

The Part Heloise and Her Life Played in Shaping the Ethical Doctrine of Intentionality

by

Emily Doyle

B.A., Simon Fraser University, 2017

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

in the

Department of Humanities
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Summer 2017

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Approval

Name: Emily Doyle

Degree: Master of Arts

Title: The Part Heloise and Her Life Played in Shaping
the Ethical Doctrine of Intentionality

Examining Committee: **Chair: David Mirhady**
Professor

Paul Dutton
Senior Supervisor
Professor

Emily O'Brien
Supervisor
Associate Professor

Matthew Hussey
External Examiner
Associate Professor
Department of English

Date Defended/Approved: May 5, 2017

Abstract

Today, scholarship gives the credit for the medieval, ethical doctrine of intentionality to Abelard who late in his career wrote *Ethica* or *Scito te ipsum* ("Know Thyself") where it received its fullest expression, but we see the roots of the doctrine in Heloise's life, especially the crises she faced during and after the affair. A case can be made that Heloise herself invented the doctrine, with Abelard functioning as the philosophical mouthpiece.

Keywords: Abelard; Heloise; intentionality; Scito te Ipsum; Ethica

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Chapter 1.

Introduction to the Problem

Not everyone fits easily into their time or its cultural expectations. Heloise, the famous twelfth-century woman, intellectual, and nun went against the powerful currents of her age. Both she and her lover Abelard struggled against conventions as they sought to navigate a world whose demands did not dovetail with their own hopes and desires. Scholars have recognized Peter Abelard as one of the greatest thinkers of his time, but he was an outlier in thought and behaviour, almost constantly in trouble with authority (as he challenged the authority of received wisdom) and with the authorities (the powers: abbots, masters, and popes). Heloise wanted to be a philosopher and writer at a time when no women and few men could aspire to such a career. A superb Latinist, humanist, and highly educated, creative thinker, Heloise fell under Abelard's spell and engaged in a love affair with him.

The circumstances of their lives were so extraordinary and their unconventionality so evident that together they needed to justify their lives—to make sense of what they had done and how it might be understood—to themselves, at the very least. They developed the ethical doctrine of intentionality, which is not to be confused with modern or even classical formulations of intentionality, but a simpler notion that acts should be judged according to the intention of the actor and not according to their consequences. This doctrine ran against the prevailing medieval conception of justice, which judged acts and penalized their perpetrators according to the severity of the crimes. Early Germanic law, for instance, assigned a monetary fine for all damages—a compensatory code—and was uninterested in causes and motivations for wrongful acts. Abelard and Heloise took the Middle Ages in a new direction by insisting that the intention of the doer needed to be considered when assessing acts and allocating responsibility/guilt.

Abelard and Heloise's culture in the early twelfth century remained rigorously rule-bound, but people were starting to test and resist the old and dominant power structures that had been in place for centuries. As a result of this tension, we see people developing new ways of understanding themselves and the changing world around them as they tried to understand how they were to fit into or break out of the conventions of their age.

Today, scholarship gives the credit for the medieval, ethical doctrine of intentionality to Abelard who late in his career wrote *Ethica* or *Scito te ipsum* ("Know Thyself") where it received its fullest expression, but we see the roots of the doctrine in Heloise's life, especially the crises she faced during and after the affair. A case can be made that Heloise herself invented the doctrine, with Abelard functioning as the philosophical mouthpiece.

In the coming pages I will examine the role Heloise played in the development of the ethical doctrine of intentionality, the most developed form of which we see in Abelard's *Ethica*. The importance of that treatise may have led scholars away from considering the genesis of the idea, which would seem to lie in the period 1115-1135, stretching from the start of the affair through the period when the couple exchanged their so-called personal letters.

Heloise is mostly known for her relationship with Abelard, but her career and ideas were just as interesting and important. The *Ethica* itself was written late in Abelard's career and, like much of his work, is unfinished. In the *Ethica* we see the first full systematic presentation of the doctrine of intentionality, but evidence for the development of the idea can be found in the earlier writings of Heloise and Abelard. The *Ethica* itself is a substantial treatise and too broad a topic for a Master's thesis; here, I intend to narrow my topic by focussing on how and where the ideas of intentionality first appear and were developed in Abelard and Heloise's correspondence, what we might call their life letters (Abelard's *Historia Calamitatum*, personal letters, and letters of direction).

It would be wrong to argue that Abelard developed the doctrine in a vacuum, as the result of some intellectual exercise. Indeed, while Heloise regularly raised the issue

of intention in their correspondence, Abelard displayed little sustained interest in the idea until the production of his treatise. I hope to demonstrate that in the *Ethica* Abelard, rather than his relying exclusively on his own ideas, was working out the specifics of an idea that he and Heloise developed over the course of many years. For her part, Heloise seized on intentionality as she struggled to justify the decisions the two of them had made in their lives, seeking solutions to the problems of love and intention she had encountered in her life. To this end, I will examine the ideas of intentionality as they were variously employed and developed, albeit at an early or formative stage, in their correspondence pre-dating the *Ethica* before examining the relationship between those letters and Abelard's finished work. By examining the discussion of intentionality between them—both during the affair and afterwards—and tracing the appearance of the concept in their personal letters, I hope to reveal the extent of Heloise's contribution.

This project will rely chiefly on two primary sources: Abelard's *Historia Calamitatum* and Abelard and Heloise's personal letters. The *Historia Calamitatum* is a quasi-autobiographical work written by Abelard c. 1133-1134—well after the affair—in which he catalogues the difficulties he had faced and was facing in his life from early in his academic career, through the affair and the condemnation of one of his books, and into the early 1130s when he was struggling to survive as the abbot of a monastery in revolt against his rule. The work provides context and also extant paraphrases of many of Heloise's arguments that might otherwise be lost. The personal letters are an exchange which was initiated by Heloise after reading Abelard's *Historia Calamitatum* at the Paraclete (the oratory founded by Abelard). These exchanges provide context for understanding the unique development of their thought and particularly show that the doctrine of intentionality develops directly as a result of their affair and its unfortunate consequences.

Heloise's thoughts on intentionality were focused primarily around three critical episodes in her life: the affair, her secret marriage to Abelard, and her entry into the convent.

1. In the first of these episodes—the affair itself—Abelard and Heloise discussed their respective intentions in very different terms. Abelard presents the affair as a matter of

force and in the *Historia Calamitatum* he explicitly relates how he coerced Heloise into the affair through no fault of her own; however, Heloise's personal letters refute this account, presenting her instead as an equally intentioned, willing partner.

2. The second key episode centres around their secret marriage. In the *Historia Calamitatum*, Abelard conveys Heloise's arguments against the arrangement; namely, that she wants their relationship to be founded in love, not obligation. She expresses a desire to be his friend and intellectual equal, and shows concern that such a partnership would surely be undermined by the institution of marriage. While she eventually agrees to marry him, her disapproval is unambiguous. She returns to the issue in the personal letters, where she points out that while it was not her intention to marry him, she was pressed into the arrangement by Abelard and her uncle, and she obeyed not out of simple deference but out of intentional deference to Abelard because of her love for him.

3. Finally, Heloise returns to the problem of intention after Abelard places her in the convent of Argenteuil. In the personal letters, Heloise argues that she had not received a calling to monastic life, but Abelard compelled her to put on a veil and enter the monastery, and she submitted because of her love for him; namely, she was led by her love for Abelard to fulfill his wish, even as it conflicted with her own intention.

The differences between Abelard and Heloise's respective accounts of these critical episodes will be central to this thesis. Heloise had "an intentionality crisis" in each of these critical moments in her life, for she did not intend these acts, but was compelled by Abelard. That fact does raise some interesting questions about intentionalities in conflict: Heloise intended one thing, Abelard another. How were such intentionality conflicts to be resolved? Did Abelard's power as an authority figure (male, older, wealthy, at some points husband) override the intention of an inferior (female, younger, dependent, at some points wife)? Abelard admitted that he compelled Heloise into beginning the affair with him, though Heloise claimed—with qualification—that she was a willing partner. Heloise's view was also that Abelard had forced her into marriage and into the monastery, though he tried to skirt culpability in those cases. Heloise repeatedly returned to these episodes, all of which centrally concern issues of intentionality, in her writings, but Abelard did not always share her preoccupation. In other words,

intentionality may have mattered more to and been more consistently invoked by Heloise than Abelard.

Abelard's understanding and use of the doctrine of intentionality remained less consistent than Heloise's, which counters the standing scholarly assumption of crediting the idea exclusively to him. Indeed, Abelard never deals with intentionality explicitly until the *Ethica*. Heloise, on the other hand, in her writings treats the doctrine as her central preoccupation and wants to be properly understood on the doctrine. While the doctrine of intentionality is exclusively credited to Abelard and can only be examined in depth through the lens of his *Ethica*, Heloise is the one who demonstrated a genuine desire to make sense of the problem of intention, repeatedly returning to the question in her letters and pressing Abelard to engage with her on the basis of a shared ethical philosophy.

To date, little scholarly attention has been paid to this question. Peter Dronke has noted in passing that Heloise and Abelard, in their wordplay, share the argument that later became the cornerstone of Abelard's *Ethica*.¹ Constant Mews acknowledged the genesis of the idea in Heloise's writings, but only to say that Abelard developed them much further in the *Ethica*.² William Levitan recognized Heloise's understanding of intention, succinctly summarizing her argument as "inner disposition divorced from outer circumstance."³ Later he briefly acknowledges that this mutual concern with intention became central to Abelard's *Ethica*.⁴

John Marenbon, in refuting the notion of Abelard's single authorship of the personal letters, drew attention to the sharp distinction between their letters on the matters of intention and the assessment of moral guilt.⁵ He also acknowledged Heloise's

¹ Peter Dronke. "Heloise," in *Women Writers of the Middle Ages: A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua to Marguerite Porete* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 118.

² C. J. Mews, *Abelard and Heloise* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 221.

³ William Levitan, *Abelard and Heloise* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2007), xxiii.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁵ John Marenbon, *The Philosophy of Peter Abelard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 91.

influence on Abelard's thought, but for her ideas of selfless love;⁶ he does, however, disagree with Etienne Gilson, who held that Heloise's influence was the primary model for Abelard's later writings on the subject in the context of human love for God, albeit while dismissing her as a French peasant girl in order to discount her ideas of love as based in material concerns.⁷

Thus, while many scholars have recognized the link between Heloise's ideas in the personal letters with Abelard's writings, none have systematically addressed Heloise's influence on the *Ethica*, as such. In examining their personal writings and circumstances in detail, Heloise's effect on Abelard's doctrine of intention will become clear.

⁶ Ibid., 300.

⁷ Etienne Gilson, *Heloise and Abelard* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960), 57-58; Marenbon, *Philosophy*, 300.

Chapter 2.

Abelard and Heloise: Context

Who were Abelard and Heloise, and what was the nature of their relationship? Abelard was, by anyone's estimation, a highly controversial figure, while Heloise possesses little of a biography outside of the context of her relationship to Abelard. As mentioned previously, their personal history comes to us from two primary sources: the *Historia Calamitatum* and personal letters. The two sources are closely related, with the *Historia Calamitatum* written by Abelard late in his tenure as the abbot of St-Gildas de Rhuys in Brittany and the exchange of personal letters instigated by Heloise upon reading the *Historia Calamitatum*. Before talking about Abelard and Heloise's story, we must address the nature of our sources, especially the *Historia Calamitatum*.

At a first glance, the *Historia Calamitatum* appears to be a reasonably straightforward telling of Abelard's life story, written by him. It takes the form of a narrative letter, detailing his various woes and difficulties while systematically addressing seven key controversies associated with him, not the least of which was his affair with Heloise.

While ostensibly written "for a friend," it is likely that the true purpose of the *Historia Calamitatum* was to secure Abelard's return to Paris.⁸ At the time of its writing, Abelard was serving as the abbot of St-Gildas de Rhuys in Brittany. His situation was miserable and, he thought, life-threatening, but in order to return to teaching in Paris, he needed to address the various accusations made against him. Therefore, while the *Historia Calamitatum* is indeed a narrative of Abelard's life, it was written with the hope of achieving a specific purpose.

⁸ Dutton, in HUM 305: 2015.1.

Indeed, the *Historia Calamitatum* successfully fulfilled its purpose: Abelard was able to return to Paris and to teaching, as evidenced by John of Salisbury's later descriptions of Abelard teaching him in Paris in 1136. Throughout the *Historia Calamitatum*, however, we see Abelard constantly re-framing the story for one purpose or another. The key point is that, in the *Historia Calamitatum*, people and events are never presented neutrally; in every case, Abelard depicts them as either positive or negative. He rarely takes responsibility for his misdoings, except in the case of his relationship with Heloise, where he accepts the entirety of the blame. He handles his relationship with Heloise especially carefully, prefacing his retelling with an appeal to readers to learn "The true story... from the facts, in their proper order, instead of from hearsay."⁹

Though not intended for Heloise, she somehow came into possession of a copy and subsequently instigated the exchange of personal letters. While the events themselves largely went uncontested, her letters call into question the veracity of how he framed events, especially those that concerned the two of them. Her letters were something of a rebuttal; she was dissatisfied with his presentation of her, alleging her arguments were misrepresented. First and foremost, she wanted her behaviour to be understood properly.

This rebuttal of Abelard's depiction of events is the starting point for recognizing that Heloise's ideas of intention may be worth revisiting on that score, while keeping in mind that these are the events as told by Abelard in the *Historia Calamitatum* for the purpose of securing his return to Paris. Their differing accounts and perspectives shall be appraised in later chapters.

The *Historia Calamitatum* opens with a recounting of Abelard's early years. Following several disputes with his masters of dialectic and theology—William of Champeaux and Anselm of Laon, respectively—Abelard manages to present himself as a popular teacher in France, then a relatively small territory around Paris. Abelard readily

⁹ Abelard, "Historia Calamitatum," in *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, trans. Betty Radice (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 2003), 9.

admits he grew overconfident and proud of his success and, unafraid of anyone, he “yielded to the lusts of the flesh.”¹⁰

Those “lusts of the flesh” came in the form of Heloise, a young girl living in the care of her uncle Fulbert. Abelard’s studies had, until that point, prevented him from spending any meaningful time with women in society.¹¹ Heloise—Abelard claims—was not particularly attractive (“in looks, she did not rank lowest”)¹² but she was famous for the extent of her learning.¹³ Equipped with “youth and exceptional good looks as well as my great reputation,” Abelard expressed absolute confidence he would succeed with any woman he chose to pursue, and in considering “all the usual attractions for a lover,” decided that Heloise was the one he would seduce.¹⁴

To this end, Abelard pretended he was too busy to run his own household and sought an arrangement to rent space in Fulbert’s home. Fulbert readily agrees, being fond of money and always seeking to further Heloise’s instruction. He gave Abelard unfettered control over Heloise’s education and discipline, going so far as to instruct Abelard to punish her severely should he find her idle. For Abelard, the situation was perfect: “In handing her over to me to punish as well as to teach, what else was he doing but giving me complete freedom to realize my desires, and providing an opportunity, even if I did not make use of it, for me to bend her to my will by threats and blows if persuasion failed?”¹⁵

After all his planning, Heloise proved a receptive partner and Abelard found himself so caught up in their affair that he paid little attention to philosophy. His classes grew boring and repetitive while his love songs grew popular until everyone was aware of their affair except Fulbert, who—blinded by his love for Heloise and Abelard’s reputation for previous chastity—was incapable of recognizing the affair taking place

¹⁰ Abelard, “Historia Calamitatum,” 9.

¹¹ Abelard, “Historia Calamitatum,” 9.

¹² Ibid., 10.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 10-12.

under his own roof.¹⁶ Several months elapsed before Fulbert realized the truth and separated them, but by then they were completely invested in one another, such that “All our laments were for one another’s troubles, and our distress was for each other, not for ourselves.”¹⁷

The affair carried on until Heloise discovered that she was pregnant, leading Abelard to secret her back to Brittany to stay with his sister until the baby was born.¹⁸ Fulbert was furious with Abelard but powerless to take revenge for fear of bringing retribution on Heloise.¹⁹ Finally, Abelard went to him, asking for his forgiveness and volunteering to marry Heloise, provided their marriage remained secret. Fulbert agreed to his proposal, but Abelard claims “his intention was to make it easier to betray me.”²⁰

Abelard then returned to Brittany to collect Heloise and inform her of their arrangement, only to find her adamantly opposed to the idea, marking the first time in the *Historia Calamitatum* that Heloise is presented with real agency.²¹ Heloise is, for her part, entirely selfless in her concerns, citing various dangers to Abelard and his reputation. She is unwilling to let Abelard bind himself to her, a single woman, when he was created for the benefit of all mankind.²² Abelard refused to listen, even as she argued from Paul and the philosophers, citing how the great philosophers of the past renounced the world, recognizing that no one could concentrate on philosophy or scripture amidst the chaos brought about by children.²³ Finally, she told him that she preferred the name of friend [*amica*] to wife, for in the case of friendship “only love freely given should keep me for her, not the constriction of a marriage tie.”²⁴ Abelard, however,

¹⁶ Abelard, “Historia Calamitatum,” 11-12.

¹⁷ Ibid., 12.

¹⁸ Abelard, “Historia Calamitatum,” 12.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 13.

²¹ Ibid., 13.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 13-14.

²⁴ Ibid., 16.

would not be moved, and since “she could not bear to offend” him, she yielded to his demand.²⁵

After the child was born, Heloise returned to Paris and the two were joined in matrimony.²⁶ They worked to be more discreet about their meetings but Fulbert spread the news, breaking his promise to Abelard.²⁷ Heloise, upon discovering her uncle’s treachery, cursed him in anger, which led Fulbert to “[heap] abuse on her on several occasions;” Abelard consequently sent her to the convent of Argenteuil and had her wear the religious habit worn by novices, except the veil.²⁸ Fulbert was incensed, thinking that Abelard had duplicitously rid himself of Heloise by making her a nun. He exacted retribution by having his men sneak into Abelard’s bedroom at night where they castrated him.²⁹

The castration became the talk of the entire city until Abelard claimed he was tormented more by their sympathy than by the pain of his wound, thinking about how his reputation had been destroyed in a moment.³⁰ He did, however, acknowledge the castration as a “just reprisal,” noting that he was judged in the very body part where he had sinned and betrayed by the man he had originally betrayed.³¹

The castration leaves Abelard in a philosophically difficult place given his theologically sensitive time since, as he notes, Deuteronomy dictates that “No man whose testicles have been crushed or whose organ has been severed shall become a member of the assembly of the Lord.”³² Unsure of where to go but desperate to escape

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 16-17.

²⁸ Abelard, “Historia Calamitatum,” 17.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 18.

the shame in Paris, he entered the monastery of St-Denis.³³ Heloise, too, rushed to the altar and took up the veil at Argenteuil, lamenting that she had brought Abelard so low.³⁴

Here we reach the end of the three key incidents involving Heloise, and consequently the end of the pertinent content of the *Historia Calamitatum*. In the *Historia Calamitatum*'s telling of events, Abelard twisted Heloise's actions and arguments to present her in a blameless light; but the nature of their relationship was such that Heloise actually initiated the exchange of personal letters to refute him. Heloise, for her part, was obsessed with ensuring that Abelard—and, depending on their circulation, the readers of the *Historia Calamitatum*—understood her true intentions. It is a concern that we can see Abelard did not share, judging by the *Historia Calamitatum*.

In the personal letters, Heloise went to great lengths to explain her intentions and undo Abelard's constructed narrative. Her thoughts on intentionality were focussed primarily around the three previously mentioned critical episodes in her life: their affair, her secret marriage to Abelard, and her entry into the convent.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

Chapter 3.

Critical Episodes in Heloise's Thoughts on Intentionality: 1. The Affair

Abelard and Heloise demonstrated very different awarenesses of intention in their respective depictions of the affair. Abelard's initial presentation of his role in the affair with Heloise in the *Historia Calamitatum* is a simple and one-sided portrayal of his pursuit of her fuelled by arrogance and lust; Heloise, however, rebuffed Abelard's account with a thoughtful presentation of her intentions in the personal letters, instead presenting her participation in the affair as something complex and purposeful. Having expressed her own intentions as an example, she pressed Abelard to explain his own real intentions. Abelard's response to her challenge, in terms of her treatment of intention, utterly lacks complexity or nuance: he insists once again that his sole motivation was lust. In her account of the affair, Heloise demonstrated an acute awareness of intention while Abelard's picture of the affair remained very simplistic; Heloise alone brought complexity of intention to her understanding of their relationship.

In the *Historia Calamitatum*, Abelard presents the affair as a matter of force; it was one-sided and instigated by his own arrogance: "I began to think myself the only philosopher in the world, with nothing to fear from anyone, and so I yielded to the lusts of the flesh."³⁵ The affair with Heloise marks the first time in the *Historia Calamitatum* that Abelard takes responsibility for his actions. In previous dealings with his masters, Abelard had attributed any and all conflict to the other men's jealousy.³⁶ When writing about the affair, however, Abelard went out of his way to remove any trace of responsibility from Heloise by ascribing the fullness of blame to himself, going so far as

³⁵ Abelard, "Historia Calamitatum," 9.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 5, 8.

to say that “in looks she did not rank lowest” (although it is possible or even likely that he painted her as such to protect her from charges that her attractiveness seduced him, making it clear she was not even at fault for tempting him with extreme beauty).³⁷

In stark contrast to his previous dealings with masters, Abelard’s version of the affair holds him responsible for everything: he arranged to “win her over” through “private daily meetings,” he arranged to get into her house “with the help of some of [Fulbert’s] friends,” he arranged to be in charge of Heloise’s education, and he plotted to “bend her to my will by threats and blows if persuasion failed.”³⁸ The affair as depicted in the *Historia Calamitatum* was very simple: Abelard—having become arrogant—decided upon the affair, arranged it, and then forced it on Heloise. Heloise had no role in being chosen by Abelard and no choice in her complicity.

While Abelard prefaces his account by insisting that he wanted “the true story” to be known “from the facts, in their proper order, instead of from hearsay,” Heloise challenged his simplistic account in her personal letters, raising complex questions of intention and complicity, while presenting herself as an equally intentioned, willing partner.³⁹

Heloise’s most weighty statement regarding her intention comes as a direct response to Abelard’s depiction of their history in the *Historia Calamitatum*:

Wholly guilty though I am, I am also, as you know, wholly innocent. It is not the deed but the intention of the doer which makes the crime, and justice should weigh not what was done but the spirit in which it is done. What my intention towards you has always been, you alone who

³⁷ Ibid., 10.

³⁸ Abelard, “*Historia Calamitatum*,” 10, 11.

³⁹ Ibid., 9.

have known it can judge. I submit to your testimony; yield to your scrutiny in all things.⁴⁰

This statement can be broken into three main ideas, each requiring close analysis: (1) Heloise as both “wholly guilty” and “wholly innocent,” (2) her notion that it is the “intention of the doer which makes the crime,” and finally (3) that Abelard alone is qualified to be the judge of her intentions.

Firstly then, she suggested that she is both “wholly guilty” and “wholly innocent.” Her guilt and innocence is easily understood in light of Abelard’s arguments—Abelard would have forced the affair on her regardless of her intention—but she is guilty because she wanted him, too.⁴¹ Thus, she stood “wholly guilty” by intention, but “wholly innocent” in act or agency. In her next letter, she professes to have had impure thoughts even before the affair began.⁴² In this interplay between wholly guilty and wholly innocent, Heloise tries to take some measure of responsibility by insisting she is both. She acknowledges that she was “wholly innocent” inasmuch as Abelard would not have allowed her to resist his advances, yet she considered herself “wholly guilty” because she was complicit in intention.

Secondly, Heloise makes her key argument that judgement should be levied according to the intention of the deed rather than the deed itself.⁴³ The deed that resulted from Heloise’s involvement with Abelard was the affair, but her intention was to be taken separately. That intention was the root of her involvement with Abelard: “it was not my own pleasures and wishes I sought to gratify, as you well know, but yours.”⁴⁴ Heloise was an equally intentional partner in the affair, which she explains in no uncertain terms: “Many were uncertain whether I was prompted by love or lust; but now

⁴⁰ Heloise, “Letter 2: Heloise to Abelard” in *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, trans. Betty Radice (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 2003), 53.

⁴¹ Heloise, “Letter 2,” 52.

⁴² Heloise, “Letter 4: Heloise to Abelard” in *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, trans. Betty Radice (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 2003), 67.

⁴³ Heloise, “Letter 2,” 53.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

the end is proof of the beginning.”⁴⁵ It was love that led to the affair and that still burned bright long after Abelard’s castration and the affair’s end. Following the affair, she did everything Abelard ever asked of her, demonstrating a dedication far surpassing simple lust, because her intention was not simply to engage in an affair; rather, her intention was to do, out of love for him, what Abelard wanted.

Thirdly, she states that Abelard alone is qualified to be the judge of her intention—a suggestion that is problematic on several levels. Heloise’s suggestion that Abelard is suited to know her intentions is a direct affront to Augustine’s argument that human beings can never fully know the thoughts of others. Likewise, it is an affront to the biblical tradition wherein God alone is the judge of thoughts.⁴⁶ Indeed, Heloise’s failure to include both heavenly and earthly authorities highlights her extreme Abelard-centrism. Heloise’s intention had only ever been to please Abelard; therefore, he alone who knew her intention could judge.⁴⁷

Heloise’s plea for Abelard to know and judge her according to her intentions comes at the crux of the letter she wrote in direct response to his *Historia Calamitatum* and consequently can be understood in a second light. Heloise’s letters undermine the simple, calculated, and purposeful depiction of their affair Abelard had constructed in the *Historia Calamitatum*; her request that he realize that her intention was not limited to her intentions regarding their affair, but also to her intention to correct his story of it.

In taking full blame for the affair, Abelard did two things: a) he effectively undermined any charge that he was still carrying on with Heloise and b) protected her from any repercussions by clearing her of any guilt. If he was the one forcing the affair on her to satisfy his lust and he physically could no longer have such desire, then the implication was that the affair obviously must have ended. Abelard had moved on and left innocent Heloise behind. If Heloise was forced into the affair by Abelard through no fault of her own, then she could not be blamed for the affair in which she participated, and the world should not condemn her for his sin.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 54.

⁴⁶ See Jeremiah 17:10, Hebrews 4:12.

⁴⁷ Heloise, “Letter 2,” 53.

Abelard's version of events is the simplest and the safest for both of them, and the details Heloise omitted from her letters suggest she knew it. She systematically reiterates Abelard's list of calamities while failing to mention their son Astrolabe or the charges that Abelard was still carrying on with her, even if just emotionally.⁴⁸ At the time of the personal letters, Abelard was still managing the repercussions of the various calamities he had listed; of those calamities, these two were the tangible results of the affair. Heloise's omission of them suggests that she needed to talk about their history even as she did not want to cause any more problems for Abelard.

She brought up the affair—explaining her intentions, sharing the blame, undoing the *Historia Calamitatum*, and soliciting him to know her intentions—because she needed to know Abelard's real intentions. Abelard's account protected her from blame, but being constructed, it failed to adequately explain why he initiated the affair with her. Having brought the complexity of intention to the discussion of their affair and after using her own intentions as an example, she tried to elicit an explanation from him:

I will tell you what I think and indeed everyone suspects. It was desire, not affection which bound you to me, the flame of lust rather than love. So when the end came to what you desired [by means of the castration], any show of feeling you used to make went with it.⁴⁹

Abelard's response entirely lacked Heloise's nuanced understanding of intention: "My love, which brought us both to sin, should be called lust, not love. I took my fill of my wretched pleasures in you, and this was the sum total of my love."⁵⁰ This ultimate response to Heloise's questions of intentionality was likely intended as another public statement designed to undercut charges that an emotional affair continued between them, thus assuring Heloise's safety and his own reputation as a changed man. At the

⁴⁸ Ibid., 47.

⁴⁹ Heloise, "Letter 2," 53.

⁵⁰ Abelard, "Letter 5: Heloise to Abelard" in *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, trans. Betty Radice (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 2003), 86.

same time, it demonstrates a more simplistic understanding or at least a less strict adherence to the doctrine of intentionality.

Heloise is the one who displayed an interest in and understanding of the issues of intention regarding the affair, repeatedly returning to the affair and explaining her intentions in the personal letters. She rejected Abelard's simplistic account of their affair for two reasons, both of which were related to the issue of intention: firstly, because she was an equally intentioned actor in the affair and he knew it, and secondly because his account failed to adequately explicate his intentions regarding the affair. The simplicity of Abelard's account in the *Historia Calamitatum* may indeed have been purposeful, but when Heloise pressed him for his true intentions in the personal letters, he reiterated the same simplistic view, either unable or unwilling to express his intentions in any other terms. Heloise was the one who raised the questions of intentionality regarding the affair and it was Heloise—not Abelard—who demonstrated an understanding of the issue in the personal letters.

Chapter 4.

Critical Episodes in Heloise's Thoughts on Intentionality: 2. Marriage

The second critical episode in Heloise's thoughts on intentionality revolved around her secret marriage to Abelard. As with the affair, Abelard cleverly depicted Heloise in order to protect her reputation, but as with the affair, Heloise rejected Abelard's intervention because she wanted her real intentions to be understood. The issue of intention regarding their marriage had three key elements: first, Abelard's presentation of Heloise's objections to their proposed marriage; second, Heloise's refutation of Abelard's version of events; third, Heloise's eventual consent to the proposed marriage.

As Abelard presented Heloise's objections to marriage in the *Historia Calamitatum*, she rejected the idea of marrying him for reasons related to Abelard, not herself; namely, she argued that a secret marriage would be too risky and disgraceful for Abelard, and that such a marriage would only be a burden on him.⁵¹ Her first concern was the possibility that their marriage would become known. The Heloise of Abelard's *Historia Calamitatum* argues that the potential damage to Abelard's reputation, were their marriage to be discovered, was too high a cost. Her second concern was that marriage would only be a burden on him.⁵² To this end, she argued from Paul and the philosophers, giving manifold textual evidence that marriage was a burden and distraction to some men, and Abelard, given his status as a philosopher, could not afford to be distracted.

⁵¹ Abelard, "Historia Calamitatum," 13.

⁵² Ibid.

Though she articulated her concerns separately, they shared an outcome: “Think of the curses, the loss to the Church and the grief of philosophers which would greet such a marriage.”⁵³ In the *Historia Calamitatum*, Heloise’s fundamental argument regarded only Abelard; he was a tremendous philosopher, created for the good of all mankind.⁵⁴ He could not stoop to being married, nor was she willing to be the person responsible for depriving mankind of Abelard’s full attention. Marriage would only distract him from philosophy and consequently attract the scorn and dismay of the multitudes who stood to lose from his divided focus.

With this presentation of Heloise, Abelard once again used the narrative of the *Historia Calamitatum* to shield her from guilt. The arguments Abelard attributed to her were entirely selfless: she was concerned only with Abelard’s reputation and the value of Abelard’s philosophy for the world, and she did not want to hinder him. But, as with the affair, Heloise could not let Abelard’s version of events stand because it failed to express her true reasons and intentions for rejecting marriage.

Heloise had strong opinions on their marriage, which were neither as selfless nor as deferential as the ones presented in the *Historia Calamitatum*. In the personal letters, Heloise accused him of keeping silent about her real concerns—how she preferred “love to wedlock and freedom to chains.”⁵⁵ Her various arguments against marriage may have included the ones represented by Abelard, but the arguments she presented for herself had a very different focus.

Heloise’s core concerns were addressed only once in the *Historia Calamitatum*, where Abelard said “[she] argued that the name of friend [*amica*] instead of wife would be dearer to her and more honourable for me—only love freely given should keep me for her, not the constriction of a marriage tie.”⁵⁶ Indeed, Heloise’s central argument in the personal letters is that this “love freely given” needs be the only bond holding them together.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Heloise, “Letter 2,” 51.

⁵⁶ Abelard, “Historia Calamitatum,” 16.

She may have—as Abelard suggested—resisted their marriage out of noble obligation, considering Abelard too valuable to be distracted, but her response to the *Historia Calamitatum* emphasized two related concerns: Heloise did not want to marry him because, first, their relationship of unmarried love better aligned with her personal philosophy and intentions and second, she considered marriage a false institution which contaminated the purity of their love. “Freely given love” aligned better with Heloise’s stricter interpretation of intentionality than the artificial, flawed, or forced institution of marriage. At the culmination of these two arguments, she gave Abelard an example of the relationship and life she wanted to have with him.

First, being unmarried better served her purposes. Abelard said she preferred the title of “friend [*amica*]” to wife, but Heloise took it a step farther:

The name of wife may seem more sacred or more binding, but sweeter for me will always be the word friend [*amica*], or, if you will permit me, that of concubine or whore. I believed that the more I humbled myself on your account, the more gratitude I should win from you, and also the less damage I should do to the brightness of your reputation.⁵⁷

Humbling her relationship to him would have protected his reputation and earned his gratitude, which was exactly what Heloise wanted: for Abelard to be tied to her by intention—ongoing, renewed daily—rather than obligation. By this reasoning, the worse she was considered by the public, the better the strength of the bond between them. On the other hand, were they to be married, external pressures would have put a strain on their actual relationship. Therefore, from Heloise’s perspective, it was preferable in every way for them to remain unwed.

Second, Heloise constantly emphasized the value of love as based on pure intention over the institutionalized obligation of marriage. And, in their case, the forcing agent was Fulbert, whose own sense of public shame demanded their marriage (and

⁵⁷ Heloise, “Letter 2,” 51.

that that marriage be publicly acknowledged, as subsequent events revealed). She explicitly stated that she would rather be called Abelard's whore than Augustus's empress, arguing that titles and wealth were meaningless and even detrimental.⁵⁸ Such allures only detracted from the core of love, which should be the value of the individual as a person. According to Heloise, a person was worth more than their wealth or power—those depend on fortune, and a person's worth needed to be found in their individual merit.⁵⁹ Therefore, individuals should be bound together because of their love for the other—a love whose foundation are these individual merits and intentions, not status or wealth.

Heloise eloquently argued that marriage was a false institution because in practice it had nothing to do with love.

... a woman should realize that if she marries a rich man more readily than a poor one, and desires her husband more for his possessions than for himself, she is offering herself for sale. Certainly any woman who comes to marry through desires of this kind deserves wages, not gratitude, for clearly her mind is on the man's property, not himself, and she would be ready to prostitute herself to a richer man, if she could...⁶⁰

Once again, Heloise focussed on the issue of intention; specifically, the intentions of those who seek marriage, and she considered marriage a form of prostitution because of the intentions of the parties involved.⁶¹ She claimed that her relationship with Abelard was the opposite—that in their affair, “God knows I never sought anything in you except you yourself; I wanted simply you, nothing of yours.”⁶² Although illegitimate, their affair

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Heloise, “Letter 2,” 51-52.

⁶¹ As noted by P. E. Dutton, the Gregorian reforms which sacralised marriage as an institution of the church were firmly in place by the twelfth century, but Heloise was hardly alone in doubting the new restrictions on marriage.

⁶² Heloise, “Letter 2,” 51.

was a relationship driven by a true intention—love—opposite the false motivations regularly driving the relationship of marriage.

Indeed, even Abelard's depiction of Heloise in the *Historia Calamitatum* argues, "What honour could we win... from a marriage which would dishonour me and humiliate us both?"⁶³ In Abelard's hands, this refers to the dishonour marriage would do to his reputation as a philosopher, but taken in the context of Heloise's own writings she may have indeed said it, albeit with a different intention: why marry when marriage itself discredits the veracity of love? Marriage would be their undoing, for they would no longer be bound together by the desire to be with one another—they would be forced to stay together by an institution that dishonoured the very love she valued so dearly.

Furthermore, marriage would dishonour her by making her appear to value Abelard for the sake of his fame and possessions; they would both be humiliated by submitting themselves to such a faithless institution. Heloise repeatedly emphasized this point: that her love was for Abelard—not for his fame or wealth or social standing—and she despised the institution of marriage for its function of procuring access to a man's social status and wealth.

In the *Historia Calamitatum*, Heloise initially argued against marriage using biblical support before transitioning to Latin philosophers. In her own writings, however, she appeals neither to the Bible nor the church fathers. Instead, she supports her argument using the Greek philosopher, Aspasia:

Unless you come to believe that there is no better man nor worthier woman on the earth you will always still be looking for what you judge the best thing of all – to be the husband of the best of wives and to be the wife of the best of husbands.⁶⁴

⁶³ Abelard, "Historia Calamitatum," 13.

⁶⁴ Heloise, "Letter 2," 52.

While subtle, her use of Aspasia is the key to understanding Heloise's entire argument, because Aspasia is a concrete example of the kind of relationship she wanted with Abelard.

Aspasia was a concubine of the Greek statesman Pericles, and she was also a female philosopher. She fit beautifully with Heloise's aforementioned arguments; as a concubine, she was legally nobody to Pericles, yet the fact that he kept her with him indicated that their love was real. Like Aspasia, she wanted freely-given love based on intention rather than obligation and, like Aspasia, she was a woman who aspired to philosophy. Heloise aspired to be Aspasia, but fundamentally she was aspiring to a position that did not exist in her world, that of a female philosopher in a common-law relationship.

Heloise's arguments in the personal letters reveal a woman who was nearly the opposite of the woman Abelard tried to depict in the *Historia Calamitatum*. She cared about the quality of his philosophy, certainly, but that was not to say she selflessly wanted to be parted from him for the good of mankind. She wanted to be with him, and she wanted him to be committed to her, but she simply did not want that relationship to be formalized as a marriage because, primarily, she always wanted to be assured of his love for her. She never wanted Abelard to stay with her out of mere obligation. Her love for Abelard was so pure that even association with the institution of marriage would taint it.

And yet, despite all her arguments to the contrary, they were married. Heloise openly acknowledged it in her writings, but even in the personal letters—after they had been married for years—she insists on undercutting its value.

Yet you must know that you are bound to me by an obligation which is all the greater for the further close tie of the marriage sacrament uniting us, and are the deeper in

my debt because of the love I have always borne you, as everyone knows, a love which is beyond all bounds.⁶⁵

Here, she points out that Abelard is maritally obliged to her, but her appeal is rooted in his obligation of love, not the obligation of marriage.

In both the *Historia Calamitatum* and Heloise's personal writings, Heloise was clearly opposed to the idea of marrying Abelard, yet she ultimately bent to Abelard's proposal. Putting subsequent events with Fulbert to one side, Abelard's initial offer of marriage was an ideal solution for all parties involved, and because Abelard wanted it, Heloise gave in.

After Fulbert discovered them in the act, Abelard offered marriage as a means of making amends: "I offered him satisfaction in a form he could never have hoped for: I would marry the girl I had wronged. All I stipulated was that the marriage should be kept secret so as not to damage my reputation."⁶⁶ This statement contained two key ideas: that their marriage was beneficial to Fulbert, and that it must not be made known.

Abelard describes his proposal as a "satisfaction... [Fulbert] could never have hoped for," which emphasizes the issue of Heloise's marriageability. While never directly addressed, the issue is raised in the *Historia Calamitatum* where she is old enough to possess not only a "gift for letters," but to be "renowned throughout the realm" for that gift when she was first introduced to Abelard. There are manifold reasons she might have been unmarriageable, but if she was otherwise unable to be married, then Abelard's proposal would have indeed been "satisfaction... [Fulbert] could never have hoped for." Abelard's proposal came with a condition: the marriage had to be "kept secret" (raising the question of whether secret marriages are marriages at all). Abelard's position as a philosopher necessitated the appearance of celibacy; therefore, the marriage had to remain secret "so as not to damage [Abelard's] reputation." The proposed arrangement appeared the best possible outcome given the circumstances: Fulbert was able to have Heloise married, Heloise was able to get away from Fulbert,

⁶⁵ Heloise, "Letter 2," 50.

⁶⁶ Abelard, "Historia Calamitatum," 13.

and Abelard could maintain the appearance of a philosopher. Still, from Fulbert's perspective and his sense of shame, a secret marriage could never be a full satisfaction since to the world it might appear that Heloise was a kept woman, merely Abelard's concubine.

Even though Heloise did not want to marry, she agreed to Abelard's proposal because "she could not bear to offend [him]."⁶⁷ Heloise loved Abelard, so once again she gave him what he wanted. While this fundamental intention for Abelard necessitated that she cede certain issues, she would not stand by and have her intentions misconstrued in Abelard's writings. She refuted the *Historia Calamitatum* in the personal letters because she wanted some to know her true intentions—that she did not acquiesce to Abelard's demands out of passivity or selflessness, but rather out of a profound longing for continued engagement and commitment. She very much wanted to be with Abelard, even if she did not want to marry him. For Heloise, this distinction and reasoning were important, because together they made her intentions clear.

Abelard's *Historia Calamitatum* consistently presents Heloise in the best possible light, an almost idealized woman of their time and place, but his depiction was at odds with how Heloise wanted to be depicted. The core reason she agreed to marriage in the *Historia Calamitatum*—that she "could not bear to offend [Abelard]"—is in all likelihood true; the rest of his depiction, however, is intentionally idealized. Abelard had Heloise use all the arguments that would endear her to the readers of the *Historia Calamitatum*: as a woman she was selfless and desired only what was best for Abelard and the rest of the world; she referenced the Apostles and the Fathers before turning to the philosophers.

In reality, Heloise very much wanted Abelard to herself, and she wanted him on her own terms. She quoted Aspasia, she reasoned almost exclusively from the classical tradition, and did not demonstrate regard for the scriptures or the church or even for the expectations placed on Abelard as a worker in that system. Heloise wanted an entirely

⁶⁷ Ibid., 16.

different system, one where Abelard was tied to her solely by his love and not by formal obligation and where women could be philosophers, too.

The Heloise of Abelard's construction in the *Historia Calamitatum* is very much an idealized and sympathetic woman of her time and place, but in reality Heloise was entirely at odds with it. Although both Abelard and Heloise were intentional about how they presented Heloise in their respective writings, the discrepancies between the two finished works provide a means by which their disparate intentions can be examined.

Chapter 5.

Critical Episodes in Heloise's Thoughts on Intentionality: 3. Entry into Monastic Life

Abelard and Heloise's joint entry into monastic life marked what may be the strongest demonstration of the problem of intention in Heloise's life. Heloise's problem was twofold: she never received the calling to be a nun and she felt no remorse for their earlier affair. Thus, despite her admirable fulfillment of the requirements of the convent, she was constantly dogged by feelings of hypocrisy. These two problems of intention resulted in her great complaint against Abelard as she struggled to come to terms with the issue of intention. In Heloise's treatment of intention, it becomes apparent that the concept was more real to her than it was to Abelard and this may support my suggestion that Heloise was chiefly responsible for the doctrine of intentionality.

In the matter of the convent, Heloise's problem of intention resulted in two related but distinct problems. First, she was held up as a virtuous nun even though she never received a true inner, monastic calling. While people judged her to be a good nun based on her actions, she considered such praise undeserved and false, since it was at odds with her intention. Second, she did not feel remorse for what had transpired between herself and Abelard. Indeed, she actively relived those memories and yearned for the times they had spent together, even as she was outwardly living a celibate and holy life.

The first of these problems (that Heloise never received the calling to be a nun) was a double-edged sword. She openly admitted "It was not any sense of vocation which brought me as a young girl to accept the austerities of the cloister, but [Abelard's] bidding alone,"⁶⁸ yet, rather problematically, she was considered by others to be a good

⁶⁸ Heloise, "Letter 2," 54.

and dutiful abbess. As she put it, “I am judged religious at a time when there is little in religion which is not hypocrisy, when whoever does not offend the opinions of men receives the highest praise.”⁶⁹

Here, the key concept is the biblical notion of hypocrisy which—while not entirely consonant with Heloise’s concept of intentionality—is important for a number of reasons. It represents one of only a handful of occasions on which Heloise referred to the biblical tradition in her own writing. In Abelard’s *Historia Calamitatum*, Heloise referenced scripture and saints and church fathers on a regular basis; in her own writing, Heloise rarely mentioned them, preferring the classical tradition. On the rare occasions when she did reference the biblical tradition it was subtly negative, such as above where she used a biblical concept to disparage her own position in the church.

The ideas of hypocrisy and intentionality share core similarities such that hypocrisy might naturally have led her to consider intention. If a hypocrite is one who outwardly appears to live for God while possessing ulterior or self-serving motivations, then the issue of hypocrisy may be understood as a subset of the issue of intentionality: a specifically defined misalignment of intention and action.

Heloise argued that her behaviour as a nun—however commendable—merited no congratulation when her actions were performed apart from the corresponding intention. It mattered little if she demonstrated the proper behaviour, as “outward actions are performed more eagerly by hypocrites than by saints;” consequently, “It is rash for man to pass judgement on what is reserved for God’s scrutiny.”⁷⁰ Heloise knew her own intentions and also recognized that others could not discern them. The people who commend her for her behaviour as a nun could not know her true reasons, and her actions were a fallible indicator when hypocrites were more eager to demonstrate proper visible behaviour than the sincere. However her actions may appear, she deserved credit only if those actions were performed in keeping with proper intentions, and her intentions were false. She argued that she could not be a praiseworthy nun by actions

⁶⁹ Heloise, “Letter 4,” 69.

⁷⁰ Heloise, “Letter 4,” 70.

alone; she consequently wished people would not judge her to be praiseworthy when God perceived her true intention.

Heloise's second problem was that she felt no remorse for her illicit involvement with Abelard. On the contrary:

In my case, the pleasures of lovers which we have shared have been too sweet—they cannot displease me, and can scarcely shift from my memory. Wherever I turn they are always there before my eyes, bringing with them awakened longings and fantasies which will not even let me sleep. Even during the celebration of the Mass, when our prayers should be purer, lewd visions of those pleasures take such a hold upon my unhappy soul that my thoughts are on their wantonness instead of on prayers. I should be groaning over the sins I have committed, but I can only sigh for what I have lost.⁷¹

Her improper intentions and inner disposition were present in the very moments she was perceived to be behaving commendably, compounding the problem of her hypocrisy. She capably performed the tasks that were expected of her, but considered them wholly insufficient, instead arguing that repentance could not possibly be achieved through actions alone, for “How can it be called repentance for sins, however great the mortification of the flesh, if the mind still retains the will to sin and is on fire with its old desires?”⁷² Here, as in her reflections on hypocrisy, she touched on the issue of intention. Repentance, she argued, could never be achieved through the actions of the body because repentance must fundamentally be done with the mind. This argument was particularly trenchant given her own situation; people may have perceived her as being chaste, but her chastity was mere hypocrisy unless she was chaste in both mind

⁷¹ Heloise, “Letter 4,” 68.

⁷² *Ibid.*

and body.⁷³ As long as her mind remained disobedient, her outward behaviour counted for nothing.

Outwardly, Heloise had performed as commendably as could be expected, yet she constantly disparaged her own efforts because she had effectively re-defined the idea of purity: while men “consider purity of the flesh a virtue... virtue belongs not to the body but to the soul.”⁷⁴ Inasmuch as virtue belonged not to the body but to the soul, it mattered little if she appeared to be chaste—what mattered was whether she was genuinely chaste. In redefining virtue as a matter of the soul, she made virtue an issue of intention.

Hypocrisy, the mind, the soul—she used a variety of words to address what was fundamentally the same problem: that actions are incomplete when not paired with the appropriate intention. Heloise recognized this problem in herself, arguing that while she may have won praise from men, she deserved none from God, who recognized the desires of the heart and body and saw even what was invisible to other human beings.⁷⁵ Her actions may have led men to perceive her as virtuous, but her virtue of the body was divorced from virtue of the soul because it was never her intention to please God—her intention was to please Abelard.

As with the affair and secret marriage, Heloise both entered the convent and capably observed the associated rules because it was what Abelard wanted, for “as God knows, I have feared to offend you rather than God, and tried to please you more than him.”⁷⁶ God knows Heloise’s true intention—that she sought Abelard’s favour rather than God’s. She kept the rules of the monastic order—rules designed to engender behaviour pleasing to God—but for the explicit purpose of obeying Abelard: again, because “It was your command, not love of God, which made me take the veil.”⁷⁷ Her language is of

⁷³ Ibid., 69.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Heloise, “Letter 4,” 69.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

particular interest here, as she says she was motivated by Abelard's command rather than love.

This is not the first instance of Heloise referring to her submission to Abelard's authority; in a previous letter, she "found strength at your command to destroy myself."⁷⁸ Despite Heloise's reluctance to invoke the Christian tradition, she would have no doubt been familiar with the biblical admonition, "If you love me, keep my commandments."⁷⁹ She regularly refers to Abelard's desires as commands, but likely in the biblical sense of love that was fulfilled in the keeping of commandments. The key, however, is that love must be the reason the commands are kept. This logic fit with Heloise's earlier concerns: even though she was keeping God's commands, because her love was for Abelard rather than for God, practically speaking she was keeping Abelard's command and so deserved no credit from God.

In these two issues, Heloise struggled with the disparity between her actions and desires and in the process came to recognize the problem of intention. Her two problems—never being called to monastic life and feeling no remorse for her sexual sin with Abelard—shared a common root: her love for Abelard himself. Her love led her to bend to his will. Heloise was able to recognize the disparity between her behaviour and desires; her behaviour befitting a respected, celibate nun even while she desired to leave the monastic life and rekindle her relationship with Abelard. Furthermore, she was able to recognize the role her own intentions played in this dynamic; that is, she recognized that her intention—her love for Abelard—was the motivation for her to act in a manner contrary to her actual desires. That is, she did not want to enter the monastic life, but because she loved Abelard she went against her own desires, both taking the veil and outwardly performing the behaviour expected of a nun.

Her love for Abelard made her want to please him and obey him, and Heloise recognized it as the stumbling block: "my love rose to such heights of madness that it robbed itself of what it most desired beyond hope of recovery, when immediately at your

⁷⁸ Heloise, "Letter 2," 51.

⁷⁹ John 14:15, Douay-Rheims.

bidding I changed my clothing along with my mind, in order to prove you the sole possessor of my body and my will alike.”⁸⁰ At his bidding, she not only assumed the religious habit, but even endeavoured to change her mind—a struggle she recounted in detail in her second letter. Even though Heloise regarded taking the veil as nothing less than “[destroying] herself,” she followed through to demonstrate her devotion.⁸¹ Her love rose “to such heights of madness” that she willingly destroyed herself to prove to Abelard that he possessed not only her body, but also her mind and will—once again, noting the distinction between her body (behaviour) and mind or will (desire). Her entry into the convent was intended by Heloise as proof of her love for Abelard and it was in reflecting on it that she returned to her idea of intentionality again and again.

She professed that she would have followed Abelard no matter where his path led, whether towards God or into the fires of Hell.⁸² The reason, she said, was that not only her mind but also her heart belonged to Abelard. In fact, she continued to describe her heart as necessarily residing with Abelard, not herself: “My heart was not in me but with you, and now, even more, if it is not with you it is nowhere; truly, without you it cannot exist.”⁸³

The problem here is the one mentioned previously: Heloise ran towards God because of Abelard, not because of God. Therefore, she reasoned, any repayment for her deeds would have to come from Abelard rather than from God. In recognizing her own intentions, Heloise could not come to expect repayment from God for her pious behaviour. She did, however, expect repayment from Abelard, arguing that if Abelard failed to repay her, then all her efforts were in vain.⁸⁴

If the problem of hypocrisy is the desire to be seen as righteous by men rather than God, then Heloise’s situation was slightly different, for she did not seek the praise of men, but rather the praise of a single man. While “whoever does not offend the

⁸⁰ Heloise, “Letter 2,” 51.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Heloise, “Letter 2,” 54.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

opinions of men” may receive “the highest praise,” Heloise has not offended Abelard, and so she expects to receive praise from him.⁸⁵ She entered the convent at Abelard’s behest, and expects him to repay her accordingly; the form of this repayment was to be more emotional engagement with him.

In this, we see that Heloise was drawing on her notion of intentionality: the person for whom the action was done is the person who should repay, because it was not important what action was performed or who benefitted—it mattered why the action was performed. Heloise entered the convent for Abelard; she could do nothing for God when her heart was not with herself, but rather with Abelard.

Heloise expected that she may have gained some small merit with God for a single reason, suggesting that if the action was done—even action divorced from proper motivation—then there may have been some small repayment for the fact of the action itself. In her words, “perhaps there is some merit and it seems somehow acceptable to God, if a person whatever her intention gives no offence to the Church in her outward behaviour, if the name of the Lord is not blasphemed among the infidels because of her nor if she does not disgrace the Order of her profession amongst the worldly.”⁸⁶ Heloise mused rather than argued that through her correct behaviour, albeit for the wrong reasons, she had not profaned God or the Church in the eyes of men and were she to receive any reward, perhaps she deserved some credit for that.

Through her correct outward behaviour, she avoided disrepute; this, however, did little to satisfy her. She described it as a gift of God’s grace not only to “do good but to abstain from evil—though the latter is vain if the former does not follow from it, as it is written: ‘Turn from evil and do good.’ Both are vain if not done for love of God.”⁸⁷ For Heloise, it was not enough to avoid evil—she had actually to do good, and she had to do it being motivated by love for God, yet she could not. It was in this difficulty that she desired Abelard’s aid, but since he, too, looked only at her actions, he saw only the outside and thought she was coping well enough. In her letters, Heloise resorted to

⁸⁵ Heloise, “Letter 4,” 69.

⁸⁶ Heloise, “Letter 4,” 69.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

spelling out her problem of intention as even Abelard was unable to recognize her struggle, masked behind a visage of exemplary behaviour.

Thus, it was in grappling with these two issues—namely her lack of calling and unrepentant heart—that Heloise was able to recognize and separate the role of motivation or intention from action. After struggling against herself, she was finally able to express that struggle in words to Abelard. Her behaviour was not a simple cause and effect of desires resulting in actions; rather, Heloise was able to recognize the distinction between the two through examining the disparity between her own desires and actions.

Through her introspection she came to realize that the behaviours others could observe were not the complete truth, because what they saw in her she knew to be false. Her desires were one thing, her behaviour another, and one did not naturally result in the other. In examining herself, she realized that the bridge between her heart and her behaviour was her love for Abelard, and in her letters made every effort to help him understand her realization.

But Abelard could not or did not understand. The *Historia Calamitatum* bears no trace of Heloise's intricate concerns with intention. In it, Abelard touched only briefly on their entry into monastic life. What few details he provided were mostly consistent with Heloise's—that is, that she took the veil in accordance with his wishes—he otherwise maintained the selfless, noble presentation of Heloise that we find in the *Historia Calamitatum*.⁸⁸

In Abelard's hands, Heloise invoked Cornelia, a model of Roman virtue who—like Heloise—was educated in Latin and Greek and who—like Heloise—had a happy marriage with an older man but who—unlike Heloise—was satisfied to remain a widow after her husband's death.⁸⁹ In invoking Cornelia, the *Historia Calamitatum* implied that Heloise had made peace with the loss of Abelard and was embracing her celibate future. While this is consistent with her depiction throughout the *Historia Calamitatum*, it is entirely at odds with the inner turmoil Heloise recounts in her personal letters.

⁸⁸ Abelard, "Historia Calamitatum," 19.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

Heloise was not at peace with the loss of Abelard, a point she made abundantly clear in her personal letters. Heloise rebuffed his depiction of events and struggled to make him understand, pleading with him on the grounds that she did everything for him—pleading with him as his wife—but her efforts were fruitless: Abelard only insisted in his salutations to her that she was married to Christ. After Heloise’s best efforts in the personal letters, Abelard still failed to understand the point, or could not afford to indulge it.

Abelard would have had Heloise take the veil, unresistant and uncomplaining, but their joint entry into monastic life became a running complaint, her great complaint, as he called it; namely, that she had entered the monastic life for Abelard, but he did not acknowledge that it was for him.⁹⁰ He was here judging actions and not intentions. For her, it was a deep-rooted issue of conscience, one that Abelard refused to help her resolve. This issue was unlike Heloise’s first two key concerns in that Abelard consistently refused to address it.⁹¹

Heloise pressed the issue in detail in her first letter, wishing he would show more concern: “If only your love had less confidence in me, my dear, so that you would be more concerned on my behalf! But as it is, the more I have made you feel secure in me, the more I have to deal with your neglect.”⁹² It is worth noting that Heloise had no way of knowing why Abelard had failed to respond to her concerns about her false profession and entry into the convent, yet rather than merely point out his silence she actively guessed why he has not yet responded. That is, she guessed his intent. Thus, in the issue of their entry into monastic life, the problem of intention arose on both sides: Heloise explained her concern that her own intentions and actions were not in agreement and simultaneously prodded Abelard in an attempt to determine his intentions in failing to address her repeated complaints. She pressed him again in her

⁹⁰ Heloise, “Letter 2,” 53.

⁹¹ This could be for one of two reasons: either he thought that his position was the only one he could take, and in both of their best interests, or he genuinely failed to pick up on Heloise’s concern. I suspect the former.

⁹² Heloise, “Letter 2,” 54.

second letter and Abelard grudgingly responded only to inform her that he was unable to give her what she wanted.⁹³

Heloise entered the monastic life to please Abelard, but she could not do it sincerely and so she struggled with her own intentions. Furthermore, Abelard—whose entry into the monastic life was much simpler and more honest and a matter of need and necessity after his castration—could not make sense of the problem Heloise faced and consequently failed to provide her with the support she required.

In contrast to Abelard's account, which purposely spun situations and re-wrote Heloise's intentions in the *Historia Calamitatum* to make her appear more obedient and blameless, Heloise genuinely struggled with the problem of intention in her own life. She recognized it as a problem and struggled with it whereas Abelard did not—whether in his depiction of their entry into the monastery or in his personal letters. His treatment of their life story lacked Heloise's emotional complexity and thus, once again, it becomes apparent that intention was real to Heloise in a way Abelard did not comprehend or could not afford to entertain.

⁹³ Heloise, "Letter 4," 69-70, 78-79.

Chapter 6.

Heloise's Stress on Intention as the Essential Feature of Personal Action

Having examined Heloise's use of intentionality in the context of these three critical episodes, there is adequate evidence to suggest she had a fully formed concept of intention, although she left no treatise of her own on the doctrine. Abstracting the ideas of intention apparent in her letters into an independent doctrine, however, is slightly difficult. Her understanding of intention appeared in her first letter in utilitarian service of her arguments, focussed around her complaint of entering monastic life not her own choosing. Her second letter adopted a deeper, more introspective approach. In order to appreciate the development of her ideas, the two letters must be approached separately and in chronological order.

While the majority of her first letter deals with their joint entry into monastic life, Heloise's first foray into ideas of intention occurred more obliquely through the lens of marriage:

For a person's worth does not rest on wealth or power; these depend on fortune, but worth on its merits. And a woman should realize that if she marries a rich man more readily than a poor one, and desires her husband more for his possessions than for himself, she is offering herself for sale. Certainly any woman who comes to marry through desires of this kind deserves wages, not gratitude, for clearly her mind is on the man's property, not himself, and

she would be ready to prostitute herself to a richer man, if she could.”⁹⁴

This is the first time Heloise brought up the problem of intention—not in relation to herself or Abelard specifically, but in reflecting more generally on the reasons people act. She raised this question of intention in the context of marriage by examining the various reasons a woman might desire marriage to a certain man and concluded that the marriage was undermined if the intention was to gain material wealth through marriage rather than to gain marriage to the man in question. That is, the intention and the action must align in order for the action to be pure. If the intention and action do not align, then the action is hypocritical—an idea Heloise treated at length in her second letter.

Similar ideas existed before Heloise and persisted after her, notably in Abelard’s writings on the topic of selfless love, wherein he quotes a passage from Augustine that bears strong resemblance to Heloise’s argument. Marenbon summarized their arguments succinctly: “...unless I love someone for his own sake (X for X), there is always the danger of inconstancy. If I love X for the sake of Y, then there is always the possibility that X might be without Y, in which case my love would cease.”⁹⁵

Thus, while Heloise was not unique in her treatment of love in the context of marriage, she was unique in her development of its core ideas. Unlike Augustine and Abelard, she was not interested in using marriage as a parable for love with the Almighty, but rather in the implications of love not always being true; that is, she was addressing the issue of intention behind the issue of love. People marry for reasons apart from love, and Heloise was interested in these ulterior intentions and what they implied about marriage and decision-making more generally.

As discussed in previous chapters, such ulterior intentions played heavily in Heloise’s own life decisions, and never more strongly than her entry into monastic life. To Abelard, she claimed that, “at your bidding I changed my clothing along with my

⁹⁴ Heloise, “Letter 2,” 51-52.

⁹⁵ Marenbon, *Philosophy*, 301.

mind, in order to prove you the sole possessor of my body and my will alike.”⁹⁶ What she did (become a nun) was divorced from the reason she did it (to prove Abelard the sole possessor of her body and will alike). Her intention was to prove to Abelard that he was the owner of her will by using her own free will to demonstrate the subjugation of her will to his.

Her intention was not to become a nun but to win Abelard’s gratitude. As she said, “I believed the more I humbled myself on your account, the more gratitude I should win from you.”⁹⁷ Thus, for Heloise, becoming a nun was the means to a different end. She freely admitted that she did not take the veil for its own sake (X for X). Rather, she took the veil (X) in hopes of pleasing Abelard (Y). Since she did not act for the sake of X, and so deserved no reward for having done it; since she acted for the sake of Y, she should be repaid accordingly. She said as much herself:

It was not any sense of vocation which brought me as a young girl to accept the austerities of the cloister, but your bidding alone, and if I deserve no gratitude from you, you may judge for yourself how my labours are in vain. I can expect no reward for this from God, for it is certain that I have done nothing as yet for love of him.⁹⁸

Heloise insisted that, if she deserved any reward, it must be Abelard’s gratitude, because he was the recipient of her intentions. God owed her nothing, because even though her deeds may have appeared to honour him, he was the recipient of her actions only, and not the recipient of her intention.

Heloise’s most directly philosophical statement on the subject of intention expressed a similar concern in a different context: “It is not the deed but the intention of the doer which makes the crime, and justice should weigh not what was done but the

⁹⁶ Heloise, “Letter 2,” 51.

⁹⁷ Heloise, “Letter 2,” 51.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 54.

spirit in which it [was] done.”⁹⁹ Justice, in her mind, had to be appropriate repayment for the underlying intention, not only the outward deed; that is, justice was only just if it addressed the cause or root, and failed to be just if it weighed only the deed. Therefore, a just repayment for her deeds would have repaid her intention, not her action. Since her intentions were for Abelard, he was responsible to repay her.

This idea of justice based on intention does, however, render judgement more difficult. Her solution, while hardly a widely-applicable philosophy, worked well enough in her set of circumstances: she argued that actions may be judged only by the person who knows the intention behind the action—in this case, Abelard. “What my intention towards you has always been, you alone who have known it can judge.”¹⁰⁰ What a failure then when the recipient of her fine intentions failed to recognize or repay them.

Indeed, if true justice requires that the actions be judged based on the intentions with which they were performed, then it becomes difficult for human beings to pass judgement. While this very problem is addressed in the biblical tradition (God judges the heart),¹⁰¹ Heloise both limited and expanded the definition of judgement: humans could no longer pass accurate judgement, when they judge based on actions alone, but likewise God was no longer the only one capable of passing accurate judgement. In Heloise’s philosophy of intention, actions could be judged by humans, provided the judge in question had been made sufficiently aware of the intention behind the deed. But it does complicate things when the judge in this case is also the recipient of the intentionality of the other.

In Heloise’s case, this role belonged to Abelard. He alone among men knew the reasons she became a nun, and so was uniquely positioned to judge her and, likewise, he alone was responsible to reward her for her deeds, according to the intention with which they were performed. Heloise drove this point home with a direct accusation: “Why, after our entry into religion, which was your decision alone, have I been so neglected and forgotten by you that I have neither a word from you when you are here to

⁹⁹ Ibid., 53.

¹⁰⁰ Heloise, “Letter 2,” 53.

¹⁰¹ See 1 Samuel 16:7.

give me strength nor the consolation of a letter in absence?”¹⁰² As Abelard was the only person equipped to judge Heloise’s deeds, he alone was responsible for rewarding her which, Heloise complained, he had failed to do.

She repeatedly asked him to repay her intentions, entreating him at various points to “Remember... what I have done, and think how much you owe me”¹⁰³ and, more specifically, to “give grace in return for grace, small for great, words for deeds.”¹⁰⁴ She honoured him with deeds—the fruit of her intentions—and requested that he acknowledge those intentions and reciprocate, even if she received only words in return for the deeds she had performed for his sake. She gave him grace in submitting to his will and—according to her philosophy of intention—since he was aware of her intentions, he was morally bound to reciprocate.

Heloise’s philosophy of intention, as developed over the course of her first letter, was developed in service of her great complaint. The central ideas—that intention and action must align in order for an action to be considered pure, and that justice is served when the intention has been judged and repaid appropriately—form a compelling argument in Heloise’s favour. Heloise’s intentions in entering monastic life were impure, rendering any reward for her behaviour by God and humans invalid, but Abelard would have been entirely justified in repaying her according to her intentions toward him. She went to such great lengths to develop a nascent philosophy of intention simply to make Abelard understand that she wanted him to acknowledge what she had done for him.

Heloise’s second letter took a slightly different approach, with her exploration of intention focussed around the related questions of sin, repentance, and hypocrisy. It began with a rare reflection on the biblical tradition, where she detailed the various women who were used by Satan to bring down their husbands. Heloise, unlike these other women, did not intend to ruin Abelard, noting that “the tempter did not prevail on me to do wrong of my own consent... But even if my conscience is clear through innocence, and no consent of mine makes me guilty of this crime, too many earlier sins

¹⁰²Heloise, “Letter 2,” 53.

¹⁰³Ibid., 54.

¹⁰⁴Heloise, “Letter 2,” 54.

were committed to allow me to be wholly free from guilt.”¹⁰⁵ She held herself responsible for the damage to Abelard’s reputation, or at least readily recognized the role her involvement played. Here—near the beginning of her second letter—we see the beginnings of a more complex understanding of intention: even though her intentions were pure, she was still culpable for her actions. The reverse likewise holds true, and becomes even more problematic.

Whereas in her first letter intention was largely employed as a dialectic tool to persuade Abelard, in her second letter she turned the philosophy on herself. Having previously distinguished intention from action, Heloise reflected on the separation of her body and her mind in the context of repentance, wondering “How can it be called repentance for sins, however great the mortification of the flesh, if the mind still retains the will to sin...?”¹⁰⁶ If, as she argued in her previous letter, justice is to repay the underlying intention rather than the outward deed, then sin should likewise be judged and repaid according to the state of mind, or intentions, rather than according to outward behaviour. Just as actions cannot be judged as righteous or unrighteous without knowing the intention of the doer, repentance, likewise, cannot be judged as complete or incomplete without knowledge of the mind behind the behaviour. As Heloise put it, “No one with medical knowledge diagnoses an internal illness by examining only outward appearance.”¹⁰⁷

For Heloise, this became a sizeable problem because while God and Abelard may have been aware of the intentions of her mind, the rest of the world was not. She lamented, “Men call me chaste; they do not know the hypocrite I am. They consider purity of the flesh a virtue, though virtue belongs not to the body but to the soul.”¹⁰⁸ This notion of hypocrisy became a driving force in the development of Heloise’s philosophy of intention, cementing many of the ideas she expressed previously. Others may have observed her outward purity and judged her virtuous, but Heloise counter-proposed that

¹⁰⁵Heloise, “Letter 4,” 67.

¹⁰⁶Heloise, “Letter 4,” 68.

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 69.

virtue belonged to the soul or mind, not to the body. That is, that virtue was in the intention rather than the deed.

If appropriate intentions were not present, outer behaviour was in vain. Thus, Heloise painted herself the worst sort of hypocrite. She entered monastic life with wrong intentions, so how could any of her actions—stemming from that intention—have merited praise? In response to the Bible’s exhortation to “Turn from evil and do good,” Heloise argues that “Both [doing good and abstaining from evil] are vain if not done for love of God.”¹⁰⁹ In practice, she both turned from evil by trading their affair for a licit marriage and did good by performing admirably in her role as the abbess of the Paraclete. In both cases, however, she acted at Abelard’s behest, but regardless of how her actions appeared, they could not be appropriately judged without knowledge of the corresponding intentions.

She did not intend to live a celibate life, and consequently deserved none of its affiliated rewards. On the contrary, “the outward actions which are performed more eagerly by hypocrites than by saints” are “common to the damned and the elected” and “win no favour in the eyes of God.”¹¹⁰ Intention was key, while outer behaviour was merely a symptom of the inner disposition and sometimes that disposition and the actions were entirely at odds. This, she argued, was the defining separation of the damned and the elect: both may have appeared to behave well, but one acted with proper intentions while the other acted out of hypocrisy. Thus, since she acted with impure intention in Abelard’s case, Heloise actually defined herself as being among the damned.

Externally, Heloise had done everything right, yet she obsessed over self-defined failings of intention, mind, and soul. She held steadfastly to her values, in the whole of her writing, relenting only once:

I can win praise in the eyes of men but deserve none
before God, who searches our hearts... and sees in our

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

¹¹⁰Heloise, “Letter 4,” 70.

darkness. I am judged religious at a time when there is little in religion which is not hypocrisy, when whoever does not offend the opinions of men receives the highest praise. And yet perhaps there is some merit and it seems somehow acceptable to God, if a person whatever her intentions gives no offence to the Church in her outward behaviour, if the name of the Lord is not blasphemed among the infidels because of her [and] she does not disgrace the Order of her profession amongst the worldly.¹¹¹

Earlier, Heloise acknowledged that, despite her pure intentions, she was still responsible for the damage she did to Abelard's reputation. Here, she acknowledged that the reverse might be true: that if she did no damage to the reputation of the church, then perhaps her intentions may be forgiven. More importantly, this was the only time Heloise granted herself the slightest reprieve, which is in itself a testament to how earnestly she adhered to the idea of intentionality.

It would be difficult to argue that we see in Heloise's writing anything resembling a fully formed philosophy of intention; we do, however, have ample evidence to suggest that by the time of the personal letters she had developed both an understanding of intention and a determination to live accordingly. Abelard's letters indicate nothing of the sort. This, of course, begs the question: if intention was so ubiquitous and important in Heloise's writing but so largely absent from Abelard's, how did the idea ultimately leap from her letters to his treatise?

With so little of Heloise's writing extant, any answer to this question is knowingly proposed standing in a fog of pure speculation, but I would tentatively argue that *Scito te Ipsum* is yet another entry in Abelard's catalog of works produced as apologies (*Historia Calamitatum* to ensure his return to Paris, the Letters of Direction in lieu of his presence at the Paraclete). Heloise wanted many things that Abelard could not give her, not the

¹¹¹Ibid., 69.

least of which being her philosophical aspirations in the tradition of Aspasia. Given Heloise's stress on intention as the essential feature of personal action, it is not impossible to wonder if Abelard may have initially been led to codify and expand her views on intention as an apology in response to her great complaint and as another gift to her.

Chapter 7.

Abelard's Later Development and Use of the Doctrine

Having examined Heloise's thoughts on the matter of intention, the time has come to examine Abelard's later development and use of the doctrine. The *Ethica* reflects not only Heloise's ideas of intention but her life circumstances, in many places reading as life advice from Abelard tailored to address her situation. The problems she expressed in her letters are systematically deconstructed and solutions are proposed. These solutions, however, are not without their own problems. Firstly, the solutions Abelard proposes are entirely founded in religious assumptions—indeed, they are dependant on them. Secondly, Abelard's castration made him something of a superhuman, no longer experiencing the vices of the flesh in the same way Heloise or others might. Perhaps as a result, his representations of intention—while philosophically complex—are lacking an essential human nuance which would render them practically applicable. In examining the intersection of their arguments, I hope to demonstrate that Abelard's thoughts are a response to hers.

Of Heloise's two letters, the first primarily employed intention as a weapon while the second struggled with problems of intention at a much deeper level. His work opens where Heloise's second letter leaves off, dealing with the related questions of sin, hypocrisy, and repentance; his work, however, is framed very differently. Rather than ruminating on issues of intention in the context of a specific life experience, Abelard tackles the abstract idea of intention¹¹² systematically until he has proceeded well beyond Heloise's concerns.

¹¹²Or "will." Where Heloise preferred the word "intention" (*intencio*), Abelard appears to have favoured the more precise "will" (*uoluntas*).

One of the core issues in Heloise's second letter was the issue of hypocrisy—her sexual desire for Abelard remained, hidden behind a veneer of celibacy and Catholic propriety. Her belief in intention trapped her in a problem with no solution: outward repentance was useless as long as her mind retained the will to sin.¹¹³ Though she had been forcing herself to perform outward acts of repentance, she did not (or possibly thought she could not) force a change of heart. In the process of expanding her simpler notions of intentionality into a fully-realized doctrine, Abelard methodically worked towards a solution.

He begins by distinguishing between vices and sins. Vices, he argues, are propensities humans struggle against while sins are when humans consent to act upon those propensities. By distinguishing vices from sins, the desire to sin is no longer a sin itself; the struggle against the vice is rather fighting the good fight of faith. The ultimate goal is to overcome vices altogether—Abelard appeals to Solomon, who deemed “the one who rules his mind [better] than the capturer of cities”¹¹⁴—but feeling the effects of that vice is not a sin as long as one does not succumb to that sin.

Rather than a new idea, Abelard returns to a well-known New Testament idea: that our struggle is not against flesh and blood¹¹⁵—that is, against other people—our struggle is against our own human nature.¹¹⁶ “For religion doesn't think it shameful to be defeated by a human being, but by a vice.”¹¹⁷ Being defeated by another human, according to the ideals of the New Testament especially, is nothing shameful. Rather, being defeated by vices—allowing physical nature to overpower spiritual nature—is the true defeat. Since the attacks of vices are more frequent than the attacks of other humans, their attacks are all the more dangerous; victory over one's vices is consequently more difficult than victory over other humans, but also more glorious.¹¹⁸

¹¹³Heloise, “Letter 4,” 68.

¹¹⁴Abelard, “Ethics,” in *Ethical Writings*, trans. Paul Vincent Spade (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1995), 5.

¹¹⁵See Ephesians 6:12.

¹¹⁶See Colossians 3:5.

¹¹⁷Abelard, “Ethics,” 5.

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*, 6.

In Heloise's case, the issue of intention is not whether she feels the desire to sin—that feeling is simply a vice. The issue is whether she consents to that sin. Vice, or the desire to sin, might make one “disposed to sin,” but “consent is what we properly call ‘sin.’”¹¹⁹ If sin is not actualized until one consents to that sin, then if Heloise does not consent, she has not sinned. Since the vice will always be present, this effort in resisting sin is commendable in and of itself.¹²⁰ The struggle against sin is an inescapable component of this life and it is by means of the struggle itself that we gain our reward.

Abelard also problematizes Heloise's argument that she retained the “will to sin,”¹²¹ claiming that willing a bad deed is not enough to be considered sin.¹²² He plays the devil's advocate here, pointing out that sometimes people commit sins in their actions not because they willed that sin, but because that sin came about as a side-effect of the will they were actively pursuing. He gives the example of a man who wanted to live, and so in service to that goal, he killed another man who was trying to kill him. Murder is a sin, but the first man's will was never to kill but to survive and he only killed in service to his primary goal.¹²³ Then, did the first man have the will to sin? Did he consent?

Abelard expands on this idea such that it addresses Heloise's previously stated concern [that she did not take the veil for its own sake (X for X), but took the veil (X) in hopes of pleasing Abelard (Y)].¹²⁴ Abelard argues, “To say he ‘wants’ one thing because of another is like saying he tolerates what he doesn't want because of something else he does desire.”¹²⁵ If someone intended Y but X was required to achieve Y, he has not intended X so much as tolerated it. This is certainly true of Heloise, who tolerates being a nun for the sake of Abelard's recognition. But this toleration of an intermediary (X) for the sake of another will (Y) is not to be considered willingness, but rather the core of

¹¹⁹Abelard, “Ethics,” 7.

¹²⁰Ibid., 4.

¹²¹Heloise, “Letter 4,” 68.

¹²²Abelard, “Ethics,” 9.

¹²³Ibid., 11-15.

¹²⁴Heloise, “Letter 2,” 51.

¹²⁵Abelard, “Ethics,” 18.

suffering. Just as Jesus suffered (X) for the sake of salvation (Y), just as the martyrs suffered death (X) for a heavenly reward (Y), “There cannot be a ‘suffering’ at all except where something happens against one’s will; no one ‘suffers’ when he accomplishes his will and when what happens delights him.”¹²⁶ This is, essentially, the core of Heloise’s suffering as presented in the personal letters: the disconnection between her intentions and actions, or the suffering of doing X when her purpose is Y.

Abelard’s next argument could almost be read as a direct response to concerns of Heloise’s second letter: “For what great deed do we do for God’s sake if we don’t put up with anything opposed to our willing but instead accomplish what we will? Indeed, who thanks us if, in what we say we are doing for his sake, we are accomplishing our own will?”¹²⁷ Even as she was serving the church, Heloise herself argued, “I can expect no reward for this from God, for it is certain that I have done nothing as yet for love of him.”¹²⁸ It was not for God’s will that she entered the convent but to fulfil her own will (that is, to gain Abelard’s recognition). Just as Heloise once pressured Abelard to repay her, as the recipient of her intentions, Abelard rhetorically turns the question back on her: who will thank us if we are accomplishing our own will? Heloise is, practically speaking, pursuing her own will and here, as in other places, Abelard subtly admonishes her to pursue God genuinely and receive her reward from him.

Abelard, like Heloise, suggests that humans are rewarded by the divine not for their actions but for their intention or will. The ideal is “when we prefer his will to ours, so that we follow his rather than ours,” just as Jesus came not to fulfil his own will but to fulfil God’s.¹²⁹ But it is also acceptable to struggle against the vice of our own will—to struggle to fulfil God’s will even as our own will rears its head. “For he who says, ‘Do not pursue your lusts...’ commanded us not to *satisfy* our lusts, but not to do without altogether. For satisfying them is wicked, but going without them is impossible in our feeble state.”¹³⁰

¹²⁶Ibid., 18.

¹²⁷Abelard, “Ethics,” 23.

¹²⁸Heloise, “Letter 2,” 54.

¹²⁹Abelard, “Ethics,” 26.

¹³⁰Ibid., 27.

Abelard proposes a scenario wherein we struggle against our vice—where we want to do something even though we know it should not be done. He gives the example of a man who sees a woman and falls into lust but curbs his desire by means of moderation, arguing that we receive our reward for such efforts, for “where does the great reward come from if there is nothing serious we put up with?”¹³¹

Heloise’s concern was that she continued to feel sexual desire, even as she was not actively satisfying it. This would imply that she succeeded, as she has not satisfied her sexual desire (since going without sexual desire altogether would be impossible for a feeble human being) but, in fact, she has not. Abelard continues, “it isn’t the lusting after a woman but the consenting to lust that is the sin. It isn’t the will to have sex with her that is damnable but the will’s consent.”¹³² According to Abelard’s definition, Heloise is certainly guilty of sin—not because she feels the vice (sexual desire) but because she continues to consent to it, and would act to fulfil it were it were possible to do so.¹³³

Abelard argues that, regardless of the outcome, as long as a person is not drawn into consent they do not fall into sin.¹³⁴ This idea of ‘the will’s consent’ forms the backbone of Abelard’s argument and separates his definition of sin from other works on the subject. It also marks a significant break with Heloise’s earlier ideas: where she had argued that intention and action must align in order for an action to be considered pure, Abelard argues that a person’s will must consent to the action for the action to be considered accomplished. The difference is subtle but, in Abelard’s hands, the implications play out in significant ways.

Consent does not necessarily result in action; indeed, it hardly matters if it does. “Someone who tries as hard as he can to go through with it is just as guilty as one who does go through with it insofar as he is able.”¹³⁵ Whether or not the action is carried through to completion, consent is “when we don’t draw back from committing it and are

¹³¹ Abelard, “Ethics,” 22.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 27.

¹³³ Heloise, “Letter 4,” 68.

¹³⁴ Abelard, “Ethics,” 28.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

wholly ready to carry it out should the opportunity arise.”¹³⁶ Whether that opportunity arises or not, “whoever is found in this condition has incurred complete guilt.”¹³⁷ Since Heloise had previously acknowledged that she felt no remorse for their affair and even wished their affair could continue—that she would have continued the affair if their reality permitted it—she has incurred this complete guilt.

This argument significantly redefines what might be considered sin and he acknowledges that his opponents may object on the grounds that the pleasure of enacting sin might somehow increase the sin.¹³⁸ He counters, proposing that God permitted many pleasures to human beings within certain bounds—the pleasure of sex within the confines of marriage, the pleasure of delicious food lawfully obtained. “If having sex with one’s wife or eating delicious food has been permitted to us... who will argue that we have sinned if we don’t go beyond the bounds of permission?”¹³⁹ If pleasure itself is not sin, then there is no reason for pleasure to worsen sin, because sin has nothing to do with pleasure. Whether the sin results in something, pleasure or otherwise, is beside the point—the issue of sin is an issue of consent. Actions, or “the carrying out of deeds,” do nothing to increase sin because “Nothing taints the soul but what belongs to it.”¹⁴⁰

Abelard argues that the consent is more important than the deed because all people are equally capable of controlling their consent: “If we look carefully, wherever deeds appear to be included under a command or prohibition, they are to be referred more to the will or the consent to the deeds than to the deeds themselves... For things less in our power are less worth commanding.”¹⁴¹ His extensive reworking of sin and pleasure incriminates Heloise rather than releasing her from guilt, but it also provides a framework for redemption. By further separating intention into vice and consent, Heloise

¹³⁶Ibid., 29.

¹³⁷Abelard, “Ethics,” 30.

¹³⁸Ibid., 35.

¹³⁹Ibid., 39.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., 48.

¹⁴¹Ibid., 51.

no longer needs to feel guilty for feeling sexual desire (a vice) and has clear direction for how to overcome her sin (no longer consenting to that sexual desire).

This idea of vice—a propensity for a specific sin—is useful in making sense of Heloise’s situation, since she had been struggling with sexual desire for years. But Abelard subdivides vice even further, into suggestion and pleasure, to explain how people may come to commit sins that were not previously their vices. Suggestions can come from an outside source—a human or demon who urges something improper. At that suggestion, pleasure occurs in the mind. Neither the suggestion nor the moment of pleasure are themselves a sin; rather, as with vice, they only become a sin if and when one approves of the pleasure—that consent licenses sin.¹⁴² These external suggestions can lead people into sins that were not previously consistent with their vices.

Here, Abelard makes a trenchant situational distinction: if a man falls into lust after seeing a woman, she is not to be held responsible for being the suggestion which led the man to consent to sin. The woman did not suggest herself; rather, the sight of the woman became un-suggested pleasure to the man, such that he alone bears the responsibility of his consent.¹⁴³ He uses Paul’s argument: these non-suggested pleasures, which come about in the course of living in this world, can hardly be blamed on another person when they are common to everyone, for God knows the limits of humans and does not allow them to be tempted beyond what they can bear.

Rather than a throwaway example, the situation Abelard describes reflects the beginning of their affair as told in the *Historia Calamitatum*: he saw Heloise, consented to the pleasure of the sin, and pursued her.¹⁴⁴ He is responsible for his own lust and consent, just as she is responsible for hers. This example in the *Ethica* directly undermines Heloise’s claim in the personal letters that she is responsible for the damage to Abelard’s reputation.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴²Abelard, “Ethics,” 69.

¹⁴³*Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁴⁴Abelard, “Historia Calamitatum,” 9-11.

¹⁴⁵Heloise, “Letter 4,” 67.

Just as his definition of vices and consent shines light on Heloise's outstanding sense of guilt over her sexual desires, his distinction of suggestion and pleasure release her from the guilt she has carried for tarnishing his reputation. She is not responsible for his sexual desire, but she remains responsible for her own. It is not enough for her to continue with her celibate appearance since, as he argued previously, her consent itself is sin whether or not actions are present.¹⁴⁶

If weight is given to actions rather than intentions, Abelard argues, then people with money could do more good and consequently attain a higher level of righteousness, but "to think... that wealth is able to contribute something... to the soul's worthiness, or to remove something from the merits of the poor, is sheer craziness."¹⁴⁷ Rather, deeds are entirely defined by the intention with which they were performed, "just as the proposition 'Socrates is sitting' (or the understanding of it) shifts between true and false according as Socrates is now sitting, now standing."¹⁴⁸ The same deed performed by the same person in two sets of circumstances may be in one instance a sin and in the other instance a virtue, depending on the intention with which the deed was performed.

Abelard argues that God cares little what actions or results arise from good or bad intentions, but judges the mind itself for the express reason that deeds "are equally common to reprobates and to the elect."¹⁴⁹ Since hypocrites are just as capable of deeds—indeed, often more capable—than saints, deeds are to be judged as good or bad according to the intention with which they were performed.¹⁵⁰ "When the intention of the one to whom the command is given doesn't depart from the will of the command-giver, the will or the action isn't to be called 'bad.'"¹⁵¹ This logic provides for the actions of hypocrites to be rightfully considered bad, as their intentions have by definition departed from fulfilling God's will as it might be understood from the Bible.

¹⁴⁶Abelard, "Ethics," 77.

¹⁴⁷Ibid., 99. This logic previously appeared in Heloise's first letter, in her arguments regarding marriage; Heloise, "Letter 2," 51-52.

¹⁴⁸Abelard, "Ethics," 106.

¹⁴⁹Ibid., 90.

¹⁵⁰Ibid.

¹⁵¹Ibid., 66.

A similar argument appeared previously in Heloise's letters, albeit serving a markedly different purpose. Heloise had argued that, since her will was to fulfil Abelard's will, not God's, it fell to Abelard to repay her according to her deeds. (In the *Ethica*, as in the personal letters, he refuses to engage with her concern directly, once again displacing that obligation to God.) She had intended her argument rather differently: since her will (as the one to whom the command was given) had not departed from his will (as the command-giver), he was responsible to repay her according to her deeds. This stems from her earlier argument that just compensation should reward a deed's intention—not the deed itself—meaning that Abelard, as the recipient of her intention, was responsible to repay her or respond in kind.¹⁵² Her understanding of justice can be expressed in a two-fold postulate: 1) that intention and action must align in order for an action to be considered pure and 2) that justice is served when the intention has been judged and rewarded appropriately.

In the *Ethica*, Abelard argues the exact opposite. He undercuts her postulate from the first sentence, presenting an almost identical assumption as his rhetorical straw-man: "there are people who suppose an intention is good or right whenever someone believes that he is acting well."¹⁵³ This, he argues, is nonsense, for even those who persecuted the martyrs believed they were doing God's will.¹⁵⁴ It does not matter if a person acts with pure intentions if what they are doing with pure intentions is, in fact, morally wrong. This, of course, relies on the existence of an external, perfect standard against which morality can be measured, rendering it philosophically satisfying but hardly applicable to daily life.

Heloise's argument was a simple one born out of life experience: that a person should be repaid if they meant well. By introducing God as the measurer of objective morality, Abelard problematizes Heloise's argument: "an intention isn't to be called good because it *appears* good, but more than that, because it *is* such as it is considered to

¹⁵²Heloise, "Letter 2," 53.

¹⁵³Abelard, "Ethics," 107.

¹⁵⁴*Ibid.*

be.”¹⁵⁵ No longer is an intention good simply because a person meant well—that intention itself must be objectively good according to some objective, external standard. Here, as in other places, Abelard runs across the limits of pure philosophy; namely, that the requirements of philosophy are not the same as the requirements of real life. Where Heloise’s argument was crafted from and suited to the issues of real life, Abelard’s argument functions in a purely philosophical sense.

Abelard moves from redefining sin to redefining the method of dealing with sin: penitence. He begins by separating sin into two categories: venial/light sins and serious/damnable sins.¹⁵⁶ Having previously argued that deeds add nothing to the severity of sin, he justifies this categorization by arguing that venial sins are “when we consent to what we know isn’t to be consented to, but yet what we know doesn’t come up in memory at the time”¹⁵⁷—essentially errors of judgement or forgetfulness rather than purposeful disobedience—while serious sins “are known through their result... for example, consents to perjury, homicide and adultery.”¹⁵⁸

He proposes that these types of sins require different methods of penitence. Repeating the words of daily confession is enough to merit forgiveness for venial sins—indeed, such is the purpose of daily confession—but he argues that there is no place in daily confession for serious sins. “We shouldn’t say [in daily confession], ‘I have sinned by perjury, homicide, adultery...’ We certainly don’t rush into *these* on account of forgetfulness... instead, we commit them so to speak by design and out of deliberation.”¹⁵⁹ These serious sins are the ones usually understood to require serious atonement, for example punishment by the church or heavy abstinence.¹⁶⁰ But if sin is defined by intention, rather than by deeds, then neither can atonement come through deeds—just as Heloise lamented in her second letter. Repentance for a sin must be fitting of the sin that was committed.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹⁵⁶ Abelard, “Ethics,” 134.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 135.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 137.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 136.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 135.

Thus, venial sins are forgiven through daily confession but serious sins, requiring serious atonement, must be resolved by other means. Abelard pays little attention to external actions of penitence, being interested in penitence of the heart. Instead, he argues that serious sins must be resolved through penitence but, once again, he separates penitence into two categories: fruitful penitence and unfruitful penitence.¹⁶¹ In both cases, the sinner is moved to sorrow and mental contrition, but where unfruitful penitence might be moved by fear of judgement, fruitful penitence is moved by love for God. Fruitful penitence observes the kindness of God and feels the full weight of sins committed in the face of his love.¹⁶²

This fruitful penitence is the appropriate method of repenting for sins of intention. Abelard argues that sin cannot continue to exist alongside the sorrow and mental contrition of true penitence. “For God’s charity, which inspires this groaning, is incompatible with any fault. In this groaning we are at once reconciled with God and obtain forgiveness for the preceding sin.”¹⁶³ Sin cannot coexist with this kind of penitence, driven as it is by the love of God.¹⁶⁴ He notes, however, that this penitence must be absolute and lasting: if a person relapses into the same scorn, “then just as he goes back to sinning, so too he will revert to the debt of the penalty so that he, who by repenting earlier earned his not being punished, ought to be punished once more.”¹⁶⁵ It is a serious understanding and performance of repentance that makes the difference and is fruitful—one that cannot be performed in a perfunctory way.

The fruitful penitence he proposes offers something of a solution to Heloise’s problem of hypocrisy. Their correspondence indicates that she has been living in the vice of her sexual desire for years, without being able to repent. Abelard issues a warning that the longer one lives in sin, scorning God, the greater the retribution they bring on themselves.¹⁶⁶ He similarly appeals to Paul, cautioning against hardness of

¹⁶¹Abelard, “Ethics,” 164.

¹⁶²*Ibid.*, 164.

¹⁶³*Ibid.*, 165.

¹⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 167.

¹⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 169.

¹⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 161.

heart.¹⁶⁷ It is possible that he feared for Heloise who, Levitan notes, “never retracted what she wrote in any of her letters. There is no hint of a conversion of her devotion from Abelard to God. If she remained silent about her suffering after the Third Letter, it was because it was Abelard's order.”¹⁶⁸ Abelard has repeatedly expressed his desire for Heloise to turn to God, and here he expresses his fear and what could result should she continue to refuse.

At the conclusions of these arguments regarding sin, hypocrisy, and penitence, Abelard proceeds to book two, of which very little remains either because he did not write it or it is now lost. Unlike book one, which was designed to help its readers identify and rectify sins, book two's self-stated purpose is to teach how to do good on that foundation. Just as book one's warnings to repent may have been directed at Heloise, so too the admonitions of book two.

The problem here is that Abelard's argument—assuming he intended for it to be applied to Heloise—once again fails to be practically applicable. He expands the biblical argument that God does not allow anyone to be tempted beyond what they can bear, adding “He doesn't try people with calamities whom he regards as timid or weak.”¹⁶⁹ With this, he implies that Heloise is not facing anything she cannot overcome—God has ordained that she can overcome or he would not have allowed her to be tempted. Therefore, he may be suggesting these temptations are suitable for her; they are appropriate training, equipping her to achieve spiritual victory in this life. Indeed, Abelard explicitly argues that God turns temptations into opportunities: temptations are simply exercises, training us to overcome the enemy so that we no longer fear his attacks.¹⁷⁰ Rather than a useful solution to Heloise's problems, he offers only empty words of spiritual encouragement, entirely lacking substance or practicality.

These exhortations exemplify the first of the *Ethica's* two systematic weaknesses: Abelard's entire argument is dependant on the tenants of his religion. To

¹⁶⁷Ibid.

¹⁶⁸Levitan, *Letters and Other Writings*, xxiv.

¹⁶⁹Abelard, “Ethics,” 231.

¹⁷⁰Ibid., 73.

him, good intentions are those that align with God's will and sexual desire is simply a vice that can be overcome with God's help. His argument cannot function properly in the real world, where God's will is rarely obvious and God's help cannot be physically observed. Additionally, since his solutions rely on God's grace, they cannot be abstracted and applied elsewhere.

Abelard's solution to the problem of vices highlights the *Ethica's* other weakness: Abelard was writing about vices he no longer experienced. Heloise, as a healthy young woman, had physical desires that continued whether she wanted them to or not—that physicality was, to a degree, beyond her control. Abelard, as they both recognized, had been lucky in his castration since his sexual drive had abated. Yet throughout the *Ethica*, Abelard seems to be making the argument that Heloise (and, indeed, anyone) is fully capable of overcoming human vices (including but not limited to sexual desire) by sheer force of will. In this, he failed to meet Heloise at her own level. His final formulation of intentionality was extra-human, like Abelard himself.

Yet even his final formulation of intentionality is necessarily unfinished, appearing in an unfinished work. The *Ethica* shares enough common material with Heloise's letters to indicate it was written with her concerns in mind, at the very least. This begs the question: if the *Ethica* was written in response to Heloise's letters, why did Abelard wait so long to write it? If written to help Heloise, then it was cruel of him not to finish it and to relieve her suffering, her great complaint. Unless, perhaps, the *Ethica* appears both late and unfinished because Abelard was never able to develop a comprehensive solution or complete a satisfactory treatise .

Abelard's advice in the *Ethica* echoes his advice in the personal letters—that is, that the method to overcoming human temptation is to rely on God.¹⁷¹ His argument has not progressed. Abelard does his best to address Heloise's concerns and solve her problems, but the work in its unfinished form is unable to provide a practical solution, relying only on abstract ideals that are nothing short of impossibilities in the context of real life.

¹⁷¹Abelard, "Ethics," 72.

Abelard's work might be widely applicable as a philosophical treatise, but the specificity with which it addresses the concerns of Heloise's letters is remarkable, such that the connectedness of their works cannot be disregarded. If, as I have suggested, Abelard wrote the *Ethica* with Heloise in mind, then his work must be necessarily understood as derivative of hers, rather than the genesis of the doctrine.

When taken in isolation, the *Ethica* is a problematic and confusing doctrine, developed in a vacuum and unrelated to any of Abelard's other works. When provided the context of Heloise's earlier ideas on intention, however, it fits neatly alongside the other works Abelard wrote for her and the Paraclete: it was his answer, albeit abstracted and philosophically impersonal, to the unresolved problem Heloise had left him at the end of the personal letters. Heloise, then, was the essential inventor and framer of the doctrine of intentionality, which the *Ethica* made famous.

Chapter 8.

Intention in the Love Letters: an Excursus

Constant Mews and others have proposed and many have agreed that an anonymous collection of fragments of twelfth-century love letters were actually written by Abelard and Heloise during the course of the affair itself.¹⁷² The authenticity of the love letters remains hotly contested; as a result of this dispute, I have founded my argument essentially in the *Historia Calamitatum* and personal letters, with these love letters separated out and treated only now as a potential source but not a necessary one. used in a qualified manner alongside the other sources. The tradition of the love letters refers to its own authors simply as “the woman” and “the man,” an identification that I will preserve to acknowledge the tentative nature of the Abelard and Heloise’s identifications and to protect the validity of my argument in the event that authenticity of the love letters is ever conclusively disproven.

My interest in the love letters is predominantly linguistic. Like many other words whose meaning we presently take for granted, the meaning of the word “intention” developed over time and was not standardized at the time of the love letters.¹⁷³ The love letters employ the Latin word *intencio* or *intentio* and related terms with unusual frequency given their supposed date and, notably, the woman correspondent shows greater interest in ideas of intention than the man.

It is necessary to note that the love letters hardly constitute a completed body of work. The collection itself is choppy and the bodies of the first letters are entirely lost,

¹⁷²See P. E. Dutton and Suzanne Marchand, *Many Europes* (New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, 2014) 265 for a synopsis of the controversy over the lost love letters.

¹⁷³J. F. Niermeyer, *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus* (Brill, 2004), 548-549 provides several medieval meanings for *intencio*, listing “aim, purpose, intent” as the primary definition.

with the letters reduced to their greetings. Given these limitations, it would be overly ambitious to make any claims based exclusively on the evidence of the letters as they survive today. The appearance of intention in the love letters, however, is of some interest in light of evidence previously discussed in the personal letters.

Intencio (and its various permutations) appear a total of nine times in the love letters—twice in the letters of the man and seven times in the letters of the woman—and its appearance can be grouped into three main categories. The first two of these categories are conversations which are sparked by the man’s use of *intencio* in letters 22 and 72; the third category is marked by the woman’s more vague use of the word in a few very late letters.

While the man and woman use the word in slightly different senses, their ideas and understanding of intention follow a trajectory of development over the course of these three sets of usage. Notably, while the man is responsible for first bringing the idea of intention into their conversation, the woman is responsible for developing the idea behind the word through new usage in different contexts. That is, the meaning of the word is developed by the woman over the course of the love letters in response to the events unfolding therein as she struggles to find the words to express her thoughts and feelings regarding both the man and the situations they face together. After briefly examining the difference in meaning employed by the man and the woman, we will delve into the progression of the word as it occurs over the three categories of usage.

For the man, “intention” is a dialectical nomen directly related to the ways words are used; for the woman it takes a much looser form which develops over the course of the letters. Between the two of them, the word is variously associated with three disparate definitions as follows: 1) a precise dialectical concept (usage by the man), 2) the more familiar notion of a specific will or purpose behind a decision or action (by the woman), 3) the phrases “intention of my mind” and “intention of my heart” used in later

letters to express purposeful thoughts or emotions which are necessarily divorced from action (by the woman).¹⁷⁴

As previously mentioned, the man only uses the word intention twice, in letters 22 and 72. In other cases he favours *uoluntas*, which he uses to discuss his will or purpose in cases where such usage deviates from the precise definition of *intencio* as related to words. The woman uses *intencio* on seven occasions, primarily in two exchanges stemming directly from the man's preceding use of the word. As the man shifts away from the word *intencio* in favour of *uoluntas* as a means of expressing his will, so too does the woman shift to favour the phrases "intention of my mind" and "intention of my heart," perhaps a specification or clarification on her part.

The word is introduced into their correspondence as a means of conveying the very difficulty of conveying their true purposes to one another. From the beginning of the letters, both the man and the woman regularly express their love for one another in beautiful and elevated Latin. This results in an unexpected complication: as their relationship grows more serious, they lack the words to match their emotional and intellectual states. Consequently, the man introduces the word *intencio* in letter 22 at the height of his passion for her, claiming "to others I address my words, to you my intention."¹⁷⁵ According to the precise definition of the word, he uses it to express the difference between words and their meanings. Words can themselves be separated from supposed meaning behind their use, but the man claims that in addressing the woman he addresses not simply the words of love but also their related meaning—possibly an attempt to convince his lover of his utter sincerity and to seal the deal. In the elevated language of the love letters, he means to say that his words of love are true.

The context of this initial use should not be overlooked: the man introduces this notion of intention in the early, private stages of their affair as a means of persuading her to carry on with him. He is not immediately successful, as the woman notes his use of

¹⁷⁴Constant Mews, *The lost love letters of Heloise and Abelard: perceptions of dialogue in twelfth-century France* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).

¹⁷⁵The Man, "Letter 22," in *The lost love letters of Heloise and Abelard: perceptions of dialogue in twelfth-century France*, trans. Constant Mews and Neville Chiavaroli (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 229.

the word and in her next several letters uses it to press him for his purposes in pursuing her.

The first of these letters is letter 23—her initial response to his assertion of intention—where her use of *intencio* appears to suggest a similar meaning of purpose disconnected from words: “Where does the unthinking intention of your hasty spirit throw you? Do you begin to speak mighty words, though you are unskilled and have unrefined lips?”¹⁷⁶ Her use of *incencio*, however, lacks the simple precision of the man’s preceding use and as a consequence functions on multiple levels.

On the surface, she engages with the fundamental paradox of *intencio* as related to words: she struggles to find the proper words to convey her intentions even as she must convey that intention to the man by means of words. Furthermore, her association of intention with the spirit likens the disconnection between intention and words to the disconnection between the spirit and body and marks the beginning of her deviation from the precise meaning of *intencio* into the secondary meaning of a will or purpose behind a decision or action. The “unthinking intention” of her “hasty spirit” results not in words, but in actions. Finally, unlike the man, her use of *intencio* is not an assertion of her intentions but rather the problematization of them. She points out the many ways in which she is lacking in an unarticulated comparison to him and raises the question of what she is hoping to accomplish by engaging in this affair.

Indeed I know and admit that from the treasures of your philosophy the greatest amount of joys [sic] have flown and still flow over me, but, if I may speak freely, still less than what would make me perfectly happy in this regard. For I often come with parched throat longing... to drink thirstily the riches scattered in your heart.¹⁷⁷

As a result of the affair, she has gained both his physical love (in person) and the treasure of his philosophy (through letters). She considers them joys but longs for

¹⁷⁶The Woman, “Letter 23,” 231.

¹⁷⁷Ibid.

something deeper—his heart—and so she wants to know the intention not only of his words, but of his actions. Her final words express not love but rather a desire to love him, as if that love cannot be achieved without his compliance, and her final poetic farewell requests he take her concerns seriously.¹⁷⁸ His philosophy pleases her, but philosophy alone is not enough; she wants his true heart.

The man's response is both clever and shallow: "Love is therefore a particular force of the soul, existing not for itself nor content by itself, but always pouring itself into another...wanting to become one with the other, so that from two distinct wills one is produced without difference."¹⁷⁹ He addresses each of her concerns with related ideas and in so doing successfully avoids addressing her concerns directly. Where she spoke of the spirit, he speaks of the soul. Where she spoke of the heart, he speaks of love. Where she spoke of intention, he speaks of will.

In the case of spirit and soul, the corresponding Latin words *animus* and *anima* are used to different effect. The woman used *animus* as a metaphor problematizing the disparity between her spirit (intention) and the actions of her body; the man used *anima* as a philosophical wellspring of an intangible force. The woman spoke of her longing for his heart and her desire to love him as a means of presenting an incomplete love lacking the unity of intention and action; by speaking of love as a force rather than an action, the man avoids addressing the relationship between action and intention. The woman redefined *intencio* because she needed a word to express the disconnect between purpose and result; the man substitutes the precisely defined *uoluntas* and avoids addressing that distinction. The end result of these various substitutions is a philosophical response which addresses each of her concerns even as it fails to address their intentions.

The man presents their love as a force apart from intention, formed from the overflowing of the soul and destined to become united. That is, his response to the

¹⁷⁸"I declare that there is no one in this world breathing life-giving air whom I desire to love more than you. May this farewell, my beloved, sweetly penetrate your inner marrow." ¹⁷⁸The Woman, "Letter 23," 231.

¹⁷⁹The Man, "Letter 24," 233. This statement echoes Abelard's known philosophical disagreement with William of Champeux on the question of universals.

woman's confession that "the treasures of [his] philosophy" alone cannot make her "perfectly happy" is entirely philosophical and fails to address her key concerns as it elucidates nothing of his intentions.¹⁸⁰

The woman is quick to point out the problems of his response, as in letter 25 where she notes "our spirit fluctuates according to how your affairs turn out."¹⁸¹ Rather than two wills becoming one by "always pouring [themselves] into [each] other," in practice he determines the nature and tenor of their relationship.¹⁸² This is the exact problem she sought to address with *intencio* in letter 23: their relationship is not a relationship of equals, and she wants to know his intentions as the more powerful party. Just as the man once substituted will (*uoluntas*) for intention (*intencio*), she now substitutes spirit or mind (*animus*) for will (*uoluntas*)—their love is not a unified, purposeful will but a changeable spirit blown by his passions. Their affair is centred on the man's will and the woman wants to know the intentions behind that will. The man, however, again fails to address her questions about intention in letter 26, and by letter 28 their affair has been made public and the topic of their conversation changes direction.

They do not return to the idea of intention for some time. Now physically separated, letter 72 ends with the man's promise that he "will tenaciously persist with the same intention towards you."¹⁸³ The woman's response in letter 73 takes the form of a love poem praising the man's worth, but the direction changes abruptly in letter 74 as the man suddenly apologizes for having offended her: "That remark was empty; it meant nothing and had no weight."¹⁸⁴ (We have no way of knowing what remark it was that offended her – either he wrote her a letter than is now lost or said something to her in person that upset her.) He writes to her twice—lamenting the failure of words—before she

¹⁸⁰The Woman, "Letter 23," 231.

¹⁸¹The Woman, "Letter 25," 235.

¹⁸²The Man, "Letter 24," 233.

¹⁸³The Man, "Letter 72," 277.

¹⁸⁴The Man, "Letter 74," 279.

writes back and the second usage of *intencio* begins in earnest: “My intention has decided this: that further conflict between us should cease.”¹⁸⁵

When he first introduced the idea of intention, she pressed him to express his intentions in pursuing the affair with her, but this time she takes the opposite approach. Here, her intention is decisive and her steadfast love no longer begs reciprocation: “never think that I am troubling your soul with such uncertainty.”¹⁸⁶ Whether he expresses his intentions or not, whether he offends her with words or not, whether she responds to his letters or not—her intention has been decided. He need not worry about her devotion.

The man expresses his relief in the next two letters, whereupon the woman responds with what is essentially a continuation of the new approach to intention she introduced in letter 76. She uses *intencio* twice in letter 79; the first of these is a direct juxtaposition to her original concerns. “If through reflection a person’s inner intention conceives anything great, it is often not brought to fruition without a certain external force.”¹⁸⁷ Earlier letters had problematized the disconnect between intentions and actions, but here she acknowledges that her intentions towards him would not have been fulfilled in reality if he had not acted to initiate the affair.

The woman’s understanding of intention has developed with their relationship. In the beginning, she pressed him for his intentions because his intentions could not be ascertained from his actions alone. Now, however, as Heloise suggests in the personal letters, “the end is proof of the beginning.”¹⁸⁸ After everything they have been through, she can acknowledge the validity of his intentions by means of his actions. His actions have proven his intentions; actions themselves have value. As a consequence, her use of *intencio* shifts away from problematizing the disconnection between intention and action and instead becomes used as a means of self-reflection.

¹⁸⁵The Woman, “Letter 76,” 281.

¹⁸⁶The Woman, “Letter 76,” 281.

¹⁸⁷The Woman, “Letter 79,” 283.

¹⁸⁸Heloise, “Letter 2,” 54.

Her second use of *intencio* reaffirms the link between intention and words: “For a long time... I have considered how I should address you... but the difficulty of expected failures has so far defied the intention of my feelings.”¹⁸⁹ According to the precise definition of *intencio*, she has struggled to find the words to express her purposes. However, her use of *intencio* extends beyond the problem of words and their meanings: she has struggled to find the words to express the feelings behind her intentions. In letter 76 she forgave him for causing offence; now she reflects on that decision and recognizes she has not always been able to express her feelings in an exact way.

In the past, when he angered or offended her, she stopped writing to him rather than expressing the problems of her feelings. Now she recognizes that her actions are driven by purposes which are tied to feelings, and she has done him a disservice. She failed to express the purposes of her actions because those feelings are difficult to express in words. The man expresses a similar struggle in letter 85, though he does so without the use of *intencio*.¹⁹⁰

In later letters, the man returns to the word *uoluntas* as a means of acknowledging his will when it is inadequately expressed by his words.¹⁹¹ The woman favours the phrases “intention of my mind” and “intention of my heart” as a means of expressing the purposeful thoughts or emotions she feels for him even as those purposes are divorced from action.¹⁹² This appears to be her solution to the problem she originally presented. Intention and action are separate in her mind. In the early letters, she problematized the dissociation of intention and action because she could not determine the man’s intentions from his actions; now, she commits her intentions to him even in situations where actions cannot result. Intention is still tied to action, but it can also exist on its own.

¹⁸⁹The Woman, “Letter 79,” 283.

¹⁹⁰The Man, “Letter 85,” 289.

¹⁹¹For example, “If the words that I send seem to be somewhat fewer than you desire, consider not the words but the will (*uoluntas*) of the sender.” The Man, “Letter 89,” 295.

¹⁹²See “Letter 88,” “Letter 102,” “Letter 104.”

In conclusion, the word *intencio* would seem to have been originally introduced into the love letters by the man, but the woman is the one who takes an interest in the word and experiments with its meaning for her and her developing personal philosophy. The meaning of the word develops over the course of the love letters in response to the various situations they encounter. If the love letters are, in fact, by Abelard and Heloise, then their respective usages of the word *intencio* demonstrate a difference of usage as early as the formative stage of their relationship. They would also help to make the case that Heloise seized on intention as a way to understand her relationship with Abelard and drove forward the couple's thoughts about intentionality. A word that Abelard had used almost incidentally twice in these letters was to become the cornerstone of Heloise's philosophy of life, personal relationships, and Abelard. She would almost more than ever be the architect of intentionality, even if it led her into a moral cul-de-sac of self-accusations of hypocrisy and failure.

Chapter 9.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I have focussed on tracing the ideas of intentionality in Abelard and Heloise's correspondence—how and where those ideas first appeared and were developed. In fact, those ideas are shared between them. Both Abelard and Heloise demonstrated an awareness of intentionality in their respective writings and used it to various ends, but while the doctrine of intentionality became the central preoccupation of Heloise's letters, Abelard displayed little sustained interest in the idea until the production of his treatise.

Heloise seized on intentionality as a means of justifying the decisions they had made in their lives, viewing it as a possible solution to the problems of love and intention that had arisen as a consequence of their affair and its aftermath—problems that, in the wake of Abelard's castration, were especially pertinent to her. It is true that they developed the doctrine together; that is, the doctrine was developed in the context of their relationship, but it was Heloise who made efforts to ensure that her intentions were properly understood and it was Heloise who agonized over her failure to live according to intentionality as a doctrine.

From her very first letter, she displayed an acute interest in the subject and her engagement with it only deepened as their correspondence progressed. Years before Abelard demonstrated any serious interest in the topic she was repeatedly raising the issue, grappling with its implications and pressing him to do the same. Abelard, for his part, did little to engage with these ideas until he turned to the *Ethica*. The *Ethica*, however, can be understood in the following light: rather than relying exclusively on his own ideas, Abelard worked out the specifics of an idea that had been developed in the context of his relationship with Heloise.

As previously noted, Heloise's letters and Abelard's *Ethica* share too many common concerns for the similarity to be disregarded. If we acknowledge Heloise's letters as context, the appearance of the *Ethica* no longer seems sudden, but rather late and overdue. When read as a response to Heloise's letters, it makes perfect sense in the context of Abelard's other writings: the *Ethica* was yet another tool he provided for Heloise and the Paraclete. Thus, if the *Ethica* was indeed intended as a response to Heloise's work, or at least written with her in mind, then Heloise's letters are necessarily understood as the foundation for his doctrine and its problematization, rendering her the original architect of the idea.

The doctrine of intentionality is exclusively credited to Abelard as it can only be examined in depth through the lens of his *Ethica*, but it fails to reflect Heloise's foundational concerns. That is, the doctrine resulted from their shared life experience, but Abelard and Heloise used it very differently. Fundamentally, Heloise's was a psychological problem, Abelard's an abstract philosophical one. As a result, Heloise's use of intention—while underdeveloped—was a more realistic and complex approximation of behaviour.

For Heloise, intentionality was a practical doctrine, invented and utilized as a means of making sense of her life when it did not unfold the way she might have expected or desired. At each of the three critical moments (their affair, marriage, and entry into monastic life), Heloise made decisions that went against her own will: compelled by Abelard, she acted apart from her own intentions. The doctrine of intentionality provided an avenue for her to process those decisions in their aftermath, reflecting on them deeply in a way that was not necessary for Abelard, whose intentions were never crossed.

Abelard took these practical ideas and, in the *Ethica*, shaped them into a philosophical doctrine divorced from the real-life concerns that drove Heloise to develop them in the first place. After the castration, Abelard occupied a different physical and head space from Heloise—she was in the world and he was not. His treatment of intentionality reflects this difference: he was no longer able to relate to the problems of the flesh. His castration, in some ways, made him less human or no longer sharing the

full range of human desires, that still haunted Heloise. Since she used intentionality to deal with very human concerns that he could not share, his treatment of intentionality was necessarily unlike hers.

Abelard's treatment of intentionality was abstract where hers was practical, relying heavily on intangible religious ideals and indefinite outcomes. The complexity of real life decision-making was simplified according to religious principles, where good and bad were indistinguishable from God's will and not God's will. Such ethics, however, are essentially impossible to apply in practice, where human beings are ethical agents independent of God. Heloise's ethics, then, might be considered the more modern or at least more humanistic of the two, arising from real life experience as a means of dealing with that reality. Abelard's, while more fully developed, are not as useful.

In the end, Abelard and Heloise's lived experiences of intentionality are tragically ironic. Following Abelard's castration, both their paths and thinking diverged. Abelard became a less spirited, conventional thinker (albeit still a brilliant one) while Heloise held to her human dilemma; Abelard yielded to orthodoxy while Heloise continued to doubt its premises, yet the world ironically spurned Abelard and held Heloise in high esteem. Heloise succumbed to Abelard's pressure and lived an outwardly praiseworthy life in opposition to her own intentions. Abelard, on the other hand, continued to be condemned as a heretic even when his thinking shifted to the side of conventional. Heloise's refusal to succumb to external pressures rendered her the bolder thinker and breaker of convention.

Neither Abelard nor Heloise fit easily into their time and its cultural expectations, but Heloise's desires, especially, were an impossibility in the context of their world. She was, perhaps, even more unconventional than him. Intentionality may have arisen as the result of their shared experience, but Heloise was the one who demonstrated a genuine desire to make sense of the problem of intention, repeatedly returning to the question in her letters and pressing Abelard to engage with her on the basis of a shared ethical philosophy. While she did not develop it to the point that it could be considered a fully formed doctrine on its own, surely she merits credit for the genesis and problematizing of the idea.

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