**Surrender, Sacrifice, Pliability**

**Sacrifice and Surrender as Branches of Devotion**

For a person to wholeheartedly surrender to their devotions – to plunge into commitment! to douse in dedication! – is considered an admirable trait. Whether it is being devoted to those we care for, intellectual pursuit, ideology, etc, identifying something worth caring about to such an extent and adhering to it seems to be an accomplishment in and of itself. The conscious decision to wholly devote is a signal of virtue. Only one who lives with great integrity and stability of spirit can be so steadfast. We witness such praiseworthy moral character and let it question our self-assuredness in our beliefs. Could I ever live with such decisiveness? Do I care enough about the things in my life to cling to my opinions on them with such passion?

Or is my moral character insipid?

Devotions do not inherently directly correspond with assessments of character, but there is some overlap. Our willingness to commit to things may attest to our integrity, festering a sense of insecurity within us when our attempts at relentless dedication fall flat. However, perhaps the anxieties around proof of integrity through insistent devotion are misguided. Devotion encompasses a certain flexibility in which the level of such can deepen and attitudes toward it can alter (Katsafanas 9). Such alterations and deepenings can strengthen one’s relationship with their object of devotion, rather than push them to abandon it, as Paul Katsafanas argues in his lecture “Devotion, Faith, Grit.” Alterations and deepenings signify a moral character of admirable integrity.

In this paper, I agree with Katsafanas’s argument that devotion does not resist tension but instead accepts it as an opportunity to deepen it. I seek to delve further into this discussion by addressing the branch of a person’s attitudes toward devotion that deals with pliability, sacrifice, and surrender. In adopting this pliable perspective and willingness to surrender, a person opens themselves up to a deeper understanding of their moral character, thus bringing them closer to a flourishing of the self. Pliability welcomes a radical metamorphosis.

**Katsafana’s Argument for Flexible Devotion**

In Katsafana’s lecture, devotion is distinguished from other less beneficial forms of commitment: grit and faith. He defines grit as “a character trait that some individuals possess and that can be cultivated. It involves a willingness to persevere in the face of obstacles, setbacks, and challenges” (4). It is concerned with questions of success and failure whereas devotion is not (8). Regarding faith, it is defined as “an epistemic state that is, at least to some extent, held without ordinarily evidential standards” – it is infused by a “desire” for the proposition to be true (6).

What sets devotion apart from other forms of less convincing or beneficial forms of commitment is the “pursuit of and attitude toward counterevidence” (7). While faith does not seek counterevidence and grit do but only as a means to answer the questions of success/failure and dictates the continuance of pursuit, devotion seeks counterevidence but maintains the view with loyalty. A devoted person does not seek counterevidence “with the intention of letting it affect their degree of commitment” (Katsafanas 7). Devotion of “dialectically invulnerable” (3). Once tensions arise, the devoted person will take them as the opportunity to engage in a “flexible deepening,” engaging with tension as a way to explore the subject of devotion in a deeper sense. In his lecture, Katsafanas draws on the work of Jenner Morton and Sarah Paul on grit. They propose the notion of an “Evidential Threshold” that questions what kind of evidence must be presented before one “comes to a conclusion about what to believe or revises her current beliefs” (Morton and Paul 191). This “Evidential Threshold” refers to attitudes on grit, so Katsafanas tweaks it to apply to devotion, calling it the “Evidential Threshold for Alteration of Commitment” which is “the amount of evidence that is required before the person abandons (or revises or weakens) her commitment” (Katsafanas 9). When it comes to devotion, there is no intention of breaking that commitment – it is a conscious choice. It’s actively showing up for the one you love, standing for your ideology in the face of adversity, or relentlessly pursuing an uncertain career (such as a Philosophy Ph.D.).

To be devoted to something requires a certain love for it, or at the very least, an emotional connection that motivates the devotion. When it comes to consciously making the decision to commit to something even if presented with counterevidence, that often involves some sort of sacrifice. To maintain a devotion, it is expected that some other commitments of lesser importance must be compromised. What happens when devotions of equal significance come into tension with one another? Then a person must sacrifice one in the commitment to another. Lives often change and alter as we grow and age, meaning that some devotions may have to take the backseat, such as deciding between a significant career choice and a committed romantic relationship. Choices such as these are matters of sacrifice and surrender. What are we willing to sacrifice? When are we willing to surrender? And how does this speak to our character, our strive to flourish, our introspective understandings of ourselves?

**Sacrifice and Surrender as Branches of Devotion**

If we accept that devotions shift and transform over time, then we are left with the question of “What are we willing to sacrifice for the sake of our devotions?” Oftentimes, a truly devoted person would be willing to go to extreme lengths to maintain their commitments, but what happens if certain commitments are placed in tension with one another? To break the relationship with one’s devoted subject is a decision of turbulence. It can make the supposedly devoted person question where their priorities lie and whether the strength of their commitment was a fallacy, therefore leading to a questioning of their identity and understanding of the self. For example, let’s say that you must pick between your career aspirations and your loved one. You are presented with the opportunity to further your career, bringing you closer to achieving your deepest motivations. However, you would need to move to a different part of the world, leaving behind your significant other. Their job requires them to stay in the city you both currently live in, so they cannot move with you. You are called to choose between your two most devoted subjects, being forced to abandon– or at the very least, permanently change – the other. In either decision you make, to remain devoted to your career or your significant other, you must make a sacrifice. This sacrifice will illuminate where your deep-seated desires are situated. It will be a transformation of great conflict and inner turmoil – a shedding of the skin.

You may attempt to resist such a decision and engage in a relentless yet fruitless pursuit of compromise. In such situations, the only options are black and white – there is no blending into gray where you’ll be able to reap the best of both worlds. Resistance is the first reaction to this tension, but eventually, it will be necessary to surrender. Surrender is as intimidating as sacrifice, as the two loom over your judgment, pressuring ostensibly inexorable “devotions.” They’ll twist your cognition, inflate your anxieties, and contort your conception of free will. They may seem insidious, but the metamorphosis they ignite reaps a greater development of character than maintaining devotion does on its own.

The call to sacrifice devotion may seem like a deterioration of character at first since you are called to abandon something you have committed to. It would be an act of betrayal to break that promise. Our ability to follow through with devotions can signify much about our moral character. It demonstrates what we care most about, where our deepest loyalties lie, and if we have the spine to maintain devotion with continuous intention and defense. However, that does not inherently mean that deciding to abandon a devotion signifies a deficiency in morality. Knowing when to surrender speaks greatly to a person's moral character as it implies virtues of humility, self-awareness, and sacrifice. This willingness to succumb to sacrifice and surrender nurtures the virtue of pliability. Pliability is often overlooked as a coveted virtue, but it encompasses some of the strongest traits of personhood. It takes strength of mind and spirit to be pliable. Pliability encapsulates the kind of strength that welcomes vulnerability and weakness. It begets humility, bringing a person closer to their desires. People are not their devotions – moral character does not disintegrate if certain devotions are abandoned.

**Pliability and Flourishing**

The virtue of pliability shall be described as the humble acceptance of change, what cannot be changed, and can only be achieved through an intimate relationship with the self. It is the willingness to change even when things seem certain, cemented. Pride and shame are the obstacles that hinder achieving pliability. When it comes to breaking a commitment with a devotion, there is a threat to personal integrity and conceived self-image, prompting an existential tension. Since there is never the intention to abandon a devotion, if that decision is made, then the devoted agent will question their values asking, “Do I really care about the things I say I do?” “Is my spine strong enough to withstand threats to my devotions – maybe it wasn’t necessary to abandon something I am devoted to?” With pliability comes doubt. Going against preconceived notions of priority, commitment, and devotion is no flippant ordeal. It involves a radical reassessment of values and being vulnerable and honest enough with yourself to let go of what you thought once was a relentless commitment. Doubt is an intimidating hindrance, but that is what makes pliability such a noble value. To be flexible in the face of doubt and existential tensions requires strength of mind and spirit. It involves sacrificing devotions and surrendering to uncertainty but reaps a great demonstration of integrity and humility.

Pliability brings a person closer to flourishing. The destructive nature of accepting change and radical reassessment of self leads to a catharsis. To be purged of what was once known is undoubtedly a metamorphosis. Such a profound transformation catapults a person on a fierce introspective journey, bringing them to flourish. To flourish is to move toward self-actualization. It is not the end goal, but the process of recognizing and fulfilling true potential. It breaks down barriers of familiarity and pushes toward risk, but reaps a high reward. Devotion demonstrates care, passion, and loyalty, but these virtues are not beneficial when they hinder flourishing. A person must exercise a sort of devotion to the self above all, where they will admit to pursuing what is most beneficial to their journey toward self-actualization. As Katsafanas argues, devotions are strengthened by encountering tension or counterevidence as they are opportunities to explore the devotion; however, the pliability that I discuss mirrors the flexibility that comes with exploring devotions in the face of counterevidence. To be pliable in the face of uncertainty and unexpectedness (of abandoning a devoted subject) is to welcome a metamorphosis, and therefore, a radical exploration of self.

**Conclusion**

To abandon devotions where one never had the intent to, radically reassess their values/self-image, and exercise humility and pliability in the face of doubt are daunting tasks. Metamorphosis is harrowing. However, it is wholly more rewarding than ruthlessly defending one’s devotions, as the journey to flourish, and subsequently self-actualize, catapults a person’s introspective journey, forcing them to exercise pliability and humility rather than remain comfortable at the level of maintaining devotions. To be clear, this does not undermine the serious intent behind maintaining devotions. To be truly devoted to something, there cannot be the intent of abandoning it, as Katsafanas argues, even in the face of tension and hardship. Devotion requires a “flexible deepening” in which tension and hardship are used as ways to explore said devotion rather than as calls to abandon it. It is only in the most radical cases, for example, when two significant devotions are at arms with one another when one must make the drastic decision to break the commitment. The radicality of the decision is what makes pliability such an honorable virtue. It welcomes a rigorous metamorphosis in the face of doubt and uncertainty to move toward flourishing. In a sense, this flexible nature allows for a radical devotion to the self, as one would normally exercise a similar kind of flexibility in exploring devotions. To be pliable is to explore the depths of the self.

Works Cited

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