, leaving one to assume that the sight of pain is inherently abhorrent to the observer. Smith suggests as much: “Nature it seems, when she loaded us with our own sorrows, thought that they were enough, and therefore did not command us to take any further share in those of others, than what was necessary to prompt us to relieve them.” The observer feels naturally uncomfortable at the sight of pain, and will sympathize only to a point; if the sufferer asks for more sympathy than warranted by the impartial spectator, the observer eventually comes to resent the sufferer for asking him to enter too fully into his hardship. Conversely, the sufferer comes to resent the observer for not considering the full reality of his situation. Because Smith’s theory concerns social interactions, it is those who restrain their pain who are admired, because they do not provoke discomfort in the observer; restraint of pain is seen as a selfless act in order to ensure another’s comfort. Thus, admiration of one’s restraint of pain—what society might call courageous and selfless—affects perceptions of and reactions to the poor. Because the poor often cannot help but be visible to the public as homeless vagrants and unwashed beggars, their inability to regulate the sight of their pain corners the poor into what society sees as the opposite of courageous and selfless, that is weak and selfish.

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26 Smith, 58.
27 Smith, 26
That the poor do not restrain or satisfactorily conceal their sorrowful situations makes them appear pathetic and contemptible to others. Indeed, even Day writes of such perceptions of the poor, recalling that in her adolescence adults looked upon "the destitute [...] as shiftless, the worthless, those without talent of any kind, let alone the ability to make a living for themselves." The very situation of extreme hunger, physical pain, and emotional depression of the poor is naturally repulsive to the observer and therefore sympathetically impenetrable. The outward gaze of the observer becomes internalized, imparting shame on the sufferer:

The poor man, on the other hand, is ashamed of his poverty. He feels that it either places him out of the sight of mankind, or, that if they take any notice of him, they have, however, scarce any fellow-feeling with the misery and distress which he suffers. He is mortified upon both accounts; for though to be overlooked, and to be disapproved of, are things entirely different, yet as obscurity covers us from the daylight of honor and approbation, to feel that we are taken no notice of, necessarily damps human nature.

Smith recognizes that the sympathetic response, or lack thereof, makes the poor feel separate from and a burden to society, but he shows little concern for counteracting this shortcoming of the impartial spectator. Smith’s Enlightenment sensibilities chalk the elevation and imitation of the rich, as well as the fear and disgust of the poor, up to human nature, which cannot be tampered or altered. Interpreting Smith in such a way positions the inevitable alienation between those experiencing extreme emotions of pain and those who are witnesses to it as something that cannot be prevented or fixed; it "simply just is."

Dorothy Day actively works against Smith’s perspective because it does not guarantee that due sympathy will be bestowed on all peoples, thus generating resentment between individuals. Ironically, Smith predicts a pitfall of the admiration of the rich and

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28 Smith, 42.
30 Smith, 62.
the powerful that, more than 180 years later, becomes Day’s primary critique of capitalism:

> It is from our disposition to admire, and consequently to imitate, the rich and the great, that they are enabled to set, or to lead what is called the fashion... Even their vices and follies are fashionable; and the greater part of men are proud to imitate and resemble them in the very qualities which dishonor and degrade them. 31

While Smith accepts such behavior as fact despite its potentially harmful effects, Day resists it precisely because of them. Day’s critique of capitalism, which she repeats in multiple pieces of writing, is directed toward the rich and powerful advertisers, who target the consumer,

> instilling in him the paltry desires to satisfy that for which he must sell his liberty and his honor. Not that we are not all guilty of concupiscence but newspapers, radios, televisions, and battalions of advertising men (woe to that generation) deliberately stimulate his desires, the satisfaction of which means the degradation of the family. 32

Day and Smith agree on the natural human tendency to find pain repulsive and joy sympathetic; that is, in Smith’s framework, to conceal poverty when present, avoid it when opportunity allows, and to always seek wealth. Day admits to the naturalness of such acts by acknowledging (in a rather confusing double-negative statement) that all people are guilty of concupiscence, the Catholic term for the human inclination toward sin as a result of the Fall. 33 In doing so, Day sets up imitation of the wealthy as a sin, but she also takes aim at advertisers for exploiting one’s innate desire to do so. Such seduction affects the poor most destructively, for, being naturally drawn toward the imitation of the wealthy for its ability to mask the pain of poverty and thereby reinstate them into the social community, the poor squander their meager earnings on the frivolous products they see the upper-classes enjoying.

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31 Smith, 75.
32 Dorothy Day, “Poverty is to Care and Not to Care,” *The Catholic Worker*, Apr. 1953, p. 1, 5.
33 *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed, vol. 13, s.v. “Sin (Theology of)”.
Day, by not blaming the poor, continues to suggest that such imitative behavior is natural. She does, however, blame the advertisers:

Who do we blame for such installment-plan buying, for the movies, cigarettes, radio, magazines, or all the trash, the worthless trash with which they try to comfort their poor lives? We do not blame them, God knows. We blame the advertising men, the household loan companies, the cheap stores, the radio, the movies. 34

According to Smith’s theory, those participating in advertising and those who fall victim to it are in no way acting out of the ordinary, for both parties are attempting to acquire wealth and power. While all people must try to balance their inclination toward sin, it is the manipulation of one’s concupiscence, through advertising, that Day sees as the more serious infraction against human beings and God. In Catholic theology, inciting another to sin is termed “scandal.” 35 In not blaming the poor for their behavior of imitating the wealthy, Day suggests that such conduct is indeed, as Smith argued, natural. However, that some businesses recognize one’s natural inclination to seek wealth (and if that is unattainable, the appearance of wealth) and take advantage of it in order to make a profit is unnatural and thus sinful. Reparation for the sin of scandal is typically “demonstrated by a visible and outward change of life,” which has implications for the method Day advocates for the wealthy to alter their perceptions of, and enter into relationship with, the poor. 36

Smith’s notion of sympathy and the impartial spectator, intentionally or not, places interaction between the poor and wealthy in crisis. Seeing that Smith’s perspective of the natural can justify one’s self-interest as “simply the way it is” and therefore inalterable, Day appeals to the supernatural—the Christian god—in an effort to combat the degradation of personal relationships which result from the capitalist

36 “Scandal.”
mentality. However, in order to reconcile the broken relationship between the wealthy and the poor, Day does not merely attempt to refocus the function of Smith’s impartial spectator through a Roman Catholic lens. In a radical move, Day pushes beyond the imagined experience which the impartial spectator provides, instead advocating for detachment from social propriety both through lived experience and imaginative functions different from those of the impartial spectator as a means to provide genuine understanding between persons.

Day’s work focuses on remedying the relationship between the poor and the wealthy by seeking to reconfigure how the poor and the wealthy “see” one another. Day uses Catholic theology of detachment to reverse the imaginative forces of the impartial spectator that have the potential to damage relationships. This chapter has spent considerable time examining how Smith’s theory of sympathy influences the wealthy’s perception of the poor, with emphasis on how it also colors the poor’s perceptions of the wealthy. In the following two chapters, the reconfiguration of the wealthy’s perception of the poor will be considered through the lived experience of voluntary poverty followed by the imaginative act of reading. The final chapter examines how Day ministers to the poor through the creation of privacy as a means to fully reestablish the relationship between the poor and the wealthy.
CHAPTER TWO

In the introduction to *Houses of Hospitality*, Day writes, “we talk of [voluntary poverty] in the *Catholic Worker* as an indispensable means to an end.”37 Despite her own experience with voluntary poverty prior to her conversion to Catholicism and the founding of the Catholic Worker movement—one of her first beats as a journalist for the socialist daily *The Call* involved living as a “diet squad of one” to report first-hand on urban hunger—Day’s theological understanding of voluntary poverty took longer to cultivate.38 Day often describes the practice of voluntary poverty in a practical light.39 She is fond of telling the following anecdote as a concise, catchy way of summarizing the cause and effect of doing without material goods: “‘There is always enough for one more,’ as a Spanish friend said, ‘Everyone just take[s] a little less.’ ‘If everyone would try to be better, then everyone would be better off,’ Peter Maurin said. ‘No one would be poor if everyone tried to be the poorest.’”40 While this commonsensical view of voluntary poverty lacks a spiritual understanding of its practice, it still has value. Not only does “doing without” logically result in a more equal distribution of resources among people, it also helps one confront his natural aversion to the ugliness of poverty that typically prohibits or limits his sympathetic response to such sights. This confrontation allows the wealthy to surpass their tolerance of poverty’s aesthetic ugliness to see the poor not as ugly, but beautiful in their humanity. When the wealthy adopt a life of voluntary poverty, they undergo a psycho-spiritual transformation that, Day believes,

provides them with the opportunity to truly understand the lives of the poor; the lived experience of poverty results in a love for the poor as themselves.

Day did not fully synthesize and articulate voluntary poverty's ability to change one's perception of the poor until the 1940s. Relatively unenthused by previous retreats, Day reversed her opinion after attending a retreat given in the tradition of Onesiums Lacouture, S.J., who initiated the spread of Ignatian retreats in North America. The retreat, which consisted of a series of lectures given over several days, is based upon the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuit order of priests. The lectures emphasize the day-to-day practice of "prayer, detachment, imitation of Christ's poverty, and love for those who are difficult to love" as a means of enacting God's will.

Day's encounter with Fathers John Hugo, Pacifique Roy, and Louis Farina—all of whom led versions of Lacouture's retreat—influenced her understanding of the psycho-spiritual efficacy of voluntary poverty. The retreat, which employed teachings on detachment, enhanced Day's understanding of voluntary poverty as a means by which to repair the broken relationship between the wealthy and the poor. Voluntary poverty imparts in the wealthy understanding of the realities of poverty, and directs time and attention away from material gain and focuses it on love of God and neighbor.

41 Day, The Long Loneliness, 244; Merriman, 132. "S.J." is an acronym for "Society of Jesus," the official name of the Jesuit order of priests.
42 Merriam, 134.
43 The English word "love" fails to describe precisely what Day meant when she wrote about love for the poor. I appeal to the three Greek words for love—eros, philia, and agape—to better explain Day's love for the poor. Love for the poor is obviously not eros, the romantic love between partners. Rather, it is a combination of philia and agape. When one sees the poor not as unwashed but clean, it is philia, or brotherly love. With philia, one can come to sympathize with the poor. But agape—one's love for God and God's love for people—describes the deeper love Day feels for the poor, the love that pushes one from mere sympathy for the poor to love of the poor. The distinction is a subtle, but important one, to keep in mind.
Both Day and Adam Smith's theories of moral behavior hinge upon some degree of detachment. Smith's impartial spectator involves detachment from self-interest; indeed, the mere act of imagining oneself in the position of another places that person's feelings over one's own. Detachment, then, is an intrinsic function of the impartial spectator. Without the ability to detach oneself from his own perspective and imaginatively enter into that of another person, it would be impossible for one not only to sympathize with another, but also to know what situations are deserving of a sympathetic response. The impartial spectator reflects the approved mores of society and thus reminds one of what behavior society praises and criticizes. Therefore, while the impartial spectator allows one to imagine another's emotional state, it also functions as an agent of peer pressure to act within the bounds of propriety. Questions of the self intrude upon the act of self-detachment: What will others think of me if I act in such and such a way? How will others interpret my actions if I choose one reaction over another? How am I seen? In this sense, Smith's detachment has a partial and temporary self-sacrificial quality, one that Day dismisses as ineffectual. Day instead follows St. John of the Cross, a Christian mystic of 16th century Spain. His teachings on detachment involve complete renunciation of worldly luxuries as a means of replacing the attention one pays to attaining material goods with attention directed toward God and, most importantly for Day, to others. That Day's detachment involves giving up material goods is simply another way to describe resistance of one's natural desires for attention and respect (and thus, in Smith's framework, wealth and power). Day's detachment, then, is radically anti-capitalist, leading wholly away from the self and society, pointing instead to God and others. Whereas the capitalist would argue that wealth increases leisure time for the

44 Werhane, 38.
individual, Day would argue that wealth actually monopolizes not only one’s time, but one’s soul as well.

Day’s understanding of the psycho-spiritual benefits of voluntary poverty solidified in the early 1940s while attending Lacouture-inspired retreats in New York and Pennsylvania. At these retreats, St. John of the Cross was regularly quoted. In his primary work, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, St. John of the Cross writes that detachment from worldly desires, which he calls “inordinate appetites,” will bring one into union with God. St. John of the Cross’ description of desires as “inordinate,” excessive and disproportional to the object, is the same move Smith makes when establishing parameters for the proper intensities of emotions that elicit sympathy from an observer. Having desires is not necessarily sinful—concupiscence, after all, is characteristic of fallen humanity—but excessive desire is, indeed, sinful. St. John of the Cross does not spend much time tabulating the specific appetites of which one is to deprive himself. He speaks of “delicious food” and “worldly possessions,” but overall calls for the “deprival of the gratification of man’s appetites in all [sensory] things.” Bluntly, he says, “So a person attached to the beauty of any creature is extremely ugly in God’s sight.” St. John of the Cross sets up a dichotomy of natural and supernatural behaviors that are delineated into virtuous and dishonorable actions, a division that Day echoes in her disdain for installment buying and advertising and her elevation of the imitation of Jesus through voluntary poverty.

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45 Merriman, 168.
47 Kavanaugh, 74, 76.
48 Kavanaugh, 79.
St. John of the Cross believes that inordinate appetites yield benefits opposite to those that the capitalist expects: “An act of virtue produces in a man mildness, peace, comfort, light, purity, and strength, just as an inordinate appetite brings about torment, fatigue, weariness, blindness, and weakness.” Instead of wealth bringing one admiration and respect, it brings “torment;” instead of poverty bringing one shame, it brings “strength.” These pairings reverse Smith’s positive and negative associations with wealth and poverty. Implicit in the peace and calm of virtuous acts is the idea that detachment from inordinate appetites allows one to give his time and attention to God by removing worry about material wealth. The re-appropriation of time from the capitalist mantra “time is money,” was, in fact, a primary concern of Peter Maurin. The colloquialism equating time and money contained a contradiction that Maurin “saw as the bizarre alienation of work, personhood, land, community, and faith. Time, a gift from God, is under no one’s control. It is the medium in which lives unfold and in which salvation works itself out.” Maurin saw a fundamental discordance between time, a creation of God, and money, a creation of man; to equate the two is sacrilegious. In this sense, detachment from inordinate appetites, the willing sacrifice of material goods, makes the theological efficacy of voluntary poverty clear and understandable. Deprivation increases one’s time and attention for God and others. Day writes, “The mystery of poverty is that by sharing in it, making ourselves poor in giving to others, we increase our knowledge of and belief in love.” Thus, the psycho-spiritual affect of voluntary poverty becomes fully realized when one’s detachment from material wealth

49 Kavanaugh, 100.
heightens one's attention and increases one's time, in turn leading to love of God and others.

Day "love[d] the Church for Christ made visible," and repeatedly speaks of the necessity of imitation of Jesus through "stripping ourselves to help others." Indeed, detachment, St. John of the Cross says, is essentially "the habitual desire to imitate Christ in all your deeds, bringing your life into conformity with His." Examining the identity of Jesus further illuminates the practice of voluntary poverty. Day points to the passion narrative as a place to start such an examination: "The only way we can write about poverty is in terms of ourselves, our own personal responsibility. The message we have been given is the Cross." Theologian Hans Frei, author of *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, considers how the structure of the gospels reveals Jesus' identity, which is fully realized in his death and resurrection:

The structure of the narrative is such that the entire focusing of Jesus as a full human being in manifest identity, rather than as a mythical savoir, comes to its climax [in the passion narrative]. In the first stage [his birth and childhood], we recall, he was described merely as a representative figure and not as an individual at all. In the second stage [his ministry], he was much more nearly identified in terms of the Kingdom of God than in terms of him. In the third stage [his death and resurrection], he emerged fully as the one unsubstitutable Jesus of Nazareth—and this as much in the resurrection as in the passion.

Jesus' passive acceptance of his death by crucifixion in the Garden of Gethsemane marks a decisive development in his character, one that moves him from having power (in being identified in terms of the Kingdom of God) to being completely powerless:

It marks the crucial *inner* transition point from power and scope to powerlessness... Corresponding to the transition from power to helplessness on the *inner* plane is its constituting enactment on the *outer* plane.

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52 Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 149; Day, "Poverty is to Care and Not to Care," 1, 5.  
53 Kavanaugh, 102.  
54 Ellsberg, 111.  
56 Frei, 151.
By first embodying helplessness, which Frei distinguishes as being vital to Jesus' identity, and then enacting it publicly through his death, Jesus gives up everything—he is vulnerable and completely without. In other words, he is poor, existing in a condition of poverty.

The significance of Jesus' turn to helplessness in the passion narrative lies in his interactions with others. In Jesus' interaction with Pontius Pilate during his sentencing, "Pilate asked him, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' He answered, 'You say so.'" Jesus is totally vulnerable in the scene, but he does not defend himself, instead accepting his role as a helpless being. Further, Jesus shows love without judgment to the criminal hanging next to him on the cross: "Then [the criminal] said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' [Jesus] replied, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.'" In these instances, the focus is no longer on Jesus' preaching or miracles, but rather on his interaction with people, be it disciples, criminals, or politicians. He is at the mercy of others, and it is here that Jesus' whole identity, one that is helpless yet full of love, emerges. In the moment that Jesus brings salvation to the world through his death, he focuses not on himself, but on others. Acting in imitation of Jesus' helplessness through the means of poverty, Day finds that to simplify one's life is to reorient its focus: poverty allows the wealthy to recognize that relationships with others, including the poor, exist in the presence of Christ.

While extreme and demanding, a life of voluntary poverty is a life lived like Christ in order to move away from unnecessary desires, refocusing one's attention on the interconnectedness of human beings. The poverty Day advocates is not masochistic, an

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argument typically made against Jesus’ command, “‘Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.’” Instead, Day sees voluntary poverty as a means by which to restore relationships to their intended place and most sacred form. Voluntary poverty puts the wealthy in communion with the poor, causing one to understand the experience of poverty firsthand, and to remember that “[the poor] are our brothers in Jesus; He died for each of them. What respect we should feel for them!” In assuming a life of voluntary poverty, one comes to see another so clearly as a part of God’s creation that it becomes impossible to refuse that person love. In Smith’s framework, to understand the experience of the poor allows one to sympathize with the poor. Day adds her own gloss, moving past sympathy and toward love: “The reason for our existence is to praise God, to love Him and serve Him, and we can do this only by loving our brothers.” Poverty, which enables one to recognize Jesus’ presence in others, sustains and rejuvenates faith, thereby allowing one to continue to praise, love, and serve God. Day understands her faith through the poor:

How do we know we believe? How do we know we indeed have faith? Because we have seen His hands and His feet in the poor around us. He has shown Himself to us in them. We start by loving them for Him, and we soon love them for themselves, each one a unique person, most special!

One loves others not only because it is what Jesus does, but because Jesus abides in the poor. What begins as a love for Jesus, manifesting itself outwardly as one’s imitation of Jesus and his love for the poor, ends as a true love for the stranger in whom one sees Jesus. The mystery of faith provokes such a turn, one that transforms all involved. Relationships of superiority and inferiority disappear as the shared condition of poverty

60 Ellsberg, 112.
61 Ellsberg, 114.
62 Ellsberg, 330.
pulls one's attention away from material gain and focuses it onto the interconnectedness of others.

Faith allows one to enter a life of voluntary poverty; that life's disciplined practice of detachment vindicates love for God and produces a newly realized love for others. Day writes, "Two people who are deeply in love are thinking of each other all the time, and what they can do for each other. So we must be with God. The love of God is more intense than any human love. Keep asking for this love." Smith's own opinion about lovers illuminates why Day's metaphor helps the wealthy alter their perceptions of the poor. In Smith's framework, the observer of a couple in love is unable to sympathize with the couple. The impartial spectator cannot penetrate the couple's bliss; instead, the observer sympathizes only with the couple's "secondary passions which arise from the situation of love," such as generosity and humanity. Sympathy for secondary passions makes the couple's love endurable, for "the passion appears to every body, but the man who feels it, entirely disproportioned to the value of the object; and the love [...] is always laughed at, because we cannot enter into it." Paralysis of the impartial spectator occurs in both the couple in love, who are so wholly consumed with one another that they cannot conceive of an observer's opinion about their actions, and the observer, who is unable to imagine and understand, and hence sympathize with, the couple's love. Thus, the state of being in love is one that can only be experienced. Day advocates the practice of voluntary poverty precisely because genuine love for another can be understood only through experience. Being a lover of God transcends the abilities of the impartial

64 Smith, 40-41.
65 Smith, 38.
spectator and enters the realm of lived experience. To love God is to be an active member of a relationship instead of a mere unknowing and thus unsympathetic observer.

One of Day’s constant commands to readers of *The Catholic Worker* newspaper is to be a “fool for Christ.” In one instance Day writes,

> It is not a counsel of perfection—this call to love. “A new precept I give unto you, to the laying down of one’s life for his friend.” This was a physical fact in Christ’s life and should be a physical fact in our own. If we are afraid, we must pray not to be afraid, to be fools for Christ.

Day unites the physical suffering that follows from detachment from material luxuries, the “inordinate appetites” of St. John of the Cross, with the love which emerges from detachment. Viewing the love between disciple and God as that between lovers—a love at which Adam Smith says observers undoubtedly laugh—gives clarity to Day’s command to be a “fool for Christ.” Day renounces the self-centeredness of the impartial spectator’s question “How do others see me?” in favor of being a lover of God, a fool for Christ. Only God’s approval, and not that of the impartial spectator which dictates behavior congruent with the mores of society, decides her actions. By describing the relationship between God and disciple as one between lovers, she makes the relationship resistant to the impartial spectator. With the propriety of society no longer a persuasive influence, the wealthy are ready to meet the poor with sympathy and love: “We start by loving them for Him, and we soon love them for themselves, each one a unique person, most special!” Living voluntarily poor allows the wealthy to understand of the lives of the truly destitute, stripping them of their negative perceptions of the poor and instead provoking a sympathetic response. What’s more, Jesus’ example moves one beyond

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66 Dorothy Day, “Love and Justice,” *The Catholic Worker*, Jul-Aug. 1952, p. 1, 2. The phrase “fool for Christ” comes from 1 Corinthians 4:10, where Paul describes disciples of Jesus as “fools for Christ’s sake.” The saying is often used to describe St. Francis of Assisi, who is perhaps the most famous practitioner of voluntary poverty within the Catholic faith. Suffice to say, Day had a strong devotion to St. Francis.

67 Ellsberg, 330.
sympathy to love. Its psycho-spiritual transformational power explains why Day positions voluntary poverty as one of the Catholic Worker’s primary means to create a new social order in which the wealthy and the poor have the opportunity to engage in genuine relationship with one another.
CHAPTER THREE

Dorothy Day upholds voluntary poverty as the “indispensable means” of the Catholic Worker movement, for the lived experience of poverty helps the wealthy understand the plight of the poor.\textsuperscript{68} Day firmly believes that the understanding of another’s situation leads to greater sympathy with that person, and that through Jesus’ example, this sympathy translates into love for that person. Experiential learning was always the most effective pedagogy for Day. Writing about the Catholic Worker, she says: “We are learning through grim experience, ‘the hard way’ everyone said, but I never knew any other way.”\textsuperscript{69} But, Day was also a realist, and understood that few people would adopt lives of voluntary poverty. Indeed, according to Day, initiating such change in an individual’s perspective and behavior is the most difficult part of her work:

\begin{quote}
I am faced with the problem of making others see it. I can well recognize the fact that people remaining as they are, Peter’s program is impossible. But it would become actual, given a people changed in heart and mind, so that they would observe the new commandment of love, or desire to.\textsuperscript{70}
\end{quote}

Day is presented with the problem of making the wealthy “see” poverty, otherwise they will continue moving about the world with the same unsympathetic attitude towards the poor. While Day advocates the lived experience of voluntary poverty as an “indispensable means” to create a new social order where the gap between the wealthy and the poor disappear, she also recognizes that for many, her lived example provides too little force to provoke individual change. To further reach the wealthy, Day uses the written word to engage readers’ imaginative faculties in order to make them “see” the

\textsuperscript{68} Day, \textit{Houses of Hospitality}, xxvii.
\textsuperscript{69} Day, \textit{The Long Loneliness}, 229.
\textsuperscript{70} Day, \textit{The Long Loneliness}, 171.
problem of poverty, to shift their perceptions, and bring them into relationship with the poor.

Day’s own experience confirms her belief that she can change one’s perception through the written word; indeed, reading first granted her insight into a life of poverty. In reflections about her childhood and adolescence in Chicago, Day recalls the powerful effect of Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*:

...though my only experience of the destitute was in books, the very fact that *The Jungle* was about Chicago where I lived, whose streets I walked, made me feel that from then on my life was to be linked to [the plight of the poor], their interests were to be mine; I had received a call, a vocation, a direction to my life.71 In reading Sinclair’s novel, Day entered a fictional world that nonetheless resonated with the one she inhabited, making the “experience of the destitute” suddenly real. The poverty of *The Jungle*’s protagonist, Jurgis Rudkus, was not aesthetically disgusting to Day, but rather repulsive in its injustice. Exposure to works like *The Jungle* and Jack London’s essays about class struggle captivated Day’s imagination as a teenager so much so that she began exploring the immigrant and working class neighborhoods of Chicago, seeing firsthand the poverty about which her favorite authors wrote. Influenced by her father’s work as a journalist, Day decided to pursue the profession, craving “experience in general” over the academic mastery symbolized by a college degree.72

Writing provided a means by which Day obtained the experiences she so craved. Her first assignment for *The Call* was to write a story about how one could survive on five dollars a week; she continued reporting on “strike meetings, picket meetings, peace meetings... the Emergency Peace Federation, the I.W.W., the Socialists, the anarchists,

an anticonscription group at Columbia University.” Journalism introduced Day to the world of political subversives of which she, for a time, considered herself a part. Yet while their concern was with the struggling working class and the poor, their lives did not resemble those of the genuinely destitute:

As young people we were attracted to the people, to the poor, and we lived in slums and suffered in order to do the work we chose. Ours was the natural virtue of voluntary poverty. We helped others, it is true, but we did not deprive ourselves in order to help others. We had no philosophy of poverty.

Day later discovered a “philosophy of poverty” through the practice of voluntary poverty, with detachment from material goods leading towards love for others. The focus of such voluntary poverty is God, and one performs each act so as to be pleasing to God. Day’s comrades, rejecting religion on communist and socialist principles, instead allowed their actions to “follow the devices and desires of [their] own heart[s]” and did not direct their hearts outwards to others. This superficial practice of voluntary poverty eventually lost its appeal, undoubtedly paralleling Day’s movement toward Catholicism. When she met Peter Maurin five years after she joined the Church, Day recognized a certain “philosophy” in his practice of voluntary poverty and felt his vision of a Catholic social justice movement was one to which she could dedicate her life.

In spite of renouncing materialism and giving up her worldly possessions, Day always held on to the act of writing; indeed, books and a typewriter may have been the only luxuries that she allowed herself. Journalism was her vocation, she said, and she wrote prolifically for The Catholic Worker newspaper during her fifty years with the movement. What distinguishes Day’s articles from those she wrote before her

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76 Day, The Long Loneliness, 93.
conversion to those she wrote afterwards is that instead of reporting mere observations of strikes and meetings of socialist groups, Day wrote about her own experience in both radical activism and Catholic spirituality. Because her writing for The Catholic Worker synthesized her religious beliefs and activist spirit, writing served as a special type of prayer for Day. Indeed, writing directs Day’s attention toward God and others, and, just like voluntary poverty, it involves elements of detachment and love.

Simone Weil, in Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies, claims that attention is the essence of prayer, and can be cultivated and practiced in scholarly pursuits such as reading and writing. Attention, Weil writes,

consists of suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty and ready to be penetrated by the object, it means holding in our minds, within reach of this thought, but on a lower level and not in contact with it, the diverse knowledge we have acquired which we are forced to make use of... Above all our thought should be empty, waiting, not seeking anything, but ready to receive in its naked truth the object which is to penetrate it.

Weil’s concept of “attention” resonates with Day’s idea of “detachment,” for in putting off one’s prior knowledge and natural reactions, one’s attention focuses more clearly and presently on the subject at hand. Within voluntary poverty, attention is a form of detachment, pulling one’s thoughts away from the self and directing them instead to others; such an act, in turn, leads to greater understanding, sympathy, and ultimately love for others. Weil demonstrates that lived experience is not the only method by which to cultivate such detachment, arguing that when proper attention is paid to one’s academic subjects, which include reading and writing, one’s capacity for attention affects other aspects of life. At the essay’s conclusion, Weil writes:

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80 Weil, 56.
The love of our neighbor in all its fullness simply means being able to say to him: "What are you going through?" It is a recognition that the sufferer exists, not only as a unit in a collection, or a specimen from the social category labeled 'unfortunate,' but as a man, exactly like we are, who was one day stamped with a special mark by affliction. For this reason it is enough, but it is indispensable, to know how to look at him in a certain way. This way of looking is first of all attentive. The soul empties itself of all its own contents in order to receive into itself the being it is looking at, just as he is, in all his truth.\textsuperscript{81}

What Weil describes is, in essence, the imagined practice of voluntary poverty, for detachment from the self leads to a greater ability to connect with, and love, another person, particularly those who suffer. Although the lived experience of voluntary poverty made poverty a physical reality, "Day herself came to perceive humanity more clearly in the process of writing."\textsuperscript{82} The attention Day pays to her subjects while writing moves beyond Adam Smith's impartial spectator because the imagination of attentiveness does not hinge on one's own emotions or society's parameters of propriety; it simply focuses on the reality of another person, "just as he is, in all his truth." Indeed, the difference in imaginative function is essential in understanding how writing is a prayerful act for Day as an author as well as how reading affects her readers' view of the poor.

Day hoped to change society's perceptions about the poor not only through her lived example but also through the written word; in an interview with friend and biographer Robert Coles she said of writing and action, "Both can be part of a person's response, an ethical response to the world."\textsuperscript{83} Day wrote for a particular audience, even though \textit{The Catholic Worker} newspaper was sold for only a penny, thereby "mak[ing] it so cheap that anyone could buy."\textsuperscript{84} Disheartened by the lack of Catholic leadership in social movements of the time, Day wanted to shake Catholics out of their complacency: "They were our own and we reacted sharply to the accusation that when it came to

\textsuperscript{81} Weil, 59.
\textsuperscript{82} Valenta, 343.
\textsuperscript{83} Valenta, 344.
\textsuperscript{84} Day, \textit{The Long Loneliness}, 174.
private morality the Catholics shone but when it came to social and political morality, they were often conscienceless." Day was less concerned about writing for the poor—her ministry to them, after all, was directly through houses of hospitality—and more concerned about writing for the advertising men and wealthy churchgoers who ignored the struggles of the poor. *The Catholic Worker* did reach wide audiences, with a circulation of 150,000 in 1936, three years after the movement began. Churches, seminaries, and Catholic high schools subscribed, and copies were sold individually on the streets of New York, Baltimore, Buffalo, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Seattle, among other places. Through writing about her encounters with uncomely characters—alcoholics, prostitutes, the mentally ill, and vagrants—and her own struggles of living a life of poverty, Day, by simply paying attention to the poor, attempted to humanize them for her readers, who otherwise viewed them as dangerous and ugly.

Day knew that conveying the harsh realities and unimaginable hardships of poverty was difficult:

> It is hard to write about poverty when a visitor tells you of how he and his family all lived in a basement room and did sweat shop work at night to make ends meet and how the landlord came in and belabored them for not paying his exorbitant rent.

The difficulty of writing about poverty comes in the reader’s own ignorance of the subject. How does one describe the physical pain of sweat shop labor to those who work white-collar jobs? How does one convey the humiliation of being unable to afford adequate housing? How does one communicate the emotional turmoil of being separated from one’s family in order to work day and night to support them? In spite of the

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88 Valenta, 344.
apparent impossibility of representing poverty on the page, Day continued to believe the written word held great potential, for “once the sense of fear of the unknown was overcome, brotherly love would evoke brother love, and mutual love would overcome fear and hatred.”\textsuperscript{90} Indeed, Day’s experience, through her own reading of \textit{The Jungle} and other works, proved that even a fictional introduction to the hardships of poverty could heighten one’s everyday sympathy and love for the poor.

But just how the imaginative act of reading translates into alterations of worldview and behavior is another matter completely. To understand how reading might yield such affects requires one to consider the role of imagination in the act of reading. In \textit{Literature and Moral Understanding}, Frank Palmer observes that readers “contemplate [the fictional] world without being a denizen of that world: we surrender our status as moral agents, but not our capacity for moral attitudes.”\textsuperscript{91} In other words, readers are under no obligation to respond to a character’s emotions or actions as they would in reality; yet, readers maintain their ability to assess the morality of a character’s behavior or disposition. That readers have no social commitment to respond to the characters of a novel in any particular way is significant in light of the impartial spectator. Recall that the impartial spectator allows one to imagine himself “in another person’s shoes.” The intensity of one’s emotions, as well as social propriety regarding the displays of emotions, determines the sympathetic response of the observer. Conversely, in the fictional world, a reader’s reaction to a character’s emotion is not predicated on how others will view that reaction. The reader does not ask himself, “What will others think if I do this or that?” as he would in reality. Thus, the imaginative act of

\textsuperscript{90} Day, \textit{The Long Loneliness}, 203.
the impartial spectator and that of the reader are distinct from one another. Social propriety influences the impartial spectator in a way that is completely absent in the act of reading. For Day, the difference is significant because it allows the reader to react to the grief, hardship, and ugliness of poverty in a potentially different—that is, more sympathetic and loving—way than that which is typical in the non-fictional world.

Palmer writes that “our experience of a fictional world is the nearest to being disembodied that we can ever get,” linking the act of reading directly to detachment. While reading is inherently an imaginative act, it nonetheless provides readers with the most authentic entry point into the lived experience of the characters described in the text. Readers do not consider social standards of propriety when engaged with a text, for reading does not involve one’s moral agency. Without the impartial spectator’s appeals to social mores influencing one’s behavior towards another, the reader’s response can approximate the character’s own emotion. Many readers feel an increase in heart rate alongside the protagonist during the suspenseful climax of a murder mystery or the heartache of separated lovers in a tragic romance as if the narrative’s events were happening to them, and not just the characters of the novel. Knowing this, Day hopes that her accounts of the injustice and hardship of poverty will affect the reader as if he were, himself, experiencing such injustice and hardship. Although reading remains an imaginative act, it has the potential to place readers directly into the experiences of the characters. That the reader’s moral attitude, but not his agency, is maintained while reading allows the reader to evaluate a character’s experience as the character would, which, in turn, leads to a greater sympathetic response on the part of the reader. Whereas the ugliness of poverty when encountered in reality typically is so unsettling that the

92 Palmer, 111.
observers will try, and often succeed in ignoring the situation, on the printed page poverty appears unfair and deserving of a sympathetic response from the reader.

That Day writes from her experience and not a fictional viewpoint does little to trouble the analysis above. Given that Day desired to reach apathetic and ignorant Catholic readers, who, it is safe to assume, had little exposure to poverty, her writing possesses a foreign, if not fictional, quality; indeed, according to Day, "we must talk about poverty because people lose sight of it, can scarcely believe that it exists." The power of Day's writing comes when the reader realizes that what he perceives as fiction is, in actuality, real. Upon this moment, the reader necessarily squares his sympathetic reaction toward the poor as provoked through the text with his unsympathetic reaction toward the poor as provoked through daily encounters. The disparity between the two works to alter the reader's perception and behavior toward the poor:

There were a very great many who had seemed to agree with us who did not realize for years that *The Catholic Worker* position implicated them; if they believed the things we wrote, they could be bound, sooner or later, to make decisions personally and to act upon them.

Day cannot reasonably expect all her readers, upon this moment of decision, to adopt a life of voluntary poverty, nor does she:

One could write volumes on this subject of poverty, it is so rich, and you learn so by doing. St. Francis says that you do not know what you have not practiced. I know that I can write far more on the subject than I could seventeen years ago when the Catholic Worker started. Of course I learned by my mistakes. For instance, I learned about vocations to poverty, about presumption and pride in poverty, about the extremists who went to the depths in practicing poverty, (if one can reach them) and after a few years left work and settled down to bourgeois and individualistic comfort. It is good to accept one's limitations, not to race ahead farther than God wants us to go, not to put on sackcloth and stand on the street corners. I do not know who said it, but it was a wise priest—"Do not do any penance that you do not want to do." In other words, pray for the desire, and even desire to have the desire for poverty.

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95 Day, "Poverty Without Tears," 1, 3, 6.
Day recognizes that voluntary poverty is a vocation, the role to which she believes God has called her. She readily admits that grace, what Catholics believe to be the presence of God in all humans, is needed for such actions, because the renouncement of one’s social position as provided by material wealth is unnatural, going against the dictates of Smith’s impartial spectator. Yet, because every individual is made in the image of God, Catholic theology establishes grace as a natural feature of each person as well. Thus, in her writing Day provides an opportunity for her reader to draw upon the grace inherent in his person that allows him to overcome his natural aversion to poverty, and in turn, welcome the poor with sympathy and love.

Dorothy Day knew from her own experience that the written word could move people to change their lives, and Day wrote about poverty in an humanizing way in order to change the wealthy’s negative perceptions of the poor. Because a reader’s response to a text is undisturbed by the impartial spectator’s appeal to social norms, he is able to face the ugliness of poverty, understand its hardships, and sympathize with the poor about which Day writes. Greater understanding of the injustice of poverty yields greater sympathy and even love between the wealthy and the poor. Voluntary poverty and writing are the primary ways Day reaches out to the wealthy in an attempt to change their perception of the poor. However, the poor are also in need of a similar change, for the wealthy’s lack of sympathy for their condition provokes resentment in the poor toward the wealthy, deepening the alienation between the two groups. Day works to satisfy the poor’s need for privacy in order to bring them into relationship with the wealthy.
CHAPTER FOUR

Dorothy Day was invested in bringing people together whom she believed the functions and mechanisms of modern American society had alienated from one another. Day stresses the importance of relationship when she says, "We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community."96 While personal relationships are of great value for Day, she also claims that privacy is the "greatest desire, the greatest need of all."97 The two concepts—social interaction on the one hand and personal solitude on the other—appear to stand in opposition to one another. As is typical of her writing, Day does not explain how she connects her values of community and privacy, and how the two might work together to establish relationships between disconnected peoples. However, analysis of what privacy is for Day and why she values it reveals that privacy too centers on detachment as a method by which to create relationships among peoples seemingly different from one another. Just as voluntary poverty and reading help the wealthy see the humanity of the poor, guaranteeing privacy for the poor helps the poor see the humanity of the wealthy.

Adam Smith’s theory of sympathy pits two people against one another when one person fails to give proper sympathy to the other. Writes Smith:

But if you have no fellow-feeling for the misfortunes I have met with, or none that bears any proportion to the grief which distracts me; or if you have either no indignation at the injuries I have suffered, or none that bears any proportion to the resentment which transports me, we can no longer converse upon these subjects. We become intolerable to one another. I can neither support your company, nor you mine. You are confounded at my violence and passion, and I am enraged at your cold insensibility and want of feeling.98

98 Smith, 26.
Thus, when a poor person’s eyes meet those of a wealthy person walking down the street, that poor person seeks his recognition and sympathy. When the poor person’s look is met with averted eyes, due sympathy is not bestowed, and the poor person feels ignored and ashamed. The wealthy passer-by, on the other hand, feels unsettled by his inability to understand the poor person’s situation and offer a sympathetic response. It is easy, if this familiar scenario repeats itself, to see how misconceptions and resentment between the poor and wealthy grow. Detachment transports the time which the wealthy spend accumulating possessions to time spent understanding the injustices of poverty and the humanity of the poor, through the lived experience of voluntary poverty and the imaginative act of reading. Similarly, the guarantee of privacy grants the poor time in which they can cultivate relationships, particularly with the wealthy from whom they are most disconnected. Day recognizes that reconciliation between the poor and the wealthy must involve both sides, for both are guilty of judging the other unfairly. The wealthy scandalize the poor by preying on their natural desire for wealth; the poor are unable to forgive the wealthy for their lack of sympathy toward their plight. Privacy, which the poor lack, works to change the poor’s perception of the wealthy.

The reader must infer from Day’s writing why she feels privacy is the most important human need and desire, for she does not offer a clear definition of privacy or explain its significance. There are many ways to conceptualize privacy: privacy can be the state of being apart from the public or other people, the control over information shared about oneself, and/or the insulation from government intervention or regulation, among other nuanced definitions. However, from her writing, the reader discerns that for Day privacy involves a sense of security, the option of solitude, and is also an intrinsic
part of human dignity. In describing St. Joseph’s House of Hospitality, in which Day herself lived, she writes, “What we need are lockers so that men can have some sense of privacy and security. John Pohl had his little radio stolen, and since he loved classical music, this is a great loss.” She also describes the lack of calm in tenement housing, what with the “harsh and screaming voices, the constant coming and going of people living herded together with no privacy,” depicting low-income housing as an unpleasant place where solitude is unavailable. Lack of privacy goes further when Day writes about Japanese internment camps on the West Coast, established during World War II; the absence of partitions between showers and toilets forces undesired intimate contact and leads, Day says, to the “degradation of human being[s],” a denial of the presence of Christ within them. In these three (of which they are many other) descriptions of privacy, Day demonstrates that lack of privacy is one of the primary injustices of poverty, leading to insecurity and indignity of the poor.

Because of the demoralizing effects of a lack of privacy, Day comes to see privacy as the foremost need to be met in her service to the poor, who stand in constant risk of losing what little privacy they may have. In emphasizing privacy’s importance, Day makes clear that poverty is not merely a state of being deficient in material goods; it is also a shortage of immaterial goods that are just as vital to one’s survival and wellbeing. Being poor forces inhumane choices on a person to satisfy some, but not all, his basic needs. The poor have more immediate concerns, such as finding shelter and food, than maintaining a sense of privacy, as these former anxieties must be met in order

to survive another day.\textsuperscript{102} Day attempts to fulfill one’s basic needs, such as hunger and shelter, through her ministry at houses of hospitality. She does so not only because she believes that it is unjust for one to go without such things, but also because, by feeding the hungry and sheltering the homeless she releases them from the worry of having to satisfy these needs. In doing so, the poor have time to focus their attention on meeting their more intangible yet nevertheless essential needs, such as privacy.

Security, solitude, and isolated space—all these contribute to the creation of a sense of privacy, but fail to articulate its essence. Upon further probing, one will notice that each of these components contributes to one’s sense of being held in respect by others. Thus, privacy, like sympathy, emerges as something that involves a relationship between two people. Charles Fried’s *Privacy [a moral analysis]*, a philosophical law essay, demonstrates how the building of relationships between people is predicated on privacy. Fried points out that many people perceive privacy as related to secrecy, but soon negates the notion:

\begin{quote}
As a first approximation, privacy seems to be related to secrecy, to limiting the knowledge of others about oneself. This notion must be refined. It is not true, for instance, that the less that is known about us the more privacy we have. Privacy is not simply an absence of information about us in the minds of others; rather it is the control we have over information about ourselves.\textsuperscript{103}
\end{quote}

When one is without privacy, he feels as if he has no control over what information about himself the public receives; in the case of the poor, and particularly the homeless, every action has the potential to be witnessed by another person. The poor person has little to no control over how and when such information about himself is disseminated and

received, which, according to Fried, makes him unable to properly initiate and maintain relationships for the simple reason that relationships rely on such control:

Love and friendship, as analyzed here, involve the initial respect for the rights of others which morality requires of everyone. They further involve the voluntary and spontaneous relinquishment of *something* between friend and friend, lover and lover. The title to information about oneself conferred by privacy provides the necessary something. To be friends or lovers persons must be intimate to some degree with each other. But intimacy is the sharing of information about one’s actions, beliefs, or emotions which one does not share with all, and which one has the right not to share with anyone. By conferring this right, privacy creates the moral capital which we spend in friendship and love.¹⁰⁴

Relationships require a degree of revelation between two people; privacy allows such revelation to be granted or withheld. Because relationships require privacy in order to begin and progress, a breach of privacy “seems to threaten our very integrity as persons.”¹⁰⁵ When the poor reclaim a sense of privacy, they also gain a sense of dignity and equality with society that they had formerly lacked; this, in turn, allows the poor to feel a part of society, and engage with its members as friends. Given Day’s overall goal for the Catholic Worker movement of reestablishing relationships between the wealthy and the poor, the preservation of privacy in the lives of the poor is an integral part of her ministry.

Voluntary relinquishment of privacy resonates strongly with the detachment of voluntary poverty. Voluntary poverty involves detachment from one’s natural repulsion towards ugliness and emotional extremes; such detachment deflects one’s attention from himself and places it instead on another person. The detachment involved in privacy differs from that of voluntary poverty in that it does not concern bodily deprivation, such as going without food, shelter, or clothing. Rather, by sharing information about oneself with another person, one relinquishes the “hiddeness” of that information in order to

¹⁰⁵ Fried, 205.
establish a relationship. To voluntarily relinquish one’s wealth and give up one’s privacy necessitates “giving something up” for a greater reward, that is, union with humankind. In both cases one voluntarily deprives himself of something with the hope that in doing so, a greater good will emerge. Peter Maurin, in fact, is quoted as saying, “The opposite of poverty is not plenty, but friendship.”¹⁰⁶ In this sense, privacy and voluntary poverty practice the same ethic of detachment, trusting that sacrifice will provide one with the opportunity to grow in relationship with another person.

Dorothy Day’s practice of the works of mercy leads her to work to guarantee privacy for the poor. The poor, after all, live their lives constantly in the presence of people; one’s most intimate actions and greatest struggles cannot be hidden, despite one’s futile attempts to do so. Day demonstrates the strong need for privacy in her writing, and knows it from her own experience living in voluntary poverty. By alleviating the poor’s day-to-day worries about eating enough food and sleeping in a safe and warm space, Day, in essence, gives the poor more time to focus on their immaterial needs, including the building of relationships, which rely on first establishing a sense of privacy. By freeing the poor from the constant anxiety related to finding food and shelter, Day not only guarantees the poor privacy but also moves the works of mercy beyond mere charity and toward a new social order:

To feed the hungry, clothe the naked and shelter the haborless without also trying to change the social order so that people can feed, clothe, and shelter themselves is just to apply palliatives. It is to show a lack of faith in ones fellows, their responsibilities as children of God, heirs of heaven.¹⁰⁷

One of Day’s central insights is that in order to change the social order, one must also change social perceptions about the poor. Day practices voluntary poverty and writes in

¹⁰⁶ Johnson, 209.
order to move her readership, people for the most part alien to the realities of poverty, towards seeing the poor as human beings worthy of their sympathy and love. However, the wealthy are not the only people who must alter their perceptions; the poor themselves need to see the wealthy in a new light. Privacy, voluntary poverty, and reading and writing all rely on detachment, for it has the potential to enhance one’s understanding of another’s situation, which in turn leads to sympathy, and even love. Day’s recognition of detachment’s wide applicability to her ministry and activism is ingenious, perhaps more so than she even realized. Day understood that there was no specific way to restore the relationships she believed to have been destroyed by the capitalist culture of America. Instead, she saw what each person—the poor and wealthy—needed most. For the poor, it is the guarantee of privacy. For the wealthy, it is compassionate understanding of the injustice of poverty. The practice of detachment works to fulfill what is deficient in one’s life and, by satisfying it, moves one towards Day’s intended goal of restoring relationships between the wealthy and the poor.

Day often laments her inability to deprive herself of writing. On more than one occasion she expresses such disappointment with herself:

How little detached I am. We try to make our own corner in our slum attractive with paint and curtains and soap and water and so we are luxuriating in the midst of poverty. We seek privacy in which to read and study and write and pray, and privacy is the most valuable thing in the world and the most expensive.108

Day bemoans her lack of detachment because she wishes to be truly like the poor with whom she lives and for whom she works. However, Day does not give up writing precisely because in writing she is able to guarantee her own privacy. Writing becomes Day’s way of having control over what she reveals about herself. While she keeps little

out of the public light—her published writings are highly personal—she still retains full discretion of what she does and does not share with others. Seeing that disclosure of information about oneself is the way in which people form relationships, Day’s preservation of privacy appears to be one of the most essential ways in which she connects with her readership; indeed, prior to conveying effectively the realities of poverty, Day’s first task is to gain the reader’s trust. While the power of Day’s writing involves the reader’s realization that his own sympathy with the poor as represented in text does not match his actions in reality, the reader must first connect with the text’s subject in order for such a transformation to occur. Day facilitates this connection by disclosing information about herself, voluntarily, as one might do with a friend. In trusting the reader to respect her, Day places herself in relationship with them. Because Day is one of the poor, a relationship with the poor becomes one that is not impenetrable or undesirable to the reader. In yet another unique and powerful way, Day uses detachment to communicate the humanity of the poor to her reader.

The “spiritual weapon” of the Catholic Worker—the theology of detachment—has wide applicability, much more, it seems, than Day realized. Day is attuned to the utility of detachment, and how it works to repair relationship between the wealthy and the poor, because she is a part of both worlds. Day grew up in a relatively comfortable household, and lived a life of considerable excess in Greenwich Village at one time. Yet, the majority of her adulthood she spent living in austerity in New York slums. Day’s dual positions in life make her a complex character indeed. But these dual positions

undoubtedly help Day recognize what the wealthy and poor need most, allowing her to
search for ways to satisfy these needs. Day desired:

...a synthesis. I wanted life and I wanted the abundant life. I wanted it for others too. I
did not want just the few, the missionary-minded people like the Salvation Army, to be
kind to the poor, as the poor. I wanted everyone to be kind. I wanted every home to be
open to the lame, the halt and the blind, the way it had been after the San Francisco
earthquake. Only then did people really live, really love their brothers. In such love was
the abundant life and I did not have the slightest idea how to find it.¹¹⁰

Day looked toward socialism, communism, playwrights and journalists to find the
abundant life. None provided her with the synthesis she desired until she met Peter
Maurin, who gave Day the credo of “cult, culture, and cultivation,” which she fashioned
into the Catholic Worker movement.¹¹¹ In her ability to understand the intangible
poverty of both the wealthy and the poor, Day discovered a method—the theology of
detachment pragmatically practiced—in which she realized the synthesis, the abundant
life, for which she had always yearned.

¹¹¹ Zwick, 43.
CONCLUSION

Disillusioned by capitalism’s disregard for the poor, Dorothy Day dedicated her life to reconnecting America’s poor with the society that rejected them. Catholicism’s theology of detachment, which Day pragmatically implemented through voluntary poverty, reading and writing, and the guarantee of privacy, provided Day with a method to repair the disconnected relationship between the wealthy and the poor. Day shifted each group’s perceptions of the other in a way that allowed the poor and the wealthy to truly “see” one another as human beings, a part of the Body of Christ, worthy of sympathy and love.

The perceptions that Day found so destructive to human relationships are uniquely tied to the scandal of capitalist economics and the capitalist mentality. Adam Smith, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, constructs a psychological mechanism, the impartial spectator, which excludes the poor from mainstream society due to the fact that sympathy favors joy over pain. In living a life of voluntary poverty and encouraging others to do the same, as well as conveying the injustices of the poor through the written word, Day helped the wealthy understand, experientially and imaginatively, the realities of poverty and thus breaks through the barrier to sympathy which poverty’s pain creates. Such understanding allows one to sympathize with the poor, and Jesus’ example moves that sympathy to love of the poor. Privacy, which provides one with the choice as to which information about himself he shares with others, serves to establish relationships between peoples. By ministering to the poor through the physical works of mercy, Day guaranteed privacy for the poor, which restored the dignity formerly denied to them and gave the poor the opportunity to rebuild relationships with others. In these ways,
detachment served to heighten, to use Adam Smith theory, one's sympathy for another, by increasing his ability to understand another's experience. Through her integration of detachment and activism, Day worked to alter the wealthy and poor's perceptions of one another from suspicious and unfeeling to trusting and loving in order to foster friendship between them.

Day dedicated nearly fifty years of her life to the Catholic Worker, from the movement's founding in 1933 to her death in 1980. In that time, Day lived through and bore witness to the Great Depression, World War II, the Korean War, McCarthyism, the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, Cesar Chavez's United Farm Workers protests, and feminism's second wave. As international violence increased and numerous minorities demanded recognition from American society, the Catholic Worker's focus moved from the singular issue of poverty to broader issues concerning human rights:

There is so much more to the Catholic Worker Movement than labor and capital. It is people who are important, not the masses [...] We published many heavy articles on capital and labor, on strikes and labor conditions, on the assembly line and all the other evils of industrialism. But it was a whole picture we were presenting of man and his destiny and so we emphasized less, as the years went by, the organized-labor aspect of the paper.112

Dimming the spotlight on labor and capital did not remove the poor from Day's sight; she continued to practice voluntary poverty and minister to the poor until her death. But Day's increased advocacy for human dignity across multiple social movements gives one an opportunity to explore the ways in which she used detachment in these new areas, and if she integrated other aspects of Catholic theology into her activism, how, and to what end. Day's participation in the vast and diverse social justice movements of the twentieth century demonstrates that the Catholic Worker's goal was not to eradicate poverty, but

rather to create a new social order where no person was poor in spirit, where divisions between peoples did not exist, where the dignity of each person was honored and upheld.

Because of the Catholic Worker’s religious orientation, Day’s standard of success was undoubtedly different from organizations seeking quantifiable results. Day admitted that her work to alleviate poverty was a futile one: “Yes, the poor we are always going to have with us, our Lord told us that, and there will always be a need for our sharing, for stripping ourselves to help others. It always will be a life-time job.” The futility of eradicating poverty in the eyes of society—“Of course, ‘the poor we will always have with us.’ That has been flung in our teeth again and usually with the comment, ‘so why change things which our Lord said would always be?’”—points to great success in the eyes of God, not because Day actually succeeded in closing economic gaps between the wealthy and the poor, but because she loved the poor and worked to help others love the poor as well. Day’s work demonstrates the essence of St. John of the Cross’ words: “A person attached to the beauty of any creature is extremely ugly in God’s sight.” In Catholicism, Day found a simply message: to love God is to love others. Day performed every action so as to be pleasing to God, and not society. In doing so, Day practice her faith in the most authentic way she knew.

Toady, the Catholic Worker movement continues in the United States and abroad. The movement’s appeal reaches across denominations—Atlanta’s Open Door Community is described as the “Protestant Catholic Worker House,” and Philadelphia’s The Simple Way claims no particular Christian denomination but practices voluntary poverty, pacifism, and service to the poor. The principles of the Catholic Worker satisfy

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113 Day, “Poverty is to Care and Not to Care,” 1, 5.
115 Kavanaugh, 79.
many aspects theorists have traditionally used to characterize religion: transcendence
from “the now,” life in community, love for the divine and neighbor, worship and prayer,
service and ministry. The Catholic Worker movement makes all these aspects available
to the lay community within a public context, outside the walls of a church or monastery.
Day reframed social justice issues in terms of religious, and not political, concerns. If
Catholics are to love their neighbors as themselves, Day stands as an example of
integrating love with activism, moving it beyond the realms of palliative charity and into
substantive change.

Day’s synthesis of Catholic theology and activism expanded the role of the
Catholic laity, emphasizing each individual’s obligation to living his faith in service to
God and others. Indeed, the Catholic Worker’s empowerment of the lay community
foreshadowed by thirty years the Second Vatican Council’s affirmation of the laity, their
faith, and their participation within the Church in such documents as Apostolicam
Actousitatem and Lumen Gentium. If the poor are always to be with the world then the
world will always have a need to “see” the poor not as contemptible or suspicious, but as
human beings worthy of love. Day’s demonstration that lay Catholics have the ability to
experience deep spiritual yearning, and satisfy it in their lives on Earth, places a tangible
mark on Catholic thought. Day writes:

To live here and now the life of the spirit, to live as though this dear flesh were not the
burden of pleasure and pain that it is—this is a great gift and to be cultivated in our time.
“All the way to heaven is heaven,” said St. Catherine of Siena, “because He said, ‘I am
the Way.’”

Catholics desire to join God in heaven in the afterlife, but in doing God’s work they can
achieve union with God in this lifetime on Earth. To say “All the way to heaven is

heaven” stirs Catholics to action, and comforts them in the midst of the hardships that accompany doing God’s work. Dorothy Day’s life and writing, radical and traditional, oblique but definitive, and at times even mystical, testifies to St. Catherine’s words, and serves as a guide to Catholics searching for an integration of their desire for union with God and their work toward social justice in the here and now.
APPENDIX: A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF DOROTHY DAY

Dorothy Day, born in 1897, came from a “solid, patriotic, and middle class” family of seven.\(^{117}\) The Day family considered themselves loosely Episcopalian. Day, however, recalls being interested in Christianity from a young age: “I was filled with a natural striving, a thrilling recognition of the possibilities of spiritual adventures.”\(^ {118}\)

After living in New York and San Francisco, the Day family settled in Chicago, when Dorothy was about ten years old. Day grew up devouring books; she was fond of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, as well as Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*. The poverty described in *The Jungle* prompted Day to explore the poor Chicago neighborhoods about which Sinclair wrote. Seeing poverty for the first time, Day became disillusioned with religion—“I did not see anyone taking off his coat and giving it to the poor”—but felt a strong connection with the working class and the poor.\(^ {119}\)

Day attended the University of Illinois in Urbana but left after two years. As a journalist in New York, Dorothy moved in socialist and communist circles; “her interest and involvement were based less on theory and ideology than on observation of the world around her and a passionate sense of justice.”\(^ {120}\) In 1922, Day was arrested during a raid of a flophouse for members of the Industrial Workers of the World. The incident left a strong impression: “I was sharing, as I had never before, the life of the poorest of the poor, the guilty, the dispossessed... I could get away, but what about the others? I could get away, paying no penalty, because of my friends, my background, my education, my privilege. I suffered but was not a part of it.”\(^ {121}\)

After her arrest, Day moved to Staten Island and fell in love with Forster Batterham, with whom she had a daughter, Tamar. During this time Day decided to convert to Catholicism, a decision that ended her relationship with Forster, an atheist.\(^ {122}\) A single mother, Day worked as a journalist; her articles attracted the attention of Peter Maurin.

Maurin was a French Catholic and follower of personalism, a philosophical movement that “insists that persons are not objects within a world, but that persons, as subjects, make the world.”\(^ {123}\) Maurin and Day founded the Catholic Worker in 1933. The movement consisted of *The Catholic Worker* newspaper, houses of hospitality that served as shelters and soup kitchens for the poor, and agricultural farms where people learned the spiritual ethic of manual labor. Maurin died in 1948, but Dorothy continued as the movement’s public leader until her death in 1980. In her time with the movement, Day lived voluntarily poor and wrote prolifically about the spirituality of poverty and the importance of human dignity; in her work, Day finally satisfied her lifelong desire to help the poor. In March 2000, Day was named a “Servant of God,” a title given in the first step toward canonization within the Roman Catholic Church.\(^ {124}\)


\(^{120}\) Coles, 2-3.


\(^{123}\) Johnson, 189.

\(^{124}\) “Her Cause,” The Dorothy Day Guild, Archdiocese of New York.
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