2010

Agape and Personal Knowledge

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AGAPE AND PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN PHILOSOPHY

BY
PETER E. BERGERON
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
MAY 2010
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people who contributed to the successful completion of my dissertation and I am grateful for the opportunity to thank as many as I can. I will start with the professors in the Philosophy Department at Loyola University Chicago who served on my dissertation committee. Dr. Patricia Huntington, prior to taking a position at Arizona State University, offered helpful comments and criticism on early drafts of material some of which made it into the final document. Dr. David Yandell graciously accepted to become a member of my committee to fill the vacancy resulting from Dr. Huntington's departure. Dr. Tom Carson offered both strong encouragement and guidance at key points in the writing process. Lastly, I would like to thank my dissertation chair, Dr. Paul Moser. Early in my time at Loyola he was instrumental in securing for me a teaching assistantship that made my attendance here possible. Having known each other for the past 12 years, his encouragement and influence spans both the personal and professional spheres of my life. I am especially grateful for the many hours of conversation we have shared over the years. Not to be overlooked is the way he welcomed and entertained my young daughters on those occasions when they had to tag along with me to Loyola. He also regularly directed me to incredibly rich resources that I expect to return to again and again in the years ahead.
Before I express my gratitude to my wife and daughters I want to thank those who supported our marriage and family life during my work on the dissertation. In particular, I would like to thank my Mom and Dad - Richard and Louise Bergeron, my in-laws Russ and Pat Harris, my brothers John and Paul Bergeron, Ric Hudgens, Dale and Martha Cooper, David Hovde, Tom and Carey Smith, Bethany Cook, Greg Ten Elshof, Glen and Barb Shelly, Eloise Davis, Dan and Emily Coyne, John and Mary Thomson, Jon and Amy Potter, Virgil Vogt, Sally Youngquist, and Matt and Fawn Bradley. A special thank you must be extended to John and Debbie Cook who patiently and sensitively walked with us through some incredibly difficult stuff and who continue to love and befriend us.

I also received many timely words of encouragement and other forms of support that helped sustain me and my writing efforts over the past six years. For these things I want to thank the community of Reba Place Church especially Mike Buren, Greg Clark, Helen Hudgens, Aaron and Grete Scott, Tom Roddy, Hilda Carper, Phil Carlsen, Charlotte Lehman, Jeff Brabham, Mark Nielsen, Roselyn Wilson, Rachel Hudgens, Johnmark Hatfield, Daniel Stutz, Nancy Bedford, Mike Iverson, David Lottich, and our many young friends there including the Sunday afternoon ultimate-frisbee gang. The encouragement of Dr. Jessica Horowitz at Loyola’s Graduate School during the final year and a half of this project was also crucial to its completion. I must also extend further thanks to Tom Smith for his friendship over the past 22 years. We met while guiding wilderness trips for Summit Adventure in the Sierra Nevada Mountains of California. His companionship has been one of the great gifts in my life. He
neither wavered in his encouragement nor in his conviction that I could get this thing done.

Most importantly I would like to thank my wife Susanne and our daughters Briana and Callie. I am both humbled and gladdened by the eagerness in which both of my daughters willingly share their lives with me. It is a joy to receive their trust and affection. I am grateful to Susanne for many things. I admire her adventurousness that led her to Montana where we first met, the steadfast and gracious way she provides for our family's material needs through her work as a physical therapist, and the joyful manner in which she provided unflagging support and confidence in me throughout my work on this project. Mostly, I am thankful for her willingness to embark on a journey of discovery with me to learn how to nurture and sustain an intimate friendship in our marriage.
For Susanne
and our daughters
Callie and Briana
For to embrace is the necessity of our deepest being.

George MacDonald
“Love Thine Enemy”
Unspoken Sermons, First Series, 1867
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ABSTRACT

The aim of this dissertation is to explore the connection between love and personal knowledge and what Jesus’ life and teaching reveal about the relationship between these. I want to distinguish that form of love or caring that makes relationships personal from those forms, like beneficence or compassion, where the concern is impersonal. It is commonly thought in contemporary Western culture that the autonomy necessary for mature moral agency or for the realization of one’s unique personal identity is diminished by the influence of other persons. In contrast, I argue that the relational image of love, or agape, in the New Testament presents a conception of personal identity in which autonomy is found in and through intimate, personal relationships with God and others. Our identity is ultimately personal, that is, we are not fully who we are apart from being in relationships with others that are personal. A fresh examination of the New Testament image of love reveals a portrait of the self as one in which the capacities essential for personhood such as autonomy are not diminished through identification with God but instead are most fully realized. I argue that this identification involves a personal form of caring, one that is distinctly intimate, that when mutual constitutes a personal form of knowing. This personal knowledge is constituted by a particular pattern of engagement between persons and is more than the intellectual apprehension of propositions that are true about another person. I argue that directly engaging the New Testament as a part of
philosophical project is justified, in part, because adequately describing the moral character of this love requires a narrative. Only a story or exemplar can image in depth the volitional, desiderative, and emotional qualities of this love as well as its relational character. Moreover, I argue that joy is an essential emotional and desiderative component of this love and is necessary for intimate, personal knowing. I argue that this kind of personal knowing is capable of addressing the existential problem of meaning. On this account the human hunger for meaning, or significance, is one that finds its satisfaction not in theoretical or explanatory knowledge but in intimate, personal engagement with God and, through God, with others.
CHAPTER ONE
PERSONAL KNOWING: A BEGINNING

Introduction

The aim of this dissertation is to explore the connection between love and personal knowledge and what Jesus’ life and teaching reveal about the relationship between these. I want to distinguish that form of love or caring that makes relationships personal from those forms, like benevolence or compassion, where the concern is impersonal. It is commonly thought in contemporary Western culture that the autonomy necessary for mature moral agency or for the realization of one's unique personal identity is diminished by the influence of other persons. In contrast, I argue that the relational image of love, or agape, in the New Testament presents a conception of personal identity in which autonomy is found in and through intimate, personal relationships with God and others. Our identity is ultimately personal, that is, we are not fully who we are apart from being in relationships with others that are personal. A fresh examination of the New Testament image of love reveals a portrait of the self as one in which the capacities essential for personhood such as autonomy are not diminished through identification with God but instead are most fully realized. I argue that this identification involves a personal form of caring, one that is distinctly intimate, that when mutual constitutes a personal form of knowing. This personal knowledge is constituted by a particular pattern of engagement between persons.
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**Overview of Dissertation**

In Chapter One I present the claim that we have a need for intimate, personal knowing. I present a broad range of personal testimonies and also recent empirical research from psychology and neuroscience that supports the view that joy-filled intimate relationships are a basic human need. This claim provides the occasion to surface the concern that intimate relationships, whether with others or God, involves a form of dependency that diminishes the autonomy necessary for mature moral agency and the realization of one's unique personal identity. I rely on the work of Ernest Becker to articulate this concern that forms one of the core problems this dissertation seeks to address. The New Testament presents a vision of the human person in which autonomy is rooted in intimate
relationships with God and others. Given that direct engagement with the New Testament is not a typical part of philosophic discourse I begin to provide justification for such engagement. I argue that questions about how to live and what constitutes a vibrant life do not fit neatly into one academic discipline. Answering these questions involves searching for images that depict a vision of “what we might do and be” that fit our deepest aspirations and experiences as a person.¹ I introduce the idea that narratives, that is, stories and exemplars, are indispensable for moral discourse because such forms are capable of capturing moral insights and a vision of what constitutes a good life in ways that abstract theoretical writing cannot.

In Chapter Two I begin to identify a proper method, or mode of discourse, for exploring moral and personal knowledge as well as to identify a space where such discourse can occur. There is a need to make room for engaging images and exemplars that can appeal to aspirations of what we might do and be. This need for room arises because of the standard for examination and explanation that is set by the sciences. Some argue that science is the path to knowledge and that other efforts at securing knowledge are not merely substandard but irrelevant. I argue that this account shields us from some important limitations concerning scientific knowledge. I identify the limitations of the experimental sciences to address issues of ultimate concern such as the character of the good life or of life's meaning. These limitations are identified in order to help define the scope of the sciences; they are not presented as an argument against the

¹ Martha Nussbaum, Love's Knowledge, p. 29.
reliability of the sciences.

In this chapter I also examine another method of gathering knowledge that is employed by the sciences that is called an inference to the best available explanation or abduction. Philosophy also employs abduction in its efforts to discover and develop the best, or most fitting, explanation of the full range of human experience. Broad explanationism is the name philosophers give to the view that our fundamental explanatory goals should guide how we regulate our beliefs. This chapter argues for a form of modest explanationism. It is modest in that it emphasizes the important role of personal judgment in gathering knowledge about issues of ultimate concern. When it comes to differences between persons concerning such issues we cannot demonstrate which of two competing accounts is better than another merely by appealing to an account’s explanatory power. I will provide the reasons for this while showing where there remains an important, though modest, role for explanatory power.

I also examine in this second chapter Tolstoy's religious writings to establish the significance of the limitations of both the experimental sciences and abduction. His testimony invites us to consider that we have a need for knowledge found within what Pascal identifies as the personal order. He gives witness to a hunger for something more than explanatory knowledge. Tolstoy, as do many people, wants to know what, if anything, matters. He writes of a haunting sense of insignificance, aloneness, and a demand for moral perfection coupled with a sense of moral failure. He testifies to finding within himself an all-consuming demand to answer the question – Why do I exist? I argue that he is
seeking a kind of knowledge that neither the empirical methodologies of the sciences nor abduction can provide. In addition, I argue that his writing models the character of discourse or conversation that best fits these issues of ultimate concern. I return to these arguments and develop each more fully in Chapter Five.

In Chapter Three I explore further how reason, as an inferential process, cannot inform us of what it is important to know. I argue that reason is inescapably emotional because emotion is that which stands directly behind personal activity and determines the substance and direction of our actions. The impulse to act in accord with reality, that is, to be responsive to reality, is our impulse to rationality. It is an objective impulse. It is regularly overwhelmed by subjective impulses. For example, our anxiety and fear of pain often lead us to fabricate and embrace self-consoling fantasies, which in turn urge us to force reality to serve our own selfish interests. This struggle between the impulse to act in terms of the world and the impulse to favor self without regard to reality is one that is centered in emotion. This is not a struggle between reason and emotion, but rather one where one emotional stance or attitude is affirmed over another. I argue that apprehending the world involves learning how to act in terms of the world, that is, it requires exercising fidelity to reality. Given my aim to understand the character of personal knowledge I begin to assess what shape that responsiveness must take when the reality we are seeking to know is another person.

In this third chapter I take a modest step in furthering the case that our
identity is ultimately personal, that is, that we are not fully who we are apart from being in relationships with others that are personal. If we start with the idea that our identity is ultimately that of an isolated individual who when fully autonomous has no need for other persons, God or human, then we will never be able to conceive of dependence on, or need for, others in terms other than enslavement or diminishment. The concern that our autonomy tends to be diminished by the influence of others is at the center of Ernest Becker’s concern which I presented in Chapter One. In contrast I argue that relationships with others that are personal are integral to our autonomy and that it is in and through such relationships that we can be autonomous. This preliminary analysis of autonomy lays the groundwork for its further development in Chapter Five.

In Chapter Four I argue that narratives can convey normative content that exceeds that which can be presented discursively as a list of normative principles. Conversation, or discourse, about what constitutes the good life will be inadequate to meet the demands of our lives if it fails to take into account our need for stories or exemplars. When conceptual analysis is employed to distill normative guidelines from a narrative it inadvertently diminishes the character of volitional, emotional and desiderative elements central to that vision of the good life that may be describable discursively but that require narratives to portray their full character or “depth.” I argue that the moral quality of an action is dependent on the character of these elements. I engage Soren Kierkegaard in his *Works of Love* to illustrate how his effort to account for the normative character of agape results in a diminished account of its normative character. In
addition I argue that narratives do more than image normative content. Narratives can speak not only to our sense of moral obligation but also to our aspirations – they show us not only what we must “do” but also what we might “be”, that is, they can portray a life, or a way of being, that addresses concerns like Becker’s of how to live a vibrant life. These features of narratives provide us with grounds for engaging the New Testament directly to explore how it portrays the good life including the character of love and personal relationships.

In Chapter Five I present the New Testament portrait of intimate, personal knowing in terms of the relational image of agape that is central to it. This narrative presents two primary images of that love. The first is the pattern of engagement between God and Jesus that constitutes their love for one another. I use the term intimate identification for this pattern.\(^2\) The second is the manner in which God and Jesus seek to draw human persons into a relationship with God and others that shares the same character. I will analyze this love, or intimate identification, in terms of its volitional, emotional, and desiderative character. I argue that the distinctive quality of these elements can only be fully portrayed through narrative imagery or exemplars. The New Testament presents intimacy as a form of personal knowing that is a shared activity between persons that involves an ongoing encounter of their genuine selves. I argue that joy is an emotional and desiderative element of agape that shapes its moral character and is necessary for intimacy. Love for another as that other involves taking joy in

\(^2\) I discovered the term “intimate identification” in Bennett Helm’s “Love, Identification, and the Emotions”, pp. 5-6. Though our accounts of love differ we both use this term to distinguish personal from non-personal forms of love. I first came across the concept of personal love as a form of identification in W.F. Halliday’s *Reconciliation and Reality*, pp. 162-163 and 170-175.
that other, that is, it involves wanting to be with that other and to enjoy that other as the particular other that they are. Joy is both the result of, and a condition for, intimacy.

This account of agape addresses Becker’s concern that fidelity to another, in particular God, diminishes a person’s autonomy. This narrative presents a portrait of the self, or person, as one in which the capacities essential for personhood such as autonomy are not diminished through intimate identification with God but instead are most fully realized. Personality is an attainment. Humans can engage with God and one another in less than personal ways. Participating in an intimate, personal relationship with God requires an identification with God that, given God's character, requires and nurtures the development of our autonomy. Jesus, in his unparalleled capacity to engage God and others in a personal manner, is presented as the portrait of how to live a vibrant life. His identity is not diminished or obscured, but instead finds its unique expression, in identification with the God he calls Father.

I argue that this activity of intimate identification constitutes a kind of personal knowing that is capable of addressing the existential problem of meaning or significance which Tolstoy helped identify in Chapter Two. On this account the human hunger for meaning, or significance, is one that finds its satisfaction not in theoretical or explanatory knowledge but in intimate, personal engagement with God and, through God, with others. Significance is found in being significant for Another, that is, in being loved by One who is worthy of our fullest love. Leo Tolstoy’s religious testimony will be engaged to help support this
view. This contributes further to the view that our identity is not found in isolation from God and other persons but is most fully realized through participation in intimate, personal relationships with God and others. At this point it is important to begin developing an account of our need for intimate, personal relationships and what constitutes personal knowing.

Our Need for Intimate Personal Communion

Our lives are inescapably intertwined with the lives of others. Interpersonal relationships, for good or for ill, form its very fabric. Daily we are faced with choices, and the effects of our own past choices, regarding how we are going to relate to the particular people we encounter in our world. We are also profoundly affected by the choices of others. Indeed, during the earliest years of our lives we were completely dependent on the choices of others. In spite of this, many of us walk through life with little or no personal knowledge of others. This is often the case even toward those whom we think we should know the best. It is not unusual to feel we have only touched the surface of those closest to us and sense a lack of knowing anything more deeply personal about them.

Norman Maclean, in his autobiographical novella *A River Runs Through It*, recounts his father’s words, “It is those we live with and love and should know who elude us.” This can become uncomfortably clear especially in trying circumstances such as the extended physical suffering or death of a loved one. Here our distance from others, our lack of intimate connection, is exposed. It is

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3 Norman Maclean, *A River Runs Through It*, p. 104. This story takes place in Montana in the early 1900’s.
not uncommon to feel that we don’t know loved ones who are suffering well enough to actually “be” with them and offer them some measure of comfort in their pain, or in the case of death, to feel awkward and disconnected from those around us who may also be grieving. Daily life confronts us with the fact that who people are, and what they need, is often hidden from our understanding.

Leo Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* opens with the line: “All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." This observation puzzles me. My experience indicates that unhappy families are all too similar to one another. The comment above from Maclean’s father intimates the reason for this. Our greatest sorrows are personal. Within our families they stem from our inability to achieve, or to sustain, intimate personal connection with one another.

As W.F. Halliday writes,

> The deepest sorrows of life are personal, and are relative to the attitude of persons to persons. They come from the sense of personal injury or through personal loneliness; thus their source is lack of fellowship. The deepest instinct of the human soul is for fellowship against isolation... Our truest joys all spring from fellowship or are a condition of it.

Similarly, Hugh Black writes, “…while nearly all our sorrows come from our

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4 It is important to note that the concept of intimacy, as I use it throughout this dissertation, refers to a quality of a relationship and not a class of relationships. Our family relationships are sometimes referred to as “intimate” because of the close association that is shared among those who live together and have extensive shared histories. However, it is not uncommon for parents to be estranged from their children or spouses to be estranged from one another and for those relationships to lack intimacy. The familiarity that people have of one another due to such shared histories does not by itself amount to intimacy. Such relationships may be in fact anti-intimate.


connections with others, nearly all our joys have the same source.”\(^7\) Joyful families are alike in their moments of joy, unhappy ones in their unhappiness. Given the personal nature of both our joys and our sorrows Tolstoy’s opening line seems at best half right. Both our sorrows and our joys, in their fullest measure, appear to hinge on the same thing.

Our lack of success at establishing and sustaining relationships that can rightly be called personal extends beyond our family relationships. Cicero believed that friendship and the joy that comes from it is a need that is rooted in human nature, yet he emphasized its extreme rarity.\(^8\) Many others emphasize the same point. Emmanuel Mounier writes, “Personality is an eagerness for friendship... and yet communion is rarer than happiness, more fragile than beauty.”\(^9\) The depth of our need for personal knowledge as found in loving communion is as staggering as our failures to obtain it. Mother Teresa who cared for some of the poorest of the world’s poor regularly made this same point. As one familiar with the debilitating physical suffering of the poor she didn’t point to it as being the most painful kind, but instead observed that “The most terrible poverty is loneliness.”\(^10\) She repeatedly remarked that more than food, shelter, or clothing the greatest need of the poor is to be wanted. She recognized that even their physical suffering was the manifestation of a deeper, more personal

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\(^7\) Hugh Black, *Friendship*, p. 91 and pp. 66-67.

\(^8\) Cicero, *De Amicitia*, see especially chapters 8, 9, and 13-15.


\(^10\) Malcolm Muggeridge, *Something Beautiful for God*, pp. 22, 73, 98.
rejection by other persons. It is this personal rejection and the loneliness it
engenders that constitutes the greatest suffering. In addition to this wide range of
testimonies concerning the importance of intimate personal relationships is a
growing body of empirical research from the fields of neuroscience and
psychology that offers support for their observations.

**Personal Knowing and Joy – Aristotle and the Neuroscientists**

In the *Nichomachean Ethics* when Aristotle seeks to describe the
cracter of that love that exists in friendship, not just in any friendship but
friendship he takes to be of the highest kind, he turns to the image of a mother
who takes joy in her baby.\(^{11}\) (1159a10-35) He maintains that the “delight mothers
take in loving” indicates that the characteristic virtue of friends “seems to lie in
loving rather than in being loved.” In addition to this, a part of this phenomenon’s
appeal for Aristotle is supplied by cases where a mother has to give up her infant
because it’s in the best interest of the baby. Where the mother cannot both love
and be loved in return, a loving mother chooses the baby’s interests over her
own. Aristotle is not alone in his awareness that something profound and worthy
of exploration is going on when a mother delights, or takes joy, in her child.

This joy, as observed not only in the gaze between a parent and its infant

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\(^{11}\) Based on 1155b30-1156a5 some argue that Aristotle’s conception of friendship can be
captured in the definition that two people are friends provided: 1) they have goodwill for each
other, and 2) each is aware of the other’s goodwill. While these conditions are necessary for
friendship Aristotle clearly thinks them insufficient to capture its intimate character. He writes, “But
such men may bear goodwill to each other; for they wish one another well and aid one another in
need; but they are hardly *friends* because they do not spend their days together nor delight in
each other and these are thought the greatest marks of friendship.” (1158a5-9) In 1166b30-
1167a20 he argues that goodwill by itself, even when mutual, is not identical with friendship
because it does not amount to intimacy. For further explication of this point see my section
“Affective Normative Content Requires Narrative Imagery to Portray It Fully” in Chapter Four.
but also in an infant’s apparent delight in, and capacity for, seeking such engagements, has become a significant area of modern research. Concerning the mutual gaze between an infant and his primary caregiver, Daniel Stern of Cornell University Medical School, writes:

The immediate goal of a face-to-face play interaction is to have fun, to interest and delight and be with one another. During these stretches of purely social play there are no tasks to be accomplished... There is nothing even that has to be taught. In fact, if the task is to teach the infant something, he won’t be able to learn what the play experience might hold for him. We are dealing with a human happening, conducted solely with interpersonal “moves,” with no other end in mind than to be with and enjoy someone else.13

It appears that infants unabashedly delight in being delighted in. One interesting finding is that infants, at a certain stage in their development, learn how to initiate and regulate such pleasurable engagements with their primary caregiver. Stern likens this face-to-face engagement to a dance and writes that the infant is a “virtuoso performer in his attempts to regulate both the level of stimulation from the caregiver and the internal level of stimulation in himself.”15 The mother too is “a virtuoso in her moment-by-moment regulation of the interaction” yet it takes both to create their intricate patterns of engagement.

12 See: Robert Karen, Becoming Attached; Daniel Stern, The First Relationship and The Interpersonal World of the Infant; Daniel Siegel’s The Developing Mind: Toward a Neurobiology of Interpersonal Experience; and Allan Schore’s Affect Regulation and the Origin of the Self: The Neurobiology of Emotional Development.

13 Daniel Stern, The First Relationship, p. 91; italics mine. This is similar to Gilbert Meilaender’s account that one of the central elements of love is “the desire to enjoy the other person in a reciprocal union of affections.” He argues that without this desire to enjoy the presence of the other and be so enjoyed by that other love would be impersonal. See Friendship, pp. 48-49.

14 Ibid. See chapter 4 for some of the research on which these claims are based.

15 Ibid., p. 133.
Neurologist Allan Schore argues that the infant’s facial expression of joy that results from this mutual regulation between the infant and the caregiver in face-to-face “gaze transactions” is one facet of “a visual dialog,” that is, an intense, yet preverbal form of communication.\(^{16}\) Moreover, his research indicates that the visual stimulation embedded in these mutual gaze transactions directly affects the development of specific structures in the baby’s brain that are critical for the future socio-emotional development of the child.\(^{17}\) The mother’s “emotionally expressive face” is the “most potent source” of visual stimulation for the infant’s developing nervous system.\(^{18}\) The loving gaze from parent to child not only stimulates the baby physiologically; the baby learns to reciprocate (or initiate) a loving gaze back to the parent, which in turn causes endorphin levels to rise in the parent.\(^{19}\) His research shows that “we are born to form attachments, that our brains are physically wired to develop in tandem with another’s through **emotional communication**, beginning before words are spoken.”\(^{20}\) Stern’s research offers additional empirical support for the importance of these facial


\(^{17}\) Ibid., pp. 62-67; 71-91.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., p. 91.

\(^{19}\) Joanna Lipari, “Raising Baby: What You Need to Know”, in *Psychology Today*. Lipari provides a summary of Schore and Stern’s work in an effort to promote greater emotional connectedness between parents and their infant children.

\(^{20}\) As cited in *Hardwired to Connect* (p. 16) from Benedict Carey’s “Shaping the Connection” in the *Los Angeles Times*, March 31 2003; italics mine. Schore states “the self organization of the developing brain occurs in the context of relationship with another self... This relational context can be growth-facilitating or growth-inhibiting, and so it imprints into the developing right brain either a resilience against or a vulnerability to later forming psychiatric disorders.” See *Affect Dysregulation and Disorders of the Self*, p. xv as cited in *Hardwired to Connect*, p. 16.
engagements. He reports on an experiment where mothers were asked to alternate between normal active “alive” facial and vocal behavior and going deadpan and silent while gazing at the baby: “The infants’ main reaction was one of distress and aversion to the deadpan face.” He writes that before the infants “turned off” they did many fascinating things in an effort to get them to “behave”, that is, to get them to re-engage with them.\(^{21}\) It is this mutual engagement, sometimes characterized as a “dynamic interactive system,” along with its corresponding neurological affects, that fosters a solid emotional connection between parent and infant.\(^{22}\)

Close attention to this phenomenon reveals that this love is not merely some form of disinterested altruism – the loving parent thrills at the capacity of the baby to respond as well as to initiate engagement. The parent engages her infant with the hope of developing a mutual emotional connection or relationship. The parent hopes her child responds to her initiations with joy. It is interesting that it is this image of delight that Aristotle reaches for when he seeks to describe the joy that exists in the highest, or most personal, form of friendship. This image is powerful and modern day observers underscore its power by helping us to see more clearly the mutual character of the engagement between parent and infant. In addition, research indicates that not only do infants need joy but that intimate relationships continue to be an important factor in brain function and other facets


\(^{22}\) Ibid. I do not like the description in quotations, as it sounds mechanistic. However, it is important in underscoring the reciprocal character of the phenomenon not only on the interpersonal plane but also on the biological one.
of our well-being throughout our lives. For example, studies examining the relationships of married couples provide a growing base of evidence that links “relationship intimacy to better health, including stronger immune systems” and “high conflict (anti-intimate) marital relationships” to weakened immune systems and increased vulnerability to disease.\textsuperscript{23} Empirical studies are increasingly demonstrating that we are “hardwired” for close attachments, or emotional connection, to other people.\textsuperscript{24} This research supports the observations of people throughout history like Cicero who believed that intimate relationships, like friendship, and the joy found in them is a need that is rooted in human nature.

\textit{Intimacy and Autonomy – A Conflict?}

The cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker comments: “All that religious and psychoanalytic genius has to tell us converges on the terror of admitting what one is doing to win his self-esteem.”\textsuperscript{25} Becker writes of our mythic longing to be heroic, the ache to be found special in some cosmic sense, and the relentless desire to “stand out”.\textsuperscript{26} Interestingly, he concludes that this esteem is not something an individual self can obtain on its own but is a sense of significance that can only be conferred by another. It is a hunger for what appears to be a kind

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{23} The Commission on Children at Risk, \textit{Hardwired to Connect}, p. 17. Research shows that anti-intimate marriages also worsen the body’s ability to respond to proven vaccines and lengthen the amount of time it takes for physical wounds to heal.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Ibid., pp. 6, 32, and 54. The authors of this report use the term “hardwired” more as a metaphor than a technical term. It means that our need for emotional connection to other people is an intrinsic aspect of the human experience that is “biologically primed and discernible in the basic structure and systems of the brain.”
\item \textsuperscript{25} Ernest Becker, \textit{The Denial of Death}, p. 6.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Ibid., pp. 3-6.
\end{itemize}
of personal knowledge - a knowing that comes through and is embodied in some type of interpersonal engagement. Satisfying this hunger for significance makes us dependent on others in a way that seems to conflict with the autonomy necessary for mature moral agency and for the realization of one's unique personal identity. In this section I will describe the character of this desire along with the conflict it seems to raise for our need to be autonomous. The following description of this desire is not intended to provide a demonstration of its existence from uncontroversial bits of evidence but the beginnings of an account that I think helps make the best sense of many features of my own experience as a person.

Sebastian Moore identifies the relational, or interpersonal, nature of the desire for significance in this way:

The very concept of ‘feeling significant’ appeals to another or others for its meaning. I may want to feel ‘happy’, or ‘good’, or ‘high’, or ‘content’, or ‘peaceful’, or ‘secure’: these are states of myself, which do not necessarily imply that anyone else comes into the act. But when I say I want to feel significant, I am talking about a state of myself which looks to others in some way. The need for significance is the need for acceptance.27

He writes that “We all desire to be desired by one we desire.”28 This echoes Richard of St. Victor who in the 12th century observed that it is inherent in love “to wish to be loved much by the one whom you love much.”29 C.S. Lewis refers to

28 Ibid., p. xii.
29 Liz Carmichael, *Friendship: Interpreting Christian Love*, p. 86. More recently the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, writes that “we are pleased because we are found pleasing” by someone whom we want to please. See William’s *The Body’s Grace*, p. 4. On the occasion of his daughter Annie’s death, Darwin wrote in a memorial about her “bouyant joyousness” and “strong
this ache to be found special, along with the fear he experiences in admitting this, as his “inconsolable secret.” He writes that the beauty of the universe as a material and impersonal reality is not enough to satisfy this ache. Concerning his experiences of beauty he writes, “Beauty has smiled but not to welcome us” and in our encounter with it we discover “we are but mere spectators.” This spectatorship stands in sharp contrast to the longing to be noticed. These experiences underscore for him that, “We have not been welcomed, accepted, or taken into the dance.” We do want to enter into such beauty, yet we find it does not acknowledge us; it is indifferent to us. In a world that is impersonal through and through there is no one to whom we matter – in such a universe we are “treated as strangers.” And, even more to the point, he writes, “Nobody marks us.” In contrast to that he writes that he desires to be “delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a father in a son.” These observations fit with Moore’s comment that “As I mature, I need to be significant for another. I need to count in

affection” that he described in terms of her enjoyment at the “pleasure of giving pleasure” to those whom she loved. See Randal Keynes, *Darwin, His Daughter, and Human Evolution*, p. 217. For similar ideas see *For Fidelity* by Catherine Wallace pp. 25-27, 68-70, and 92-96.


31 Ibid., p. 14 and pp. 3-19.


33 Ibid., p. 15.

34 Ibid. The Hebrew narrative of Job also testifies to this desire. A major part of Job’s suffering comes from his fear that God no longer wants to be with him. Job expresses to God that he longs to be longed for by God. See Job 14:15.

another’s life, to be the enhancement of another’s life.”

Remarking on his experience he writes that the desire for self-worth is the desire to “be myself for another.”

Pascal also writes extensively on this feature of the human condition. He thinks our hunger for significance or “glory” is one of our defining characteristics. By glory he means the good opinion, or esteem, of others. He thinks we desire this esteem more than life itself. Pascal states that we would “even die gladly provided people talk about it.” He remarks that “All the happiness of men lies in this esteem.”

Though prone to overstatement due to his stylized use of hyperbole I do not think we should dismiss Pascal’s testimony. Of course he cannot speak for all people however, he is aware of an overwhelming hunger within himself to secure the good opinion of others and is aware that this drive holds for others with whom he is familiar. Based on his experiences and observations he would concur with Becker who views humans as being possessed by “a screaming for glory” that can be as “uncritical and reflexive as the howling of a dog.” Pascal finds this quest both “the vilest feature of man”

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36 Sebastian Moore, The Fire and the Rose Are One, p. 40.

37 Ibid., p. xii.

38 Blaise Pascal, Pensees, no. 628. He also states, “We would cheerfully be cowards if that would acquire us a reputation for bravery.” See no. 806.

39 Ibid., no. 411. Similarly, Daniel Day Williams writes, “that the fundamental human craving is to belong” and that we are more afraid of “not-belonging”, “not counting”, or “not being wanted” than of death. See The Spirit and the Forms of Love, p. 146.

40 Becker, The Denial of Death, p. 6. He acknowledges that in some people that “howling” may be muffled yet the desire to be significant is still there animating both feeling and behavior. Similarly, Daniel Day Williams writes that the human craving to belong is “the key to human action and feeling.” The Spirit and the Forms of Love, p. 146.
and yet, tellingly, that which “most clearly shows his excellence.”

How does this quest, though vile, reveal the excellence of human beings?

Pascal observes that regardless of a person’s possessions, privileges, or wealth, that he “…is dissatisfied unless he enjoys the good opinion of his fellows.” Our excellence lies in our awareness that persons, and what they think of us, ultimately matters more than possessing impersonal things. It is likely that Pascal, like Moore and others, holds that our significance is found in being significant for others, God included. Moreover, this feature of our condition is vile not because we need an esteem that can only be conferred by others but because we seek to gain that esteem in ill-fitting or unjust ways. He argues that a person’s need for others has been corrupted into a desire that “leads him to make himself into a God” and be at “the centre of everything.” He describes humans as being possessed by a disastrously distorted form of self-love. These efforts to secure the significance we need decrease our capacity for intimate, personal relationships.

Whether or not we are aware of this hunger to belong, or desire to be desired, Pascal thinks that our behavior reveals that we are convinced that the

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41 Pascal, Pensees, no. 470; see also no. 411.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid., nos. 617 and 597. For more on this theme see nos. 142, 148, 396, 978, 628, 597 and 806.

44 Emmanuel Mounier in Personalism makes an observation that fits well here. He states, “The world of others... is a perpetual provocation to self-diminishment or aggrandisement.” (P. 18) He remarks that our fear of being found insignificant leads us to engage others in a manner aimed at preventing a loss of self-worth. Our self-protective efforts follow one of these two paths.
acceptance of others is needed to gain the significance we desire. He observes that

... nothing can deflect him from this desire, and this is the most indelible quality in the human heart. And those who most despise men, and put them on the same level as beasts, still want to be admired and trusted by them, and *contradict themselves by their own feelings*....

He is not alone in this observation. Cicero observes:

Even if one be of so rude and savage a nature as to shun and hate the society of men... he yet cannot help seeking some one in whose presence he may vomit the venom of his bitterness.

We need others even if only as an audience to denounce our need for others. Similarly, Gabriel Marcel writes that this, “craving to be confirmed from outside, by another” is a “paradox, by virtue of which even the most self-centered among us looks to others and only to others for his final investiture.” Thus, while we might not consciously be aware of this desire, and possibly even deny its presence or importance, our unguarded emotional responses and many of our behaviors seem to be best explained by a yearning to be understood, taken into account, or known by others.

This need for communion or intimate, personal fellowship leads to a problem. How do we each become the person who we truly are, or possibly are meant to be, if that involves some kind of dependency on another? If our

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45 Pascal, *Pensees*, no. 470; italics mine.

46 Cicero, *De Amicitia*, chapter 24.

47 Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator*, p. 16.
significance is dependent on being significant for another, or for others, this seems to interfere with the autonomy and self-determination we need to develop and exercise to be ourselves. Ernest Becker states that the “only real problem of life” is our need to “win a degree of self-realization without surrender to complete spiritlessness or slavery.” Needing to be significant for another seems to constitute such a surrender. Framing the problem in its cosmic dimension he puts it this way “How does one lean on God and give over everything to Him and still stand on his own feet as a passionate human being?” He thinks this is no mere “rhetorical question” but a “real one” that goes right to the heart of the problem of “how to be a man.” Many years earlier John Oman addressed this problem and sought to show “…how absolute moral independence and absolute religious dependence are not necessarily opposites but one and indivisible.” Like Becker he points out that we must be careful to avoid characterizing our autonomy, or moral independence, “as though we could ride over reality” or our dependence on God “as though reality could simply ride over us” because this moral independence “is the vital and distinguishing characteristic of a moral person” and if that is lost “man is no longer a person but is a mere animate creature.” Throughout the dissertation I will refer to this apparent conflict between intimacy and autonomy as “Becker’s Concern.”

Becker’s Concern helps us to surface several important issues that

48 Becker, *The Denial of Death*, p. 82.
49 Ibid., p. 259.
50 John Oman, *Grace and Personality*, Part One, Ch. 3.
revolve around what we can call identification, or dependence, and personal identity. First, if it is the case that we are seeking our significance from someone, from whom are we seeking this? Second, how are we seeking to gain that significance that comes from belonging? Third, what is the cost of belonging? As Becker rightly realizes there are ways that a person can seek to belong to another that diminishes their capacity for autonomy and self-determination. Thus, the cost of some forms of engagement is the diminishment of one's identity. With this in mind Becker's Concern can be reframed in this way: Is there anyone I can belong to that enhances rather than diminishes what it means to be the human being that I am? (Or: Who can I belong to who can help me to discover and become the person I need to be?) Moreover, what is the manner of such belonging that leads to the enhancement of our individual personal character and capacities? In the chapters ahead I argue that the New Testament narrative provides a way to address Becker's Concern. Participating in an intimate, personal relationship with God requires an identification with God that, given God's character, requires and nurtures the development of our autonomy. Our capacity for intimate, personal engagement with God and others increases as our capacity for autonomy increases. Our identity is not diminished or obscured, but instead finds its unique expression, in and through loving relationships with God and others. At this point I begin to provide justification that it is philosophically acceptable to directly engage the New Testament narrative as a part of ethical discourse. This effort will continue in Chapters Two through Four.
As a person I’m confronted with the phenomenon of Jesus’ life as given in the New Testament narrative – it is part of the field of experience I inherit as a person. As such I cannot escape making choices about what to do with it. I find in it a portrait of love that is intimate and personal as well as connections between that portrait and personal knowledge. The narrative image of Jesus’ life and the love that is central to it addresses the twofold character of Becker’s Concern about intimacy and autonomy and what constitutes a vibrant life, that is, what he describes as “how to be a man.” This desire to probe the connection between love and personal knowledge, and what Jesus’ life and teaching reveal about the relationship between these, may evoke the response: “But is this philosophy?” Or, its counterpart: “Isn’t this theology?” These are important, possibly inescapable, questions. In formulating an initial response to these I am lead to ask another question: When we ask - “How should I live my life?” - does this question belong to theology or philosophy? Martha Nussbaum argues that this broad, inclusive, and human question “presupposes no specific demarcation of the terrain of human life” nor does it fit neatly or securely into one single academic discipline to the exclusion of the rest. In order to answer it we search “…for images of what we might do and be…” from literary, philosophical, and religious texts. And as we search, she writes, we “look for a fit between a view

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52 Ibid., p. 29.
and what is deepest in human lives."

Nussbaum's approach, which I am advocating, fits with what Robert Nozick claims is the original motivation for studying or entering philosophy. He writes that philosophical inquiry is motivated by “...puzzlement, curiosity, [and] a desire to understand” Moreover, he adds that the “... philosophical goal of explanation rather than proof not only is morally better, it is more in accord with one’s philosophical motivation.” As I seek to understand how to live my life I’m confronted with the phenomenon of Jesus' life. It provides an image of what we might do and be. We are justified in engaging this narrative, as Nussbaum writes, to see if it fits with what is deepest in our lives. The philosophic goal of such an exploration is to discover how well it illuminates and enlarges our understanding of the human condition. In addition, not only must our search for ethical understanding transcend academic categories for the reasons mentioned above, but also because as we begin such inquiry we find ourselves already morally and epistemologically midstream.

It is an uncontroversial, though important, claim that each of us is living our own life in a way that already embodies certain assumptions about who we are, how we should live, how we can have knowledge and much more. Moreover, even once you begin to examine these assumptions you are still

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53 Ibid., p. 26. Even then David Ford reminds us that the effort to answer the question – *What do we most want to be and do?* - faces complications. This is so, at least partly, because, “What we actually desire may be very different from what we think we ought to desire.” See *The Shape of Living*, p. 51.


55 Ibid.
making commitments to certain beliefs about how best to live your life—
including, if you’re philosophically inclined, that it is valuable to examine these
assumptions. We are constantly having to decide on the basis of our experience
of the world how we should live in that world well before we have had a chance
to reflect on all our beliefs that are involved in doing just that. Even in the
reflective life of the philosopher this element of decision and commitment cannot
be eliminated. Pascal and Montaigne spoke lucidly about this very feature of
philosophy. A brief look at their thoughts might help us to see this feature more
clearly as well as to understand more fully what it is we are doing when we are
doing philosophy.

“We never try to find out whether the roots are sound. We argue about the
branches,” writes Montaigne in 1569.\textsuperscript{56} He observed that in studying
philosophers we argue about what they meant by what they said, rarely if what
they said was true. To ascertain their truthfulness requires examining their
“roots.” Whether these roots are called first principles, postulates, assumptions,
axioms, or “the given” Montaigne recognizes that if you work back from the
conclusion of an argument you eventually reach the initial premises from which it
began. He realizes that the chain of reasoning that leads from the premises to
the conclusion cannot establish the soundness of the initial premises themselves.

\textsuperscript{56} Montaigne, \textit{An Apology for Raymond Sebond}, p. 114. Montaigne is not unaware of, nor does
he deny, the philosopher’s interest in these roots. He states that philosophical “…discussion and
inquiry have only one aim: to establish first principles…” (p. 139), however, he argues that such
discussion does not go far enough if it fails to acknowledge that reason cannot demonstrate the
soundness of these roots. Given the difficulty this raises for adjudicating between views that
begin with different first principles, or between the principles themselves, Montaigne thinks that
philosophers often content themselves to “argue about the branches” while taking their first
principles on the basis of someone else’s authority.
Montaigne concludes that since reason is not capable of demonstrating the rationality of our starting points that it should not have the exalted status that philosophers give it. Instead, each of us must decide, or judge, for ourselves what we will accept as our first principles or as evidence for our first principles. These starting points are not given to us by some natural power of reason that is common to all men.\footnote{Ibid, p. 141. See also pp. 73; 114-117; 139-141; and 183-186. In these passages Montaigne identifies and describes what modern epistemologists call “the problem of the criterion.”} Reason does not provide us with a neutral vantage point to which we can all retreat to find the truth. Thus, to philosophers he states, “… let them abandon their professional intention, which is to accept nothing and approve nothing except by following the ways of reason.”\footnote{Ibid, p. 116.} Whether or not this is the professional intention of philosophers, Montaigne incisively points out the limits of reason and chooses to philosophize in a way that acknowledges those.

Pascal, unlike Montaigne, did not embrace skepticism even though he shared many of Montaigne’s views. Regarding our inability to rationally demonstrate first principles, Pascal states “We know the truth not only through our reason but also through our heart. It is through the latter that we know first principles, and reason, which has nothing to do with it tries in vain to refute them.”\footnote{Pascal, \textit{Pensees} no. 110; see also nos. 131, 423, 512, 530, 751, and 821.} He realizes, along with Montaigne, that reason has its limits. These limits entail that not all of our knowledge is rationally demonstrable, however it does not entail that we do not have knowledge. Speaking to skeptics, and rationalists who employ skeptical arguments like Descartes, he states “We know
that we are not dreaming, but however unable we may be to prove it rationally, our inability proves nothing but the weakness of our reason, and not the uncertainty of all our knowledge."⁶⁰ Pascal argued that if we are to be successful in deepening our understanding of ourselves and our world we must avoid the dangers of both dogmatism and skepticism. The dogmatists fail to realize our incapacity for proving anything, while skeptics fail to realize that we have knowledge that no amount of skepticism can overcome.⁶¹ An accomplished scientist Pascal recognized that even the empirical knowledge provided by the experimental sciences rests on first principles that are themselves not demonstrable.

Both Montaigne and Pascal help us to see that in our search for understanding, or truth, we cannot escape an element of decision and commitment. When we take up philosophical inquiry we are already morally and epistemologically midstream, that is, we begin with convictions about who we are, how we should live, and how we can have knowledge already in place. John Cottingham, in his reflections on Pascal, draws attention to this feature of our lives. He calls it “the primacy of praxis”.⁶² Though he initially describes praxis as a feature of the spiritual life in order to distinguish it from contemporary philosophy, which he characterizes as having become merely the “intellectual

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., no. 406.

⁶² John Cottingham, *Spiritual Dimensions*, p. 5. Praxis is a strategy of engagement with a subject matter where an individual must embark on a path of practical, internal self-transformation as required by the character of that subject matter in order to more fully comprehend that subject matter.
business of evaluating propositions”, he concludes his reflections by acknowledging that such praxis is unavoidable in all endeavors where the goal is some form of understanding. He writes,

From within a given framework, we cannot jump outside to gain some final and definitive assurance that all is going well. But neither can we ensure a detached external stance by remaining outside that framework, for any human stance is necessarily one conditioned by pre-existing frameworks of understanding, structures of belonging and commitment and dependency. If that is a problem, it is a problem for the human condition in general, not for religious frameworks in particular… the primacy of praxis is in some sense a feature of the whole human condition...

Like Pascal and Montaigne he recognizes that our philosophic inquiry is not conducted from some neutral vantage point but is one that involves emotional, volitional, and intellectual commitments. These commitments are inescapable. This is not to dismiss knowledge claims – whether they be scientific, philosophical, or theological - as “merely” subjective. At issue is the demonstrableness of our knowledge, not whether or not we have knowledge. This reasoning underscores the point made earlier. Ethical inquiry does not belong to a single theoretical discipline, or academic domain, but is personal and human. We cannot shed our commitments before we begin our inquiry. What is at stake when we engage an image of what “we might do and be” is not whether that view is theological or philosophical, but whether it fits with, or helps explain, what we find to be deepest in our lives. The philosophic goal of such an exploration is to discover how well it illuminates and enlarges our understanding.

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63 Ibid.

64 Ibid, pp. 16-17.
of the human condition. This provides further support for engaging the New Testament narrative.

Pascal and Montaigne are part of a tradition that reaches back to Aristotle. In the *Posterior Analytics* he too identifies the significant limitations of reason. The observations of these thinkers helps us to see that if philosophy is going to be about the business of living and not merely that of evaluating propositions, then we cannot overlook these practical starting points and their implications for ethical inquiry. They recognize that we are practically staking our lives on something – committing ourselves to a particular course of action - even as we inquire about what it is best to stake our lives upon. This is so even though what we consider to be the most reasonable framework around which to interpret our experience and commit ourselves cannot be conclusively demonstrated as such to others.\footnote{65 In the following chapter we will look at the difficulties that individuals with competing broad explanatory frameworks face when seeking to discuss and determine with one another which of the frameworks is more reasonable to hold.} Philosophy can be practiced in a way that ignores or diminishes these observations. Philip Hallie was familiar with the attitude that maintained:

\begin{quote}
… it is simply tender-minded, to be dismissed by a sweep of the hand, to suggest that giving ‘guides for living’ (a phrase some philosophers of my acquaintance dismiss with an open sneer) has anything to do with philosophy as it is now being done. Especially in current Anglo-American philosophizing, we leave the bigger morsels, the vague, broad problems, to our wives…\footnote{66 Philip Hallie, *The Scar of Montaigne: An Essay in Personal Philosophy*, p. xvii.} 
\end{quote}

Theoretical knowledge can be sought without regard to the broad questions of personal and practical import. Albert Borgmann, who shares similar concerns
with Hallie, argues that contemporary American philosophy has become increasingly technical and focused on ever smaller targets and is regularly practiced like a game.\textsuperscript{67} He remarks that these philosophical games are engaged in “mostly for the pleasure of playing.”\textsuperscript{68} They differ from games like chess in that there are no definitive winners though they provide occasion to display grace, intelligence, and ingenuity in “executing more difficult and varied moves.”\textsuperscript{69} However, it is clear that a commitment to such open-ended intellectual gamesmanship would constitute a way of living that does not fit the reality of our lives.

The inescapability of our need to act forces us to make judgments about how it is best to live. Even those who judge that it is best to postpone answering this question make a decisive commitment to what they deem is the best way to live. Moreover, we may reflect extensively upon the ethical theories of Aristotle, Kant, or Rousseau, but all of what we know about their thoughts cannot decide for us how we should choose to live our lives. Thus, we cannot escape making judgments about the broad ethical problems. About this feature of our experience Iris Murdoch astutely observes, “Moral philosophy cannot avoid taking sides, and would-be neutral philosophers merely take sides surreptitiously.”\textsuperscript{70} Similarly, Borgmann writes, “The question of the good life... cannot be left open. What

\textsuperscript{67} Albert Borgmann, “Does Philosophy Matter?”, p. 301; and “A Reply to My Critics”, pp. 85-86.

\textsuperscript{68} Borgmann, “A Reply to My Critics”, p. 86.

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid. See also “Does Philosophy Matter?”, p. 301.

remains is not *whether* but *how* we will answer it.”\(^\text{71}\)

It should be apparent that this feature of our condition puts us in a position where exercising trust is inescapable. We already have entrusted, and are entrusting, ourselves to someone or something for insight in answering this question even as we continue to ask it. It may be that we entrust ourselves to some media personality like Oprah, or science, or religious traditions, or maybe just our own selves. There are a tremendous number of “voices” that compete for our allegiance and fidelity. Who, or what, is worthy of this trust? If a part of learning what constitutes a morally admirable life comes through “wanting to be like certain persons and not like certain others,” as Linda Zagzebski argues, then, we should ask: Who is worth imitating?\(^\text{72}\) Who should we entrust ourselves to for the insight we need? Who or what am I entrusting myself to now?\(^\text{73}\) This trust may be informed by observation and experience. It may also be corrected by our experiences as when we discover we have misplaced our trust. The New Testament narrative presents Jesus not only as an exemplar, that is, as one worthy of imitation, but also as someone we should seek to know and trust. A

\(^{71}\) Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*, p. 178. From here on referred to as *TCCL*. He observes that “…the reflective care of the good life has not withered away. It has left the profession of philosophy and sprung up among practical people.” See *TCCL* p. 201.

\(^{72}\) Linda Zagzebski, “The Admirable Life and the Desirable Life”, p. 14. In this paper Zagzebski explores the role of moral exemplars in moral learning and states that research and experience suggests that learning what a morally admirable life is comes through “…wanting to be like certain persons and not like certain others.”

\(^{73}\) See David F. Ford, *The Shape of Living*, p. 45 for a similar line of questioning. He states: “In a choice between regarding the universe as a brute fact or as created by and for love there can be no neutrality. No one on earth has an “objective” standpoint: that would require being able to stand outside it all in some way. For all the importance of being as intelligent as possible about our beliefs... it is hard to imagine any ultimately convincing argument one way or the other. There are huge issues here, but let me go straight to the crucial one: Whose testimony do we trust?”
person may have grounds to think he appears trustworthy but reflection alone
cannot decisively prove that he is. Seeking to answer this question can only be
done through commitment. The inescapability of praxis shapes the character of
moral discourse. As we continue to explore how to conduct an inquiry into the
good life, that is, as we take up the broad questions, we must take these things
into consideration. The character of these limitations and the way they shape
individual moral inquiry and public discourse about that inquiry will be the subject
of Chapter Two on modest explanationism.

Engaging Images: Moral Commitment and the Imagination

If the question of what constitutes the good life cannot remain open, that
is, if we are always and already answering it even as we raise it, then we can
also see from the previous reflections that we have already made a commitment
to some image of what it is good to do and be. Even if that commitment is
tentative, in the sense that it is open to revision, it still remains a commitment. An
openness to new images may reflect one's awareness of a need for greater
moral understanding. The images of the good life that we have committed
ourselves to are worthy of exploration because it seems likely that they are
closely linked to what we most deeply value.\textsuperscript{74} It seems plausible that what we
commit ourselves to can be influenced by an image, or picture, of what it means
to be a man or woman that captivates our imagination – a picture of life that we
find admirable and worthy of pursuing to embody in our own life.

\textsuperscript{74} In Chapter Three I argue that there are important connections between our moral, emotional,
and imaginative life.
Plato recognizes the link between what we admire and its consequences for how we live. It is nicely stated in *The Republic* where Socrates asks “Or do you suppose there is any way of keeping someone from imitating that which he admires and therefore keeps company with?”\(^{75}\) One of his criticisms of myth, story, or poetry is that it seduces us to admire, or identify with, images of what it means to be a good or just person that turn out to be inadequate. This admiration leads us “to give ourselves over to following” flawed images that undermine the soul by strengthening its baser parts.\(^{76}\) As we identify, or keep company with, that which we admire in some sense it shapes our identity, that is, the kind of person we become.\(^{77}\) Iris Murdoch writes, “Man is a creature who makes pictures of himself, and then comes to resemble the picture.”\(^{78}\) And Walter Kaufmann laments that in spite of its brilliance “modern philosophy has not yielded any remotely acceptable picture of man” nor has it produced “a conception of man that would even tempt us to assent.”\(^{79}\) We seem to search out and attach ourselves to images of what we aspire to do and be in the world.\(^{80}\) Novelist Leif

\(^{75}\) Plato, *The Republic*, 500c.

\(^{76}\) Ibid., 605a-608c.

\(^{77}\) Halliday writes “A supreme affection has often changed a man to the depths of his being, for what we love we grow like. Our love expresses that which we seek, and the ultimate purpose for which we work, and as we labour we develop according to the nature of our love.” See *Reconciliation and Reality*. p. 172.

\(^{78}\) Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics*, “Metaphysics and Ethics” p. 75. Also, as noted earlier, Zagzebski argues that learning what a morally admirable life is comes through “…wanting to be like certain persons and not like certain others.” Moral exemplars are critical for moral learning. See “The Admirable Life and the Desirable Life”, p. 14.


\(^{80}\) Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge*, p. 29.
Enger writes that this search involves “deciding who and whose you will be in this world.” And, as Zagzebski points out, this search forces us to “distinguish between those persons and behaviors that are worth imitating and those that are not.” These observations provide an opportunity to resurface Becker’s Concern: Is there anyone or anything that we can give ourselves over to, or intimately identify with, that will enhance rather than undermine the autonomy necessary for the realization of our unique character as individual persons? The importance of his concern seems clearer given the feature of the moral life described here.

This seeking after trustworthy pictures or models to emulate, fashion ourselves after, or entrust ourselves to, seems to be a part of the normal process of seeking to answer the question “How should I live?” History provides us with many examples of different images of what it is to be a vibrant person that have been put forward for us to consider. In the midst of the bloody religious wars of his day Montaigne appears captivated by an ideal of man and knowledge that might halt the bloodshed. Bacon appears captivated by an ideal of man and knowledge where knowing is imaged as that which enables humans to dominate physical reality by bringing it under their control. Descartes appears captivated

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82 The fuller quote states “…as soon as a person is old enough to reflect upon why she imitates a certain person and whether she should continue to do so, she is forced to distinguish between those persons and behaviors that are worth imitating and those that are not.” See Zagzebski, “The Admirable Life and the Desirable Life”, p. 14.

83 Nussbaum, Love’s Knowledge, pp. 12, 15, 25, and 29.

84 See his Apology for Raymond Sebond. I follow Murdoch and Kaufmann in using “man” here, and in that which follows, to refer to human persons both female and male.

85 See chapter 2 of Albert Borgmann’s Crossing the Postmodern Divide for a helpful introduction.
by an ideal where man as Archimedean Knower is capable of moving the world from the fixed point of his indubitable knowledge. Bertrand Russell, in “A Free Man’s Worship”, eloquently presents his ideal of man as one who defies the universe through his reason. According to Russell scientific knowledge makes man superior to the universe even while it simultaneously informs him that it will snuff him out. His free-man bows down to reason alone in order to heroically arise and shake his fist in the face of that reality which will ultimately crush him and all his aspirations.

One of the most vibrant pictures of what it is to be a person and a philosopher is found in Plato’s dialogs. It is in these that the personal character of Socrates is made evident through his active engagement with others. Numerous people have been captivated by Socrates, including Plato himself, and have sought to pattern their life after him. Concerning Plato, Kaufmann remarks, “it was the image of the ideal man that marked the beginning of Plato’s philosophy… It was the personality and life of Socrates no less than his teaching that suggested to Plato what man might be like.”

Plato, in Socrates, provides us with a picture of what we might do and be.

Interestingly, none of these pictures present the human knower as one that is primarily interested in intimate, personal knowledge. Each presents an account of knowledge as something that is not satisfying in itself but provides to Francis Bacon and Descartes. Regarding their desire to dominate nature Borgmann in TCCL writes that it does not just “spring from a lust of power, from sheer human imperialism. It is from the start connected with the aim of liberating humanity from disease, hunger, and toil, and of enriching life with learning, art, and athletics.” See pp. 35-36.

86 Kaufmann, Critique of Religion and Philosophy, p. 38.
satisfaction through the goods it secures. This knowledge is of instrumental value. This sharply contrasts with the picture of human beings as persons who find their most secure, and potentially most satisfying, knowledge in personal fellowship with others. John Macmurray perceptively writes about how personal knowledge finds its satisfaction in the person known and not in some other good that is procured through that knowing. He writes,

*When you love anyone you want above all things to be aware of him, more and more completely... You want to see him and hear him, not because you want to make use of him but simply because this is the natural and only way of taking delight in his existence for his sake... you are appreciating and enjoying it for itself, and that is all you want.*

This kind of knowing serves no other purpose than the “glad awareness” of the other who is known. However, it is not a morally flaccid love, that is, it does not ignore the need of the one loved to grow morally. Loving another involves being committed to helping him become what he needs to be because as he grows morally his truest self can shine forth. In George MacDonald's words, as he grows he will be “yet more the person” we love. Love is a form of “intimate identification” in which wanting to know a particular other as that particular other involves a commitment to the identity of that other as that particular other. In this way, the

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88 Ibid.

89 MacDonald, *Unspoken Sermons*, “Love Thine Enemy”, pp. 150-152. Halliday strives to say something similar, though possibly not as precise, when he writes, “Lastly it is our duty and privilege to love the other person, if not for what he actually is, still for what he may become.” He maintains that personality is “our real nature” and yet that “it is also an attainment” whose full realization is often hindered by selfishness. See *Reconciliation and Reality*, pp. 61 and 59.

90 Helm, “Love, Identification, and the Emotions”, pp. 5-6. Helm argues that a “deeply personal”
love necessary for personal knowing is one that is creative of distinction.\textsuperscript{91}

*Looking At and Overlooking Personal Knowledge*

Personal knowledge is a form of knowledge that is found in, and constituted by, engagement in a particular kind of relationship with another person. It results from a mode of learning, interpersonal learning, that differs from that which leads to the mere intellectual apprehension of an object or thing. Nussbaum nicely states, “…that knowledge of love is not a state or function of the solitary person at all, but a complex way of being, feeling, and interacting with another person.”\textsuperscript{92} Knowledge of a person involves an encounter, or an engagement, of a certain sort. When we want to know a person we want to know *him*, not merely *about* him. He is not loved for his usefulness to me or for how he can serve some purpose of mine but is loved for his own sake. Personal life, in contrast to social life, involves being in a kind of relationship where there is no other purpose for being together than the sharing of our lives.\textsuperscript{93} If two people are associated merely for what they can get from one another, it would not be personal in this sense. Social life on the other hand, for example, our work

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\textsuperscript{91} Mounier, *Personalism*, p. 23. He writes that love is not a “self-identification” with the other in which our separate identities dissolve into one another but rather that when one loves another he “wills his realization as a person, in perfect liberty.” Similarly, Helm critiques “union” accounts of love because they maintain that the individual’s identities become “blurred or erased” in their love for one another. See “Love, Identification, and the Emotions”, pp. 2-3.

\textsuperscript{92} Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge*, p. 274.

\textsuperscript{93} See Macmurray, *Reason & Emotion*, pp. 93-115, for more on this distinction between personal and social life.
\end{footnotesize}
relationships, necessitates the limiting of this full expression in order to reach some lesser, though still important, goal. In social relationships something other than the relationship itself provides us with a reason for being together. To emphasize the importance of personal knowing over theoretical knowledge is to image the character of life differently. Due to the kinds of demands it places on us knowing other persons involves difficulties at least as great as that which is involved in securing other kinds of knowledge.\footnote{One might exercise the requisite character and habits necessary to secure certain kinds of knowledge like that of physics or mathematics yet might choose not to nurture those that are necessary for intimate, personal knowledge. H.R. Mackintosh writes that in “...a good many branches of knowledge... mathematics, chemistry, astronomy, and theology... a bad man might do first-rate work. He might score success quite irrespectively of the life he was living... [these branches constitute] a kind of knowledge, in short, which may be gained altogether independently of the man’s deepest moral purpose... but consider how the situation changes instantly when we are dealing with persons and endeavouring to know them as friends.” See \textit{Sermons}, p. 115.}

This tendency to overlook the character of intimate, personal knowledge in favor of other kinds of knowledge is quite common. Paul Wadell notes, contemporary reflection on morality and ethics tends to neglect, and in large part overlook, the “relational quality of our lives.”\footnote{\textit{Wadell, Friendship and the Moral Life}, p. xiv.} He is not alone in this judgment. Carolinne White recently remarked that friendship is “an area of ethics which is not of central concern nowadays, especially when regarded as a relationship of affection between members of the same sex.”\footnote{\textit{Caroline White, Christian Friendship in the Fourth Century}, p. 1.} Similarly Gilbert Meilaender writes, “It would be difficult, if not impossible, to find a contemporary ethicist – whether philosophical or theological – who in writing a basic introduction to ethics
would give friendship more than a passing glance.\textsuperscript{97} And John Cooper observes that the subject of personal relationships, in particular friendship, has “not much engaged the attention of philosophers and philosophical scholars.”\textsuperscript{98} The tendency to overlook the relational quality of our lives, where the human knower might be more accurately imaged as a knower of persons, is not only common it is also not new.

Thomas Aquinas’ efforts to put friendship at the heart of Christian thought and life were also overlooked. Liz Carmichael persuasively argues that “The voice of Thomas on friendship… was scarcely heard… he was valued for his philosophy and speculative theology… (while) his moral teaching with its distinctive development of caritas was largely ignored.”\textsuperscript{99} For Christian theology caritas, or agape in Greek, is the most perfect kind of love; it is the love characteristic of God. Over the centuries defining the character of that love has often proven controversial. Aquinas weighs in by defining caritas (agape) in terms of friendship (amicitia). He states that, “Caritas signifies not only the love of God, but also a certain friendship with Him: which implies, besides love, the mutual return of love, together with a certain mutual communion.”\textsuperscript{100} This is a

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\item[98] John Cooper, \textit{Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics}, p. 301. His full statement is: “If the number of published discussions is a fair measure, the two books of the \textit{Nichomachean Ethics} devoted to friendship have not much engaged the attention of philosophers and philosophical scholars.” On the other hand, Bennett Helm recently remarked that there appears to be a resurgence in the philosophical interest in love. See “Love, Identification, and the Emotions,” p. 1
\item[100] \textit{Summa Theologica} I-II 65.5. See Carmichael's \textit{Friendship: Interpreting Christian Love}, pp. 101-128 for a helpful discussion of this.
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love which contains within it a hope of reciprocity – a longing that the person loved would gladly enter into relationship by responding with self-giving to, and a joyful reception of, the one loving. This conception of caritas stands in sharp contrast to the notion of Lombard’s dominant at that time of “love of God for himself, and of neighbor for God and in God” that emphasized ordinary legal obligations based on the Ten Commandments.\textsuperscript{101} Love on Lombard’s account involves the fulfillment of certain moral duties or obligations; it does not involve the development of a mutual relationship that has characteristics of an intimate friendship. Aquinas’ rich relational conception of love - as friendship with God and then through God friendship with others - was quickly “banished into the... specialized realm of mystical theology” and its fundamental importance to the ethical life was diminished or overlooked.\textsuperscript{102} There is ample room to challenge this tendency and to redirect our attention to personal relationships.

The New Testament narrative provides an account of love as intimate, personal knowing that is worthy of engaging. This is so for several reasons. Its account of the Father-Son relationship between God and Jesus as well as Jesus’ relationships with other persons provides a vibrant relational image, or picture, of love. This relational account of agape addresses Becker’s Concern that fidelity to


\textsuperscript{102} Ibid. Why is this kind of intimate knowing regularly overlooked? The psychologist Paul Tournier suggests that the kind of dialogue at the center of an ongoing friendship is “so rare and so difficult to establish” that we choose to spend our energy and attention elsewhere. See \textit{The Meaning of Persons}, p. 141. Wendell Berry remarks that we “can only know and come to care for one another by meeting face to face, arduously, and by the willing loss of comfort.” See \textit{The Hidden Wound}, p. 104. Martha Nussbaum wonders if these “issues of daily and urgent human significance... are sometimes avoided as embarrassingly messy and personal.” See \textit{The Therapy of Desire, Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics}, p. 3. Still others may consider it too particular or trivial.
another, in particular God, diminishes a person's autonomy. I argue that the New Testament presents a portrait of the self as one in which the capacities essential for personhood such as autonomy are not diminished, but most fully realized, through intimate identification with God. Participating in an intimate, personal relationship with God requires an identification with God that, given God's character, requires and nurtures the development of our autonomy. Moreover, Jesus, in his unparalleled capacity to engage God and others in a personal manner, is presented as the portrait of “how to be a man”, that is, of how to live a vibrant life. His identity is not diminished or obscured, but instead finds its unique expression, in identification with the God he calls Father. The character of this relational picture of love will be explored in greater detail in Chapter Five. There I argue that it provides an illuminating account of how intimate, personal knowing can be a source of autonomy and how that intimacy can satisfy the existential hunger for meaning or significance.

Given our need for understanding, especially our need to understand how we should live, I argue that the New Testament narratives should be engaged as a possible source of insight and wisdom even if they lie outside what might be considered typical philosophical discourse. In Chapters Two through Four I present an argument for this engagement. As we have seen Nussbaum argues that literature should be incorporated into philosophical reflection as part of our effort to deepen moral understanding.\textsuperscript{103} She argues that it can provide us with

\textsuperscript{103} Nussbaum, \textit{Love's Knowledge}; see Chapters One and Eleven. Carolyn Simon echoes and elaborates Nussbaum’s line of thinking. She writes, “If our understanding of ourselves and others is narrative in nature, then it is not too surprising that narratives in the form of novels and short
moral knowledge in ways that abstract theoretical discourse cannot. Iris Murdoch argues similarly. She writes that it is “impossible to discuss certain kinds of concepts without resort to metaphor” and that these images are “not merely peripheral decorations... but are fundamental forms of our awareness.” These images cannot be reduced by analysis into “non-metaphorical components without the loss of substance.” In Chapter Four I show that narrative imagery, that is, a story or exemplar, can convey normative content that exceeds that which can be presented discursively as a list of normative principles. It will become clear that the character of agape in the New Testament, a love that is central to its conception of personhood and personal knowing, requires a narrative to adequately image it. Lastly, the importance of broadening our search for images of what we might do and be is heightened given the nature of personal knowledge. Its interpersonal character makes us dependent on others for such knowledge and this dependency invites us to be open to being addressed personally - from outside ourselves - in our efforts to grow in our understanding and experience of personal knowledge. 

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105 Ibid. See also my fourth chapter “Narrative and Normativity.”

106 As we seek for images of what we might do and be Luke Timothy Johnson reminds us that we must not seek to know God as a thing, as that would involve “…stepping outside the realm of interpersonal learning...”, but rather as we know other people, that is, “as an agent who can confront and instruct us.” See Luke Timothy Johnson, *Living Jesus*, p. 70 and pp. 4-5. Also, Paul Moser's *The Elusive God* deals with this subject at great length.
Conclusion

My aim in this dissertation is argue that the New Testament narrative offers a relational image of love, with an attendant conception of personal identity, in which autonomy is found in and through intimate, personal relationships with God and others. Our identity is ultimately personal, that is, we are not fully who we are apart from being in relationships with others that are personal. A fresh examination of the New Testament image of love reveals a portrait of the self as one in which the capacities essential for personhood such as autonomy are not diminished through identification with God but instead are most fully realized. I will engage the New Testament, along with other sources, in order to identify the character of personal love that constitutes intimacy from impersonal forms of love. I argue that joy is an essential emotional and desiderative component of the love that is necessary for intimate, personal knowing.

To help reach the overarching aim of this dissertation I began this chapter with the claim that we have a need for intimate personal knowing. This kind of knowing is also sometimes referred to as communion or personal fellowship. I relied on the personal testimony and observations of others such as Cicero, Mounier, and Mother Teresa to briefly testify to the existence and character of this need. Along with their testimony I offered recent empirical evidence from psychology and neuroscience that supports the view that joy-filled intimate relationships have a dramatic effect on a person’s physical and psychological well-being. The neurologist Allan Schore has provided extensive evidence that
reveals that the organization of the developing brain in a child occurs in the context of a relationship with another self. Moreover, this relational context can be growth-facilitating or growth-inhibiting depending on its emotional character. To the degree that physical and psychological health are taken as characteristic of proper human functioning this evidence supports my claim that intimate personal relationships are a human need.

In contemporary Western thought there is a common intuition that intimate relationships involve a form of dependency or identification with another person that diminishes the autonomy necessary for mature moral agency and the realization of one's unique personal identity. I rely on the work of Ernest Becker to draw attention to this concern. For the sake of simplicity I refer to this as Becker's Concern. The concern is that this dependency will interfere with living a vibrant human life and will result in some form of spiritless enslavement to another or others. The nature of the demands that intimacy places on us will lessen our significance as the particular individuals that we are rather than be a source of it. This concern forms one of the core problems that I think the New Testament is capable of helping to address. Given that direct engagement with this narrative is not a typical part of philosophic discourse I turn to providing preliminary justification for such engagement. I begin to develop an argument, with the help of Nussbaum and Murdoch, that will ultimately support the position that questions about how to live and what constitutes a vibrant life do not fit neatly into one academic discipline. Such questions are neither distinctively philosophical nor theological, but are existential and personal. Answering these
questions involves searching for images of what we might do and be that fit our deepest aspirations and experiences as a person. I introduce the idea that narrative imagery, that is, stories and exemplars, can convey the character and content of love – including normative content – in a manner that a discursive account cannot. Thus, narrative imagery or exemplars of the moral life are indispensable for moral discourse. And because their power is at least partly dependent on the character of our emotional life and our individual aspirations it appears that these personal elements also are an inescapable part of moral discourse. Arguments to support engaging the New Testament narrative form the middle chapters, Two through Four, of the dissertation.

The shape of our discourse concerning the good life and life’s meaning is also affected by the fact that we are unable to conclusively demonstrate that one account is superior to another. If this is so, is there some other way to rationally establish which image, or portrayal of the good life, is preferable to another? Possibly there is a way to overcome the limits of philosophical argumentation and our dependence on individual personal elements that will enable us to put moral discourse on a more secure footing. In the following chapter I will explore whether the experimental and explanatory forms of the modern scientific enterprise provide a mode of discourse that can help us. Some argue that it renders philosophical and theological discourse irrelevant. As a part of this effort I will provide an account of abduction, also called explanationism, as one of the central methods we regularly employ to gather knowledge of our world. Given our desire to have the best explanation of the full range of our experience of the
world, including ourselves, it is possible that abduction will provide a way to rationally adjudicate between competing accounts of the good life. This exploration will clarify further the character of discourse that best fits the subject of personal knowing and the good life.
CHAPTER TWO
MODEST EXPLANATIONISM:
PERSONAL KNOWING AND THE LIMITS OF EXPLANATORY POWER

Introduction

One of the primary aims of this dissertation is to explore the connection between love and personal knowledge and what Jesus’ life and teaching reveal about the relationship between these. I am especially interested in understanding what the character of love must be in order to make our fellowship or communion with God and others personal. I want to distinguish that form of love or caring that makes relationships personal from those forms, like benevolence or compassion, where the “concern for particular others” is impersonal.¹ In particular I will explore the relationship between joy and personal knowing. It appears that joy – the longing to be with the other as that other – is a feature that makes love both personal and morally robust.² I argue that the relational image of love in the New Testament narrative presents a conception of personal identity in which autonomy is found in and through intimate, personal relationships with God and others. This will enable me to address Becker’s Concern that the autonomy necessary for mature moral agency and for the realization of one's unique

¹ Bennett W. Helm, “Love, Identification, and the Emotions,” p. 1. Helm also seeks to articulate those features that distinguish personal modes of concern from impersonal ones.

² Gilbert Meilaender argues that benevolence is an impersonal form of love because it is not interested in enjoying the presence of that other as that particular other. See Meilaender’s Friendship, pp. 48 and 63.
personal identity is diminished by the influence of other persons. These aims are a part of a broader ethical one. This exploration also forms part of a response to the question - How should I live my life? And, as in all reflective enterprises, there is debate about what constitutes a proper method for approaching and answering such questions. This chapter, along with the two that follow it, seeks to make the case that directly engaging the New Testament narrative is acceptable, even desirable, for ethical discourse.

In Chapter One I argued that our questions about what constitutes the good life are neither distinctively philosophical nor theological, that is, they do not belong to one academic discipline to the exclusion of the rest. These questions are existential and personal. In asking how should I live I am asking what is worthy of staking my life on, that is, what is worth attending to and acting upon. By caring about what I attentively and actively commit myself to I am caring about myself, or my existence, in particular ways. To care about what one should do and be in this world is to care about one's identity. I also argued that in order to orient ourselves in the world, that is, to gain moral insight into how we should live, we need to make room for engaging images that depict a vision of “what we might do and be.” Narrative imagery or depictions of the moral life are indispensable for moral discourse because such forms are capable of capturing

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3 This notion of “staking one's life on” will be developed more fully in the pages ahead.

4 Helm, “Love, Identification, and the Emotions”, p. 16. The question How should I live my life? is not merely an abstract or theoretical question that is looking for a satisfying intellectual solution. Unlike a math problem or other theoretical problem answering this question inescapably involves me and what I am willing, or not willing, to stake my life on in a manner that the others do not.

5 Martha Nussbaum, Love's Knowledge, p. 29.
moral insights in ways that abstract theoretical writing is not. Theoretical ethics, though important, is not adequate for articulating the good life in its fullness. However, as I seek to develop a mode of discourse fitting for an exploration of personal knowing, the appropriateness and value of this effort is brought into question by another discipline. Some think that the experimental and explanatory forms of the modern scientific enterprise constitute a mode of discourse that makes other forms, like moral and religious discourse, substandard and irrelevant.

In this chapter I identify the limitations of the experimental sciences to address issues of ultimate concern such as the character of the good life or of life’s meaning. I also argue that abductive, also called explanationist, approaches to gathering knowledge as employed by the sciences and other disciplines like philosophy yield a species of descriptive knowledge that fits into the theoretical category. It too faces important limitations. These limitations are identified in order to help define the scope of the sciences; they are not presented as an argument against the reliability of the sciences. I will examine Tolstoy’s testimony that such knowledge cannot meet the existential demands he finds within himself. His testimony invites us to consider that we have a need for knowledge found within what Pascal identifies as the personal order. His life gives witness to a hunger for something more than explanatory knowledge. Many people want to know what, if anything, matters or has worth. This might be called orienting, or

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6 I will provide a detailed argument for this position in Chapter Four.

7 See Albert Borgmann *Real American Ethics*, pp. 25-30; and also Philip Hallie *Tales of Good and Evil, Help and Harm*, pp. 6; 85-86; including the foreword by John J. Compton.
existential, knowledge in contrast to explanatory knowledge. Tolstoy testifies to finding within himself the need for forgiveness coupled with a demand for moral perfection, the need for significance, and the need for personal fellowship. I argue that he is seeking a kind of knowledge that neither the empirical methodologies of the sciences nor abduction can provide. In addition, his testimony models the character of discourse that best fits these issues of ultimate concern. In the following section I will present the first of two important limitations that the sciences face.

Science and the Problem of Significance

The eminent biologist E.O. Wilson writes, “The crux of the empiricist view is its emphasis on objective knowledge.” The implication here is that science, unlike other intellectual endeavors, provides us with real knowledge in contrast to speculation or mere opinion. The Nobel Prize winning physicist Steven Weinberg is described as scornful of those who think science is just one way among many of finding truth. Science is the path to truth. Some philosophers refer to this view as replacement scientism. Concerning the value of philosophy Weinberg remarks, “I know of no one who has participated actively in the advance of physics in the postwar period whose research has been significantly helped by the work of philosophers.” Given the cogency, or compelling character, of

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11 Steven Weinberg, Dreams of a Final Theory, pp. 168-169. He writes, “The radical critics of
scientific demonstrations and explanations, one might wonder if there is room left for meaningful moral discourse.

Questions of ultimate significance or concern, like questions about what constitutes the good life or life’s meaning, appear hopelessly contestable in ways that scientific ones do not. The discourse surrounding them is notable for its inability to compel consent. Albert Borgmann writes, “The final obstacle to proper moral discourse is the most difficult. When it comes to examination and explanation, science sets the standard.”

The obstacle arises because the discourse we use to explore and evaluate scientific modes of explanation does not display the same degree of cogency as those scientific practices under scrutiny. If we judge moral or philosophic discourse by the standards of mathematics and the experimental sciences, which compel nearly universal assent, they appear weak in contrast. Given this it may appear either naïve or arrogant to explore and specify the limitations of scientific explanation. However, the picture of science presented by scientists like Wilson and Weinberg shields us from some important facts concerning scientific knowledge. The assent it’s explanations compel is very specific – narrow in important ways - and fails to

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12 Albert Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*, p. 174. This book will be referred to as *TCCL* throughout the remainder of the chapter.

13 Concerning deductive-nomological forms of scientific explanation Borgmann argues that the “assent that is exacted by scientific cogency is as narrow as the explanation.” This assent is “limited in scope because in general it cannot disclose to us how it gets underway, i.e., how its laws are discovered and how something emerges as worthy or in need of explanation.” See *TCCL*, p. 179.
address other features of our experience as humans that demand our attention.\(^{14}\)

This obstacle – the impression that all forms of discourse must match the characteristics and success of science - must be addressed in order to show where there is room for moral discourse. This leads us to the first limitation of scientific discourse.

One important characteristic, or limitation, of scientific discourse is that science cannot tell us what is worthy of explanation, that is, it cannot inform us of what it matters to know. Another way of putting this is: science cannot tell us what we \textit{should} learn. It assumes that the kind of knowledge that we need is explanatory and descriptive and that the important questions are ones that seek such explanations. The judgment that the kind of knowledge that the experimental sciences provide is the kind that we most need is not one that is reached by employing scientific methodologies. There is no scientific method that enables us to judge what phenomena are significant to explain or know.\(^{15}\)

Regarding this aspect of science Leo Tolstoy writes,

\begin{quote}
Science has always been, and always will be, not the study of ‘everything’, as today's scientists naively believe... for there is an incalculable number of objects subject to inquiry... but is merely a study of those things put forward by religion.\(^{16}\)
\end{quote}

Something other than science must inform us of what is worthy of our attention.

\(^{14}\) Concerning the empirical sciences Leo Tolstoy accurately observes that the more clear and precise the explanations they offer the less applicable that knowledge is to questions we raise about how we should live. See “A Confession” in \textit{A Confession and Other Writings}, pp. 35-38. See also Chapter 6 “The Scope of Scientific Explanation” in Borgmann’s \textit{TCCL}, pp. 22-26.

\(^{15}\) See Borgmann, \textit{TCCL}, pp. 22-29; 68-70; and 179-181. I distinguish here between explaining and knowing because there are important kinds of knowing that are not explanatory in form.

\(^{16}\) Tolstoy, \textit{A Confession and Other Religious Writings}, from the essay “Religion and Morality”, p. 138.
Given the common characterization of science and religion being natural enemies Tolstoy’s remark provides an interesting twist on their relationship. He construes religion broadly to mean that which we judge worthy of devoting ourselves to. He argues that it is this fundamental orientation to the world that is provided by one’s ultimate values that guides scientific and philosophic inquiry. These values are not given to us by science nor can they be established themselves through scientific methods. Tolstoy remarks that scientific investigation cannot tell us “what man should know and why.”\(^\text{17}\) Moreover, he states that “it is impossible in philosophy or science to use mental effort in order to determine the direction in which such efforts should be made, and yet all mental effort is inevitably performed according to a given direction.”\(^\text{18}\) Our reflective efforts are guided by what we think it is important to know yet those same efforts by themselves cannot establish what is important to know. This inability to inform us of what it is that is worthy to know or pursue knowing is the first limitation of scientific discourse that is important to identify. It is one Tolstoy applies broadly to include philosophy.

When someone judges that science provides us with the kind of knowledge we most need they are making a claim that has an important and ineliminable personal element in it. Regardless of the discipline, whether we are scientists or philosophers, the knowledge claims we make are based on choices

\(^{17}\) Ibid., from the essay “What is Religion and of What Does Its Essence Consist?”, p. 108.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., from the essay “Religion and Morality”, p. 138. The inevitability that Tolstoy draws attention to here is akin to the one John Cottingham describes in Chapter One as “the primacy of praxis.”
we have made concerning features of the world and ourselves that we consider significant either to explain or to know.\textsuperscript{19} Science involves personal judgments, or evaluations, about what is significant to know and what kind of knowledge it is significant to obtain. These judgments may be widely shared by the members of that discipline yet that consensus does not diminish that they are personal judgments made by individuals. The discipline itself is incapable of either making or establishing the accuracy of such judgments. This is to say that all of our modes of learning, including the practice of science, require personal judgments that are not affectively neutral. Science as a family of methodologies for gaining knowledge of the world cannot establish by those methodologies that scientific knowledge is the kind of knowledge that is really worth seeking. This is not a claim about the reliability or accuracy of scientific claims; it is merely a claim about the scope of science – science is unable to determine for us what it is important to know.\textsuperscript{20} This limitation conflicts with an important feature of the human condition.

It is a fundamental feature of the human condition that human beings are creatures that both want to, and do, stake their lives on something that they judge to be significant. Thus, the practice of science cannot escape several important interrelated personal elements. These elements include one’s emotions, one’s moral evaluations, and one’s personal identity. Bennett Helm

\textsuperscript{19} There are modes of knowing, or apprehending, reality that do not take the shape of an explanation. For example, when I want to get to know another person better, my wife for example, I am neither wanting a theoretical explanation about her nor mere facts about her.

\textsuperscript{20} Tolstoy argues that this question, along with important others, is beyond the scope of science. See \textit{A Confession and Other Religious Writings}, pp. 35-40, 108-110, and 137-140.
writes,

To be a person is, roughly, to be a creature with a capacity to care not merely about things or ends in the world but also about yourself and the motives for action that are truly your own. To care about yourself in this way is to put yourself at stake in your engagement with particular things, projects, ends, etc. - things that you thereby value... This is, in effect, to define the kind of life it is worth your living and so your identity as this particular person.21

When we decide that some range of phenomena is worthy of explanation or that science is that approach to reality we must employ in order to discover significant truths, we are making a statement regarding what we value and think worthy of our care. This ability to evaluate what is worthy of staking our lives on along with the capacity to successfully stake ourselves on that which has been so judged is an important facet of our well-being. Concerning this Helm writes,

The well-being of a particular person as such, therefore, is not merely a matter of her physical and psychological health; rather it crucially depends on her identity: on whether she has upheld the values constitutive of her identity and consequently on whether she has succeeded or failed to live the kind of live worth living for her.22

When it comes to assessing what is significant to explain we discover that it is inextricably linked to issues of moral worth or value and existential issues, that is, issues of personal identity. This surfaces a problem that the sciences as such cannot resolve.

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21 Helm, “Love, Identification, and the Emotions,” p. 16; the italics are mine for the phrase “to put...at stake” while the other words in italics are his.

22 Ibid. Helm argues that our well-being is dependent on the relation between our values, our emotions, and our identity. If we fail to live up to those values that form the core of our identity then our failure to live out this identity will result in the emotion of shame. To feel ashamed is to feel degraded for failing to live up to, or for trampling upon, one's values. See p. 17.
Helm calls this problem the problem of import.²³ He argues that persons are agents that do not mechanically pursue goals but that “they find certain goals to be worth pursuing and pursue them because they are worth pursuing.”²⁴ Human desire is distinguishable from mere goal-directedness in that to desire something is to find it worthwhile. He writes, “to desire something is not merely to be disposed to pursue it as an end; it rather involves the sense that this end is worthy of pursuit: that it has import.”²⁵ The problem of import arises because our commonsense notion of desire presupposes import. We do not say something is worthy of pursuit because it is desirable. Helm rightly asks, “But if desire does not account for import, what does?”²⁶ What accounts for worth? For some person or thing to have import for you it must be judged by you as worthy of your attention and action. This means that a consistent pattern of attending to this object of import and acting, or being prepared to act, on its behalf is required if it is to be intelligible that it has import to you. He describes this attentiveness as a kind of vigilance for what happens or might happen to the object of import. To care about one’s health, for example, requires not only a vigilance for healthiness but also a preparedness to act so as to maintain it. Our finding something to have worth or import does not solve the problem. The problem, as Helm states it, is that “import

²³ See Helm’s “Emotions as Evaluative Feelings,” pp. 4-8.
²⁴ Ibid., p. 4.
²⁵ Helm, “Emotional Reason – How to Deliberate About Value,” p. 9. Nussbaum, in her chapter “Emotions As Judgments of Value” in Upheavals of Thought, makes a similar argument about the character of emotion. She writes that “the intentional perceptions and the beliefs characteristic of the emotions… are concerned with value, they see their object as invested with value or importance.” See p. 30.
²⁶ Helm, “Emotions as Evaluative Feelings,” p. 5.
as a kind of worth, does not seem to have a place in nature as conceived by science, which seems to have no place for worth.”

Tolstoy may have voiced this problem most thoroughly, and perhaps most forcefully, in his essay *A Confession*. There he argues that science cannot demonstrate through scientific means that which we should stake our lives on, that is, science cannot inform us what is worthy of our attention and action. He states that

…a person who sincerely asks *how he ought to live* cannot be satisfied with an answer advising him to study the infinite complexities and mutations of an infinite number of particles in the infinity of space and time.

Tolstoy wants to know what, if anything, he should stake his life on, that is, he desperately wants to know if there is a way “he ought to live.” He writes, “If a man lives, he must believe in something. If he did not believe that there was something he must live for he would not live.” He intimates that his identity is dependent on finding something of worth to identify with. He feels within himself the demand to care for something worthwhile, the demand to invest his life in something of value, and being informed that the purpose of life is to study so as to come up with better explanations of material reality doesn't fit the shape of the demand that Tolstoy experiences within himself.

Tolstoy argues that when the experimental sciences advise him to study

27 Ibid.


29 Ibid., p. 54.
the mutation of infinitely small particles and claim that “When you understand the laws of these mutations you will understand why you live” they completely miss the import of his question. In offering such responses scientific investigation evades “the essential question demanding an answer” that he finds inescapable. For him that question is: What is the meaning of my own life? Sometime he phrases this as – What am I? Or, Who am I? Or, Why do I live (or exist)? Or, What must I do? To answer, as do the sciences, that “you are that which you call your life; you are a temporary, incidental accumulation of particles... a randomly united lump of something... [that] will disintegrate... together with all your questions” constitutes a failure to reply to the question. He says that this answer “not only fails to give it [his life] any meaning, but eliminates any possible meaning.” Meaning requires purposes and purposes require persons and persons and their purposes do not fit in a web of material causation and material phenomena. There is no room for meaning in the scientific picture of nature. Though he finds the experimental sciences “very interesting and

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30 Ibid., pp. 37 and 36. Tolstoy states the problem for the experimental sciences is that “the answer [they provide] does not relate to the question.” Though expert at assessing “the sequence of cause and effect in material phenomena” it turns into “nonsense” when it attempts to answer this question. See p. 38.

31 Ibid., from the essay “What is Religion and of What Does its Essence Consist?”, p. 108.


33 Ibid., p. 36-38.

34 Ibid., p. 39-40. He states that the sciences cannot answer otherwise than this if they adhere strictly to their principles.

35 Ibid.

36 This appears to be the form of an implicit argument within Tolstoy's religious essays. To act
attractive” he observes that their “precision and clarity” is “inversely proportionate to their applicability to questions concerning life” - “the more they try to provide solutions to the questions of life, the more obscure and unattractive they become.”  He states that he can “find no house” for himself, or his question, in the experimental sciences because “the clearer the knowledge was, the less I needed it, and the less it answered my question.” He concludes that when the experimental sciences seek to answer these questions they end up giving answers “beyond their scope.”

In questioning the meaning of his own existence, as well as through his critique of science and philosophy, Tolstoy testifies to a hunger for something that is more than merely an explanation. Life's meaning is describable discursively – it can be talked about in propositions – yet that meaning is not capable of being experienced and known merely through an intellectual apprehension of a set of propositions that are true. This becomes clear as he argues that if certain views of reality are true, then human life is meaningless. A correct picture of reality is not adequate - by itself - to provide life with meaning; in fact, it may force us to conclude the opposite. In Chapter Five I will argue that

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37 Tolstoy, A Confession and Other Religious Writings, from the essay “A Confession”, p. 36.
38 Ibid. p. 39.
39 Ibid., p. 37. See also pp. 35-40 and pp. 137-140 in the essay “Religion and Morality”.
40 Ibid., p. 30 and pp. 34-41.
for Tolstoy the meaning of life is constituted by personally engaging a God who has sought to find him and love him and whom he must obey. Meaning is found in a particular kind of personal interaction with a personal reality. Though Tolstoy does not use Pascal's terminology we will see later in this chapter that his life gives witness to the division between what Pascal considers the personal order of the heart and the order of the intellect.

The explanatory approaches of the sciences are unable to identify what is worthwhile or significant to explain because this involves a prior decision about what constitutes the good life. For example, if we say scientific knowledge is significant because it allows us to prevent and cure disease, its significance is established relative to some other value. Here the value is the prevention and cure of disease. And if we ask why that end is valuable, there are different responses that could be given. One person might be motivated to cure disease as a way of loving others whereas another might be motivated by financial gain. The value of those ends cannot be provided through science. If we judge scientific knowledge of certain features of our world to be significant it must be done on grounds other than that which science provides and its value will be derivative from these other ends. Someone might agree that science is incapable of telling us what is significant to know or explain yet argue that the

41 Tolstoy also makes an argument for this point in his essay “Religion and Morality.” See A Confession and Other Writings,” pp. 137-140.

42 There is a gap between scientific explanation and moral insight. This is readily apparent in the field of medical technology. Our capacity to manipulate and control the material world, our bodies included, gives us no guidance for how or whether we should assert such control. Bioethics is rife with problems of insight where our technological knowledge outstrips our ability to explain with the same degree of cogency whether or not we should use that technology.
accumulation of scientific knowledge itself is significant. If this is so, science did not reveal this to us. Science may be able to explain the material character of the world but it lacks the resources to orient us morally, that is, existentially, in that world. It cannot tell us why it is important to accumulate such knowledge.43

Tolstoy is not a radical critic of science and scientific knowledge. He holds a deep respect for the experimental sciences. However, he makes two important observations about the sciences. One, they are guided by values that are themselves prescientific or religious. Two, they lack the resources to adequately address his deepest questions about life. In other words, there are questions that reach beyond their scope. He rejects as profoundly misguided the advice that he should study the material universe in order to answer his questions. He is emphatic that developing clearer and more precise descriptions of material reality will only take him farther away from the understanding he seeks. His identity as a person demands something more significant to attend to and act upon than the kind of descriptive or explanatory knowledge the sciences provide. It cannot inform him how he should live or of life’s meaning. His testimony invites us to consider that finding something that one judges worthy to stake one’s life on is an indispensable part of the good life. How we decide what is worthy to stake our life upon is not only a decision we cannot avoid but it is also one that requires something other than scientific modes of understanding and explanation. Thus, this limitation that Tolstoy helps to identify is one of scope and does not call into doubt the well grounded character of scientific claims that fall within the purview

of the sciences. This leads us to the next limitation of science that it is important to explore.

*Science and the Problem of Evidence*

Another limitation of science is found in a common objection to views like Wilsons and Weinberg’s. The view that science alone provides us with objective knowledge appears to be self-defeating, that is, it advocates doing what it says should not be done. Its claim that scientific explanations alone constitute knowledge is not itself a scientific claim established through scientific methodologies but a claim about science and about knowing. Science consists of those practices that aim to describe the organization and structure of the physical universe. It does not consist in making claims about the character of knowledge and knowing. When we step back from science to reflect about it and about what constitutes knowledge we are practicing philosophy. Moreover, if we ask which of the sciences are reliable and should regulate the theories we form to explain the evidence, this requires utilizing a standard that exists independently of the sciences.\(^4\) Thus, when considering the full range of our experience of the world the methods of science not only are unable to inform us of what is significant to know but also are unable to demonstrate how we should seek that knowledge. It is not a scientific claim to say that science is the only trustworthy way we can learn about ourselves and the world. The empirical methodologies of the sciences cannot tell us what constitutes evidence or when we should assent to the evidence we have. This illustrates that when it comes to deciding how it is

\(^4\) Moser et.al., *The Theory of Knowledge*, pp. 33 and 161.
best to seek knowledge of our world, as with our decision regarding what is
significant to know, we are not affectively neutral. We must decide what
approaches fit the knowledge that we seek. Pascal argues that how we know will
be determined in part by the character of that which we seek to know.\(^{45}\)

To understand more clearly why the affective elements of emotion, desire,
and volition play such a central role in human knowing it will prove helpful to
continue the discussion, began in the first chapter, on the character of proof. In
Chapter One it was shown that when we reach the foundational premises of a
deductive argument, what I referred to as our starting points, we encounter a
stopping point for argumentation. These premises are not conclusions that have
been established by inferences from other premises. Argumentation cannot
substantiate these premises. Experience is that which ultimately grounds these
starting points and subsequently the conclusions based upon them. It is our
experience of the world, and I mean this in the broadest possible sense, that
provides us with evidence about the world. This includes our experience of
ourselves and others. Another term for such experience is phenomenal reality. It
is the knowledge we have of reality by acquaintance with it. This knowledge
cannot serve as a premise because it is not propositional. And because it is not
propositional we do not say of such phenomenal experience that it is true or
false. Instead, experience is either veridical in that it matches the objective

\(^{45}\) Pascal argues that different orders of reality call for different modes of response in order to
know the members of that order. He argues that personal knowing is different in kind from the
knowledge of material reality given by the sciences. For example, when I want to get to know a
person better, like my daughter, I am neither wanting a theoretical explanation about her nor
mere facts about her. Moreover, it would be out of place to employ the methods of science or
mathematics in an effort to know her (though they could give me knowledge about her).
situation or it is non-veridical in that it does not. We can contrast ordinary perceptual experience with a hallucinatory experience to see the difference. In the former perception matches up with the objective situation and in the latter it does not. We then develop propositions to express the data provided by experience. One important implication of this that an argument is only as good as its starting points. It is at the start where we either get it right or get it wrong. Whatever is unloaded at the end of the tracks of a sound argument depends upon what was put on board at its starting point.

Our experience provides us with a wide array of features that can serve as evidence for our beliefs about the world. Some examples include: an awareness of actions as either morally right or morally wrong, the seeming reliability of perceptual experience, and the sense of being able to freely choose some of one's actions. Though our experience provides us with evidence for our beliefs we are faced with a problem. We must choose what we will count as evidence from the wide range of our experiences of ourselves and the world. The question about what constitutes evidence surfaces dramatically, as Tolstoy illustrates, as we seek answers to issues of ultimate concern. Questions about the meaning of one's own particular life and how one ought to live that life go beyond the scope of the sciences. If we cannot rely on scientific standards of evidence and inquiry what then do we rely on? To illustrate this difficulty I will compare how two different individuals, the biologist E.O. Wilson and C.S. Lewis, a scholar of Renaissance literature, handle the evidence that is presented to us in moral experience. Both think that our moral experience must be attended to and
explored because how we view it will determine how we live. However, each of these individuals chooses to respond to, or handle, their moral experience in decisively different ways. They illustrate how the inescapability of exercising personal judgment when it comes to issues of ultimate concern can lead to radically divergent accounts of what we take to be the “facts of experience”, that is, of what constitutes evidence for their beliefs.

Wilson and Lewis, as do most persons, recognize that our moral experience is worthy of our attention. Moral phenomena matter and are something we should seek to understand. In our daily lives we find ourselves in situations that present us with an awareness of moral strength and others with an awareness of moral frailty. For example, Tolstoy thinks it is a feature of the human condition to be aware of our responsibility for our own actions and to know that at times we have acted badly and could have acted better. What are we to make of such experiences? What are they awareneses of? Lewis and Wilson offer strikingly different responses to these questions. Lewis aligns himself with the likes of Plato and Aristotle who thought that “our judgments of value were rational judgments... [and] that what they discovered was objective.” Morality on this view is something that we discover, not create. In this sense our moral experience is something that at times can be veridical, that is, our experiences sometimes match, or are an awareness of, some moral reality that

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47 C.S. Lewis, “The Poison of Subjectivism,” p. 73.
really exists.\textsuperscript{48} E.O. Wilson, on the other hand, sees these experiences as “products of the brain and culture” that are “no more than principles of the social contract that have hardened into rules and dictates.”\textsuperscript{49} Our experience of morality, or moral sense, arose because it “contributed to survival and reproductive success.”\textsuperscript{50} These moral imperatives that guide how we should behave are “the translation not of human nature but of the public will” and may need to be rejected or refashioned in light of their biological and material basis.\textsuperscript{51} Because morality is malleable in this way – it is shaped according to the consensus of society – the authority of morality resides within the human community.\textsuperscript{52} For Wilson, understanding the biological and material basis of morality is that which will provide human beings with the knowledge to “fashion a wise and enduring ethical consensus.”\textsuperscript{53}

Both of these men are clear that we are faced with a decision regarding what to make of these experiences of moral value. Wilson says the choice between these competing views of morality “makes all the difference in the way

\textsuperscript{48} Given that people offer conflicting claims about what constitutes veridical moral experiences an important and difficult question can be raised here – Whose moral experience is veridical? We seem to need a criterion to distinguish between those experiences that are veridical from those that are not. However, this leads to another difficulty – how do we determine which criterion is reliable or trustworthy from those which are not? This is called the problem of the criterion. I will examine it in greater detail in a few pages.

\textsuperscript{49} E.O. Wilson, “The Biological Basis of Morality,” p. 57.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., p. 64.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., p. 58.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., p. 54. He writes, “...ethics is conduct favored consistently enough throughout a society to be expressed as a code of principles.”

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
we view ourselves as a species” and that this choice “will be the coming century's version of the struggle for men’s souls.”54 In a manner that highlights the difference Wilson refers to above, Lewis rather boldly states, “Either the maxims of traditional morality must be accepted as axioms of practical reason which neither admit nor require argument to support them... or else there are no values at all.”55 If moral values are merely socially or biologically conditioned feelings, argues Lewis, then we could be conditioned to feel otherwise and morality itself would change since it simply is such feelings. He thinks that to admit this is to admit that there are no moral values that exist as such, that is, that there is no transcultural standard that could evaluate the moral worth of an action or attitude.

It is important to note that Wilson's conclusion that empiricism is the only reliable source of objective knowledge has neither been reached through, nor substantiated by, an empirical method.56 He fails to recognize that he is choosing decisively to trust the experiences of his senses and give them primacy over his experience of moral values. But more than that - he infers that sense experience provides us with the only path to knowledge of reality. This is one of his chosen starting points. The evidence of his sense experience did not logically entail this inference. Moreover, if we should only take as objective knowledge that which can be demonstrated empirically, then we do not have objective knowledge that empiricism is the only path to knowledge because we lack the empirical evidence

54 Ibid., p. 53 and p. 54 respectively.

55 C.S. Lewis, “The Poison of Subjectivism,” p. 75; italics mine.

56 Borgmann in TCCL gives a helpful account of this in Chapter 5 on “Scientific Explanation” and Chapter 6 on “The Scope of Scientific Explanation” pp. 17-26.
to support such a claim. He could choose to trust as veridical the data gathered by his senses and those provided by his moral experience. Or he could restrict the scope of his claims and refrain from commenting on the status of moral experience. By claiming that the empirical methods of the biological sciences provide objective knowledge, with his explicit inference that our moral experience does not, he fails to make clear what establishes the trustworthiness of knowledge claims gathered through experimental methods from those arrived at by other means. By his own account his claims about what constitutes objective knowledge and morality are suspect and should be considered untrustworthy.

All beliefs rooted in knowledge by acquaintance face the same difficulty. The person faced with evidence provided by experience has to decide what to do with it. Lewis and Wilson's response to our moral experience illustrates this. The need to exercise personal judgment, that is, to make a decision regarding whether or not to take an experience as veridical, cannot be avoided because our experience of the world does not decide for us what constitutes evidence. Even if it seems to us that our moral experience is as real and reliable as our perceptual experience and that both can serve as evidence for our beliefs, we still will not be able to establish their reliability through an argument that others are logically obligated to accept. How then do we decide that an experience is veridical or that it is not? We apparently need a standard, or tool, that will enable us to correctly judge whether or not an experience is veridical. A trustworthy tool will enable us to avoid making arbitrary decisions about these experiences. For example, if we had the right tool we could decide whether Wilson was right about
our moral experience and Lewis wrong or vice versa. But, if we need a reliable tool, we also need to know whether an experience is veridical prior to using that tool in order to be able to gauge, or evaluate, that tool's accuracy. Montaigne states the difficulty this way, "We register the appearance of objects; to judge them we need an instrument of judgement; to test the veracity of that instrument we need practical proof; to test that proof we need an instrument."\footnote{Michel de Montaigne, \textit{An Apology for Raymond Sebond}, p. 185. See also, 73; 114-117; 139-141; and 183-186.} Today we call this the problem of the criterion. As we try to resolve it, Montaigne says, we discover, “We are going round in circles.”\footnote{Ibid.} Some consider this to be the most significant problem in philosophy.

One response to this difficulty is to argue that experience itself is decisive, that is, that there is self-intimating evidence that reports to us that it is to be considered rightfully as evidence. We don't need a criterion. This is akin to Pascal's position that there are just some things that we know. Recall his jibe at Descartes that “We know that we are not dreaming, but however unable we may be to prove it rationally, our inability proves nothing but the weakness of our reason, and not the uncertainty of all our knowledge.”\footnote{Blaise Pascal, \textit{Pensees}, no. 110. Pascal's approach here is what some call “particularism.” He believes that there are particular things that we know though we cannot provide a method that shows how we know them. In contrast are “methodists” who believe that we must employ a reliable method before we can make knowledge claims.} However, the view that we have experiences of self-intimating evidence faces the same difficulty encountered by all beliefs that are rooted in knowledge by acquaintance. The person faced with an experience of evidence that is self-intimating still has to
decide what to do with it. Moreover, even if there are such experiences, there is no way to demonstrate the veridicality of such experiences to another. Someone could always respond by saying, “Yes, that appears to you to be that way but to me it does not.” The need to exercise personal judgment, that is, to make a decision regarding whether or not to take an experience as veridical, has not been removed. Even if it seems to us that our moral experience is as real and reliable as our perceptual experience and that both can serve as evidence for our beliefs, we still will not be able to establish their reliability through an argument that others are logically obligated to accept. We cannot provide an argument to conclusively demonstrate the reliability of our perceptual or moral experience without begging the question. What then can guide our choice between competing theories?

One way to evaluate our choices regarding what to consider as evidence and what to assent to as such involves asking questions about self-referential, or logical, consistency. Do the claims we make about reality based upon our experiences logically fit together and support each other or do they contradict one another? For example, if one claims that there is no moral reality that binds people to certain attitudes and actions and then argues that there are certain behaviors that everyone is morally obligated to follow, then those claims would be logically inconsistent. One cannot deny morality in one breath and then prescribe moral behavior in the next. Wilson does something of this sort. After explaining that our experiences of good and evil are merely instincts that are either ratified or rejected by social consensus and hence subject to change he
ends his essay with the remark: “However the process plays out [i.e., the
competition between the two views of morality], it demands open discussion and
unwavering intellectual rigor in an atmosphere of mutual respect.”

What is the character of this demand Wilson appeals to? Is this a moral
realm that we can apprehend and to which we must conform? Or, are we
obligated to rigorously seek the truth and to do that in a mutually respectful way
because the majority of the people in our society, or in that of our ancestors’,
have decided that is the right thing to do? This is problematic because
throughout history the will of the consensus has ratified activities like slavery,
apartheid, and genocide. What if our society or that of our ancestor’s was wrong?
It is possible to state that morality is nothing more than the will of the consensus
yet find oneself regularly embracing the attitude that there are certain things that
are right or wrong regardless of that consensus. Either Wilson is appealing to our
ability to see, along with him, the goodness of open discussion and mutual
respect or he’s aligning himself with a consensus about these things that we too
should align ourselves with. And though many of us would affirm the goodness of
open discussion and mutual respect it is not at all clear that we should do so
because these values have been established by consensus. However, it is
important to note here that Wilson’s apparent inconsistency does not establish
Lewis’ view as correct. And, even if a position of moral realism like Lewis’ is
correct, we are still faced with the difficulty of ascertaining which moral
experiences are veridical given the existence of conflicting claims.

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60 E.O. Wilson, “The Biological Basis of Morality,” p. 70; italics mine.
Another way of approaching the evidence provided by experience is to examine it in terms of trying to find what provides the best explanation of a broad range of facts. It seems likely that Wilson is employing this approach in the way he handles moral experience. He takes what he considers to be the best explanation, which for him is some form of materialism, and seeks to explain our moral experience in terms of that broader explanation. Lewis may embrace the position that his moral experience is veridical because it helps him to make the best sense out of other features of his experience like his awareness of personal agency, of the interpersonal character of joy, of his aspirations to love and be loved, our intellectual capacity for rational insight, and the testimony of trusted others on these matters. This explanationist approach will be considered in detail below. On the other hand, Lewis may take the Pascalian position that there are some things we just intuitively know to be the case like the veridicality of certain moral experiences and personal agency. In either case, as Lewis recognizes, the conclusion that our moral experience is veridical cannot be established deductively or by the experimental methods of the sciences.

*Broad Explanationism and Its Limits*

A common form of explanation that the sciences regularly employ to gain knowledge about the natural world is what is called an inference to the best available explanation. This practice of seeking explanations that give the best available account of a particular range of human experiences or natural phenomena appears to be quite common and quite fruitful. C.S. Pierce calls it abduction. Pascal employs abduction in his *Pensees*. In that work he describes
features of the human condition that he thinks are evident upon observation or reflection and then seeks to show how the Judeo-Christian narrative offers the best available explanation of those features. The fictional detective Sherlock Holmes, along with his real world counterparts, employs abduction when he seeks an explanation that makes the best sense of all the clues he has collected about a crime. Similarly, Darwin’s theory of evolution is his effort to make the best sense of all of the facts he gathered from his extensive observations of the natural world.

The sciences regularly employ abduction to infer the existence of some unobservable entity, force, or process like atoms, gravity, and evolution. Since these phenomena are not directly observable does this mean we can have no knowledge of them? The biologist Kenneth Miller, like many scientists and philosophers, answers no. He argues that scientific knowledge about phenomena that we cannot observe directly or test through experimental methods occurs through a process that is “so ordinary that most of us take it for granted.”

Like Sherlock Holmes he knows that a “police detective would scoff at the notion that crimes can be solved only when they are witnessed directly.” He argues that through the many crimes that are solved each day we demonstrate that we have an ability to learn about features of our world that we do not directly observe “by applying good, old-fashioned detective work to the clues that have


62 Ibid., p. 23.
been left behind.”63 Scientific theories of these kinds of phenomena may not meet the condition of being “absolutely certain” yet they are considered knowledge claims because they provide the best available explanation of the evidence at hand.64 When it comes to scientific knowledge Miller is clear that not just any story will do, but only that story that provides the best available explanation of the phenomena. To understand more clearly why we have confidence that such inferential processes provide knowledge we need to look more closely at abduction and the more general model of knowing called broad explanationism in which it is subsumed.

One of our goals as knowers is to have the best explanation of the full range of our experience of the world. Robert Nozick, as we saw earlier, maintains that the original impulse for engaging in philosophical reflection is not about “trying to get someone to believe something whether he wants to believe it or not…” but “…puzzlement, curiosity, a desire to understand….”65 The goal of philosophy is “explanation rather than proof” and this goal is morally superior, Nozick thinks, because “… it is more in accord with one’s philosophical motivation.”66 Nozick, like Wilson, helps point out that when we seek knowledge, whether we are a doctor, detective, philosopher or scientist, one of the primary things that we want is to make the best sense of the full range of our experience. Given that this form of explanation is so widely employed to meet our

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid., pp. 21-22.


66 Ibid.
epistemological goals, that is, given that it does not exclusively belong to the sciences, I will rely on the work of several philosophers to provide an account of it.\textsuperscript{67} This account of abduction will then provide the basis from which to reveal some of the limitations of explanatory knowledge when it comes to other goals we have as knowers. Prior to starting that it is important to note that I think this epistemological goal is reflective of more fundamental personal and existential goals. Our desire for truth is rooted in our care for our identity. I agree with Helm when he argues that we care about who we are and thus about how we decide what it is that we should find worthy of attending to and acting upon.\textsuperscript{68} We do not want to slavishly assent to the views of others or fall prey to what might be our own wishful thinking. Moreover, at our best we desire to be appropriately honest with others. Our identity has a built in need for, or dependence on, truth.

Though science regularly employs abduction, our desire for good explanations is not dependent on a commitment to any particular branch of the sciences. The commitment to abduction is rooted in more general intellectual values. Nozick, in his comments above, points to understanding as one of these more general or primary values. Abduction is also valued as a central method of gathering knowledge of the world, that is, as a means of meeting the fundamental goal of acquiring informative truths and avoiding falsehoods.\textsuperscript{69} Another fundamental goal, that Nozick and Miller allude to above, is the desire

\textsuperscript{67} The primary account of abduction and broad explanationism that I rely upon is from The Theory of Knowledge by Moser, Mulder, and Trout.

\textsuperscript{68} Helm, “Love, Identification, and the Emotions,” pp. 9-16

\textsuperscript{69} Moser et.al., The Theory of Knowledge, pp. 162 and 185.
“to maximize the explanatory value of our belief system with regard to the world and our place in it.”

Whether it is the experimental methods of the laboratory or the abductive process that leads to knowledge of phenomena that are not directly observable, Miller argues that science is guided by the more general value of finding theories that better, or more adequately, explain the evidence. Broad explanationism is the name philosophers give to the view that our fundamental explanatory goals should guide how we regulate our beliefs.

One of the primary difficulties of, or limitations to, this process of inference to the best available explanation is that what is determined to be the best explanation of some range of phenomena or evidence can vary between persons. We can come up with many different stories to explain the same range of evidence. As Miller argues not just “any story” will do otherwise we would not be able to answer the charge that our explanations are merely “pure speculation.” Moser, Mulder, and Trout point out that in order to avoid such an “anything goes” approach to abduction “we must find some way rationally to constrain what counts as an explanation and what counts as a better explanation than some other explanation.” One difficulty here, which was raised also in the first chapter, is that when we begin to seek understanding we discover that we are already “epistemologically midstream,” that is, each of us is living our own life

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70 Ibid., p. 162.


72 Moser et.al., *The Theory of Knowledge*, p. 162.


74 Moser et.al., *The Theory of Knowledge*, p. 179.
in a way that already embodies certain assumptions about who we are, how we should live, and how we can have knowledge. And these commitments are able to orient “one's entire quest for knowledge” in a certain direction. Dostoevsky draws attention to this issue in a discussion about miracles. He states:

...in my opinion miracles will never confound a realist [i.e., a naturalist]. It is not miracles that bring a realist to faith. A true realist, if he is a not a believer, will always find in himself the strength and ability not to believe in miracles as well, and if a miracle stands before him as an irrefutable fact, he will sooner doubt his own senses than admit the fact. And even if he does admit it, he will admit it as a fact of nature that was previously unknown to him.

We don't have to agree fully with Dostoevsky to recognize the difficulty he identifies. How do we determine whether our present explanatory commitments occlude our ability to apprehend phenomena accurately? For example, if reality is ultimately personal, the naturalist may fail to seek for evidence of that reality that is available upon the seeking of it. This difficulty about explanatory knowledge is one that the argument between Lewis and Wilson also illustrates.

Wilson would agree with John Searle that modern scientific theorizing is guided by a “bottom-up” conception of physical explanation where we explain the “surface features of a phenomenon” like the liquidity of water “in terms of the

75 Ibid.

76 Fyodor Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, pp. 26-27. John Cottingham also draws attention to this difficulty with his notion of the primacy of praxis. See my Chapter One.

77 See Paul Moser’s The Elusive God: Reorienting Religious Epistemology. He provides an extensive argument that we should expect evidence of a perfectly loving God to be purposively available to humans in a manner consistent with God’s all-loving character and God's purposes in self-revelation.
behaviour of microparticles such as molecules." This view of material reality is embraced because it provides the best available explanation of the evidence. However, it is regularly elevated to a central explanatory hypothesis used not only to explain features of the physical world but also of ourselves. Searle points out that if we adopt this broad explanatory framework, what I referred to earlier as replacement scientism, there is no room for personal agency, or freedom, as this would require some type of "self" capable of moving these "molecules in directions that they were not otherwise going to move." In light of his commitment to a bottom-up explanatory approach he argues that our experience of freedom is not veridical; it is merely an "illusion" that we are "unable to give up" because material processes have built into the very structure of human behavior a sense of voluntary action. Thus, our understanding of morality will also be reconceived if we adopt this explanatory approach. Rather than being the result of an empirical methodology Wilson's conception of morality is the result of interpreting moral experience in light of his commitment to a bottom-up ontology.

According to Wilson our moral sense exists because it contributes positively to our survival and reproductive success. The moral imperatives that we experience have a biological and material basis and are nothing more than the expression of a social consensus. Along these lines the biologist William


79 Ibid., pp. 92 and 87. Searle points out that trying to locate libertarian freedom, that is, free will, in the indeterminacy of quantum mechanics is a futile enterprise. It doesn't follow from the indeterminacy of microparticles that a human mind, or agent, is capable of exercising the kind of control that would force those particles to move in directions they were otherwise not going to move. See pp. 86-87.

80 Ibid., pp. 94; 93; and 98.
Provine writes:

Modern science directly implies that there are no inherent moral or ethical laws, no absolute guiding principles for human society... There is no way that the evolutionary process as currently conceived can produce a being that is truly free to make moral choices.\(^{81}\)

It is not clear that science directly implies that there are no moral laws. However, given a commitment to a naturalistic explanatory framework Provine, like Searle, recognizes that physical causation leaves no room for personal agency. John Bishop frames the difficulty succinctly, he writes, “From the natural perspective, all events have the status of happenings, and the problem is that the ethical perspective requires some events that are doings.”\(^{82}\) A human organism as a complex pattern of physical events is caused by a complex pattern of physical events that preceded its present arrangement and will itself issue forward in time as other physical events.\(^{83}\) These events are “happenings” in that there is no personal agent that initiates, or causes, a series of physical events to occur or that is capable of exercising control over the direction of any physical phenomena at its most basic level. Personal agency requires a being capable of exerting top-down control and there is no room for such a being in a causal network that only functions from the bottom-up.

Working within a bottom-up explanatory framework it can be argued that


\(^{82}\) John Bishop, *Natural Agency*, p. 40. He writes that “the problem is that the natural perspective positively rejects that any natural event should be agent-caused.”

\(^{83}\) This picture of causation is simplified in that it leaves out indeterminate events. However, as Searle pointed out above, indeterminacy does not constitute agency.
our moral sense, like our sense of freedom, is just another illusion that we are unable to give up. In its denial of personal agency and morality Lewis, Tolstoy, Macmurray and others maintain that the explanatory mechanisms of physics do not provide the best available explanation of the full range of our experience as persons. This explanatory account of the full range of our experience transforms critical pieces of it into something less than it is. Personal agency is no longer a fundamental fact of one’s experience but something that can be reduced to physical causality. This helps illustrate one difficulty with abduction. What one person judges to be the fundamental facts of experience can differ from what another person judges. The acceptance of one set of facts can act as a control on interpreting another set of “facts”. Given that our fundamental explanatory commitments play such a significant role in orienting our search for knowledge is there some way to rationally decide which of two competing explanations provides a better explanation than the other?

Some scientists, like Wilson and Provine, would agree with John Searle that the success of the sciences demonstrates that the bottom-up conception of physical explanation holds the key to understanding the full range of our experience of the world and of ourselves. All of reality that is knowable to us is constituted by this ontological structure. Thus, the sciences have a monopoly on what constitutes legitimate theoretical explanations.94 This view was represented earlier by physicist Steven Weinberg who claims science is the path to truth. Philosophers call it replacement scientism. It is the position that traditional

94 Moser et.al., The Theory of Knowledge, pp. 29, 32-33, and 161.
philosophic concerns about what constitutes knowledge or objective truth should be replaced by the methodologies and doctrines of the natural sciences. Its proponents maintain that one cannot make legitimate claims either prior to, or independently of, the sciences. On this account Wilson's explanation of the full range of evidence doesn't compete with, but replaces, Lewis' explanation. Earlier I stated that this approach appears to be self-defeating. Its claim that scientific explanations alone constitute knowledge is not itself a scientific claim but a claim about science. Moreover, if we ask which of the sciences are reliable and should regulate the theories we form to explain the evidence, this requires utilizing a standard that exists independently of the sciences. Moser, Mulder, and Trout argue that a basic concern for explanatory power and explanatory coherence, relative to the full range of evidence, provides the standard by which an explanation is evaluated. This standard is not dependent on a commitment to any particular branch of the sciences but is rooted in more general values such as the desire for understanding.

*Significant Truths and Explanatory Power*

When faced with competing explanations, like Wilsons and Lewis', is there some way to rationally constrain which explanation counts as a better explanation than the other? One approach is to require that such broad

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85 Ibid., pp. 33; 161. The standard Searle appeals to is a certain notion of “success.”

86 Ibid., p. 183. They argue that “ultimate epistemological authority” does not reside in some privileged set of intuitions or some privileged scientific or philosophic theory but in that which provides “the greatest overall explanatorily satisfactory worldview.” See p. 184.
explanations lead us to significant truths.\textsuperscript{87} Significant truths are ones that provide better descriptions of the way things and people work. They provide greater explanatory power. Thus, some knowledge is “obviously more important than other knowledge” because it possesses this power and because of “its connection to other pieces of knowledge, its utility, and the insight into the world that it affords.”\textsuperscript{88} It is this basic concern for explanatory power and coherence, and not whether a claim is scientific or not, that should regulate which explanations that we consider best. As stated earlier this position is known as broad explanationism. In order to evaluate how much help this constraint provides in guiding us to the better of two competing explanations we need to look at an important question.

What makes a truth significant? The answer provided by Moser, Mulder and Trout is that a truth is considered significant relative to the attainment of some other more fundamental goal. They argue that explanatory truths are significant at a practical level because they give us the ability to predict and control our environment for the sake of survival and prosperity.\textsuperscript{89} And they suggest that an even more fundamental value is the intellectual value of understanding.\textsuperscript{90} Understanding is constituted by explanatory knowledge that gives more accurate and comprehensive descriptions of ourselves and our

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., p. 180. They state here that “The best candidate for justifying a deep explanatory hypothesis about the nature of the world is a set of fundamental intellectual values, most notably the fundamental twofold value of acquiring significant, explanatory truths and avoiding error.”

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., p. 182.

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.
environment. Thus, a truth is significant if it increases our understanding by providing us with a greater ability to explain the full range of our experience. A detective does this when he provides an explanation that reveals to us the relationship between various pieces of evidence that otherwise might remain unintelligible. Insight, on this account, is the intellectual capacity to see how the pieces of a puzzle fit together. The issue before us is whether this conception of significance will help us find a way to choose between competing explanations. And, importantly, does it provide those with competing explanatory frameworks a neutral vantage point that they can employ to determine which of the competing explanations makes the best sense of the evidence? Individually we may recognize our need and desire for explanations that provide the best available account of the full range of our experience, but can this approach be employed in dialog with others to disclose to all participants that one explanation is more reasonable to hold than another?

When it comes to broad explanations that seek to account for the full range of human experience we discover that deciding which explanation is best depends upon the evidence in question that needs to be explained. If we do not agree about what experiences are veridical, as is the situation between Wilson and Lewis, we cannot resolve the disagreement at the explanatory level by advocating theory selection based upon the standard of explanatory power. In other words, there is no method that will conclusively demonstrate which of these explanations makes the best sense of the phenomena because there are fundamental disagreements about the phenomena that need to be explained.
There is no affectively neutral explanatory power, that is, the power an explanation holds for a person will depend on judgments she has made about what constitutes evidence. At an individual level we may be guided by the goal of maximum explanatory power but we cannot resolve a dispute between those who have different accounts of the evidence in need of explanation by appealing to that. When we disagree about what needs to be explained then our focus will need to return to the phenomena in question; our discourse will not take place at the level of explanatory power.\(^91\) Before turning to the character of that discourse a few more things need to be explored regarding this conception of significance.

This conception of significance returns us to the issue we explored with Tolstoy at the beginning of this chapter. If we want significant truths, what can help us to identify what truths are significant? Our desire for truths that are more than trivial might lead us to judge that truths that give us greater explanatory power are themselves not trivial.\(^92\) However, this is problematic. The standard of explanatory power does not enable us to identify all that is significant to know. It assumes that the knowledge we need, and the insight associated with it, is explanatory in character. The full range of my experience as a human is great. There are things of incredible significance that I know by acquaintance that are not explanatory in character nor would an explanation of them come to hold more epistemological value than knowing those things themselves. The ones that come readily to mind are persons. I want to continue to know these persons and


\(^{92}\) Moser et.al., *The Theory of Knowledge*, p. 182.
to know them more intimately. This is not to deny the value of explanatory knowledge but to affirm that one can judge that knowing a person is more significant than knowing an explanation. In contrast, appealing to the standard of explanatory power as a general value that establishes what constitutes significance may obscure this need to exercise personal judgment and lend this approach a more objective air.\textsuperscript{93} As my section earlier on Tolstoy revealed neither the sciences nor philosophy can determine for an individual person what constitutes such significance. Tolstoy thinks that intellectually apprehending accurate explanations of material reality cannot inform us of what we should know and as such lacks the ability to address his most pressing personal questions. The question of significance is more personal - what do we decide is worthwhile to know?\textsuperscript{94}

Tolstoy’s point is that science and philosophy cannot reveal to us what we should focus our attention on but are methods of inquiry that are already oriented by evaluations that we have made about what matters. He reports that some things command his attention more than others and it is these he wants to understand. Tolstoy identifies several such features of his awareness that asserted themselves and forbade his escape. One is the “tormenting awareness” of his own moral failure.\textsuperscript{95} He reports that he willingly chose courses of action

\textsuperscript{93} Borgmann, \textit{TCCL}, p. 186.

\textsuperscript{94} A person could offer their justification for why they think that personal knowing is more valuable than theoretical knowing and yet maintain that while that justification is significant it does not exceed the significance of knowing others.

\textsuperscript{95} Tolstoy, \textit{A Confession and Other Writings}, from the essay “Religion and Morality”, p. 134. Two other features of his experience that demanded his attention include his longing for an enduring
with the awareness in place, at those moments of choosing, that he should not
take them. He argues that our inquiry is focused by these kinds of things – the
things that we find significant. He would say that these issues of significance are
not the result of mere curiosity but are a response to the inner demand to
understand how we should orient ourselves in the world. We are looking for
something beyond the best explanation of the facts, though we should want a
view that does provide that, we are looking for insight into how we should live.
Thus, explanatory power is valuable relative to phenomena a person wants
explained; the explanation derives whatever significance it has from the
significance those phenomena hold for that person. Moreover, given our desire
to know how we should orient ourselves in the world it is the case that the
understanding we desire goes beyond theoretical explanations.

One might argue that greater explanatory power is an intrinsic value given
that more accurate and comprehensive descriptions of some facet of reality are
intellectually superior to ones that are less so. However, though it may be the
case that one description has greater explanatory power relative to another that
does not establish that greater explanatory power as such is significant. An
important question remains - Why is it significant to have better or more powerful
explanations? Answering this hinges on who we are as persons - as knowers –
and what we value. And, interestingly, as persons we want to know what we

meaning, purpose, or significance to his own life that could not be stolen by death and a sense of
aloneness that seems to speak of a hunger for communion with a loving God. These features will
be looked at more closely in Chapter Five.

96 Borgmann writes, “But it is clear that when an explanation disregards that aspect of that event
that is of concern to me, it fails to satisfy my need to understand.” See TCCL, p. 23.
should value? To ask questions about the value of explanatory power, or of the other more fundamental values from which it derives its value, is to ask questions that have to do with morality and meaning. And as Tolstoy rightly saw theoretical explanations lack the power to give us insight into how we should live our lives. The kind of understanding the sciences and speculative philosophy provide is incomplete. It leaves our deepest questions unanswered. With this in mind we need to return to the relationship between how we decide what constitutes a better explanation and how we view ourselves as persons.

Moser, Mulder, and Trout maintain that how we settle this issue of what counts as a better explanation will bear on “our entire understanding of ourselves as knowers.” I would add that it goes beyond this. It also bears upon how we conceive of ourselves as persons. How we answer this bears on our identity or self-conception. If this is so, we can ask - What conception of ourselves fits with the manner of determining what counts as a better explanation by appealing to an explanation's ability to provide significant truths? This approach leads to a conception of the knowing person as inherently an explainer. Descriptive knowledge is the knowledge that something is the case, whereas explanatory knowledge is knowledge why something is the case. Explanation is a type of

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97 Tolstoy, A Confession and other Religious Writings, see pp. 36-40 from “A Confession”.

98 Moser et.al., The Theory of Knowledge, p. 179. Wilson makes a similar remark when he says that the choice between these competing views of morality “...makes all the difference in the way we view ourselves as a species.” See Wilson’s “The Biological Basis of Morality,” p. 53.

99 Ibid., p. 165. Paul Moser's recent work provides a decidedly broader picture of the human knower than one that is primarily an explainer. He does this while yet maintaining the importance of an explanationist approach. See his The Elusive God: Reorienting Religious Epistemology; especially Chapter 2 “Knowing as Attunement.”
descriptive knowledge in that it supplies additional descriptive information that answers a previously unanswered why question.\textsuperscript{100} Human knowers on this account “are primarily theorizers rather than simple fact-gatherers.”\textsuperscript{101} The understanding we seek is constituted by the kind of explanatory knowledge that allows us to understand our environment and ourselves, not merely predict and control it. It aims to satisfy our desire to know why things are the way they are. Without diminishing the value of theoretical knowledge, that is, the power of an explanation to make intelligible the relationships between a range of phenomena, we must still ask if the understanding we seek always takes the shape of such knowledge. It may be the case that our desire for understanding is a desire for moral or existential insight - we care about ourselves and we want to know if there is anything worth staking our life on, that is, we want to know if there is anything of such value in the world that we should attend to it and act upon it. Explanatory knowledge, as Tolstoy and Helm argued, cannot inform us of what is worthwhile to know. In order to explore this portrayal of a human knower we can contrast it further with an account of personal knowing that fits with Pascal’s orders of reality. Before turning to that let me conclude this section with a summary of what has been covered so far.

\textit{Explanationist Limitations and Ethical Discourse}

Broad explanationism is the name philosophers give to the view that our fundamental explanatory goals should guide how we regulate our beliefs. Not

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., p. 173.

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., p. 183.
only should we be guided by the fundamental goal of acquiring truths and avoiding falsehoods we are interested in those truths that are significant or informative. Significant truths are ones that possess greater explanatory power and coherence relative to the full range of evidence than other truths. In addition broad explanationism is also a form of discourse, that is, it constitutes a way for one person to rationally commend their viewpoint to another or to evaluate that other's view. Broad explanationism is faced with several important limitations. First, it cannot tell us what features of the world or of ourselves are worthy of explanation; it cannot identify for us what is significant to know. When we disagree about what needs to be explained then our focus will need to return to the phenomena that move us to seek understanding and how it is that we are moved. Thus, our discourse will not take place at the level of explanatory power. This will be explored further in the following section. Second, it cannot tell us which explanation to choose when competing explanations for the same phenomena are presented. Third, as Wilsons and Lewis' reflections on morality illustrate we may agree on the phenomena that need explanation and yet disagree about the evidential character of those phenomena. In other words, when it comes to broad explanatory frameworks there are no volitionally neutral knowledge claims. This is especially important to acknowledge when it comes to issues of ultimate concern. Thus, explanationism is constrained by the necessity of personal judgment.

Given these limitations philosophical discussion must take the form of an invitation. We cannot always resolve disagreements at the explanatory level by
advocating theory selection based upon the standard of explanatory power. In other words, there is no method that will conclusively demonstrate which explanation makes the best sense of the phenomena because there are fundamental disagreements about the phenomena that need to be explained. As we have seen we already have broad explanatory commitments that orient our pursuit of knowledge. There is no affectively neutral explanatory power, that is, the power an explanation holds for a person will depend on judgments necessary at various stages in the explanatory process. For example, one of the first judgments to be made is about what experiences are veridical and constitute evidence. We may be guided by the goal of maximum explanatory power but we cannot resolve disputes between persons who hold different broad explanatory frameworks merely by appealing to that. The character of our discourse must shift to take these limitations into consideration. Exploring issues of ultimate concern with others requires giving witness to that concern – pointing others to some reality beyond one's explanations and inviting others to consider that reality.\textsuperscript{102}

This chapter began as an effort to identify a proper method, or mode of discourse, for exploring moral and personal knowledge as well as to identify a space where such discourse could occur. In particular, it is part of an effort to provide justification for direct engagement with a religious text, the New Testament narrative, as a part of this discourse. This latter concern, the need for space, arises because of the standard for examination and explanation that is set

\textsuperscript{102} Borgmann, \textit{TCCL}, pp. 174-181.
by the sciences. Some argue that science is the path to knowledge and that other efforts at securing knowledge are not merely substandard but irrelevant. I argued that this account shields us from some important facts concerning scientific knowledge which makes other forms of knowing appear unnecessarily weak. One of these is that science cannot tell us what matters; it cannot tell us what we should know. By itself science fails to orient us in the world. It cannot even make the case that we should seek knowledge. Another is that science cannot tell us how we should know. I also looked at how abduction, or inference to the best available explanation, as a central method of gathering knowledge employed by the sciences and other disciplines cannot tell us what it is significant to know nor provide a neutral method for selecting between competing explanations. Moreover, giving primacy to explanatory knowledge of this sort yields a narrow view of the human knower as primarily an explainer or theorizer. This conception fails to encompass other more fundamental goals we may have as knowers. Like Tolstoy many people want to know what matters or has worth, if anything, including theoretical knowledge. We want what might be called orienting, or existential, knowledge. We want to know if there is anything worth staking our lives on. We also want personal knowledge. Neither the empirical methodologies of the sciences nor abduction can provide us with this kind of knowledge.

Pascal's Orders of Reality Considered

The evaluation of the limits of scientific discourse, including those of abduction, provides an opportunity to consider Pascal's distinctions about the
orders of reality. In order to make sense of the knowledge we do have in spite of reason's limitations, that is, in spite of our inability to demonstrate the soundness of our starting points, Pascal speaks of three separate orders, or levels, of reality - the heart, the intellect, and the body. Each order has its own kind of knowledge and its own characteristic path to that knowledge. His account of these orders provides a framework for distinguishing how the knowledge that comes through love differs from other kinds of knowledge. His highest order - the order of the heart - is marked by charity, or agape, which he believed is the kind of self-giving love that is essential to God's nature and work in the world. For Pascal, the heart transcends the intellect, just as the intellect transcends the body. Human excellence in one order does not guarantee excellence in another. One may be great in physical exploits – the order of the body - yet lack intellectual acumen and greatness with the eyes of the mind does not entail that one loves greatly.

One effort to highlight the differences between these orders is found in Pensees no. 23: “Knowledge of physical science will not console me for ignorance of morality in times of affliction, but knowledge of morality will always console me for ignorance of physical science.” Pascal recognizes that our deepest sufferings are not allayed by a general knowledge that is merely apprehended by the intellect. There are areas of our lives where facts by themselves, that is, mere information, cannot provide the good that we need. For example, we can readily find instances where medical knowledge has alleviated

103 See Pensees no. 308. See also John Macmurray, *Reason and Emotion*, pp. 196-199.
the physical suffering of an elderly person, yet not touched the deeper suffering
that comes from their being abandoned in an empty room. Such suffering may
only find relief in the assurance that someone desires to be with them. The
hospice movement in its efforts to provide wholistic care seeks to address this
need. H.R. Mackintosh implicitly acknowledges these different orders and the
moral character of the personal order when he observes that in

...a good many branches of knowledge... mathematics, chemistry,
astronomy, and theology... a bad man might do first-rate work. He
might score success quite irrespectively of the life he was living...
[a] drunkard might do brilliantly in physics; a profligate in history...
[these are] a kind of knowledge, in short, which may be gained
altogether independently of the man’s deepest moral purpose... but
consider how the situation changes instantly when we are dealing
with persons and endeavouring to know them as friends.\textsuperscript{104}

There are activities we must engage in and character traits we must develop if
we are to know others intimately. These differ from the methods used to secure
knowledge in the order of the intellect. Though Pascal doesn’t use the
terminology of personal knowledge this concept clearly fits in his order of the
heart. Further evidence of this is found in his thoughts on knowing God.

Pascal identifies the distinctiveness of this knowledge of the heart in his
reflections on knowing God though he fails to fully develop it. He argues that
failing to find God through intellectual means should not hinder us from seeking
God, because God is capable of being perceived with the heart.\textsuperscript{105} By talking
about the heart he is not advocating irrationalism, but seeking to describe how

\textsuperscript{104} H.R. Mackintosh, \textit{Sermons}, p. 115.

\textsuperscript{105} See Pascal’s \textit{Pensees} nos. 380, 381, 382, and 427 for Pascal’s conception of the heart.
knowing persons differs from knowing about things. Different orders of reality call for different modes of response in order to know the members of that order. One of the simplest ways to distinguish between these orders is to draw attention to the fact that there are modes of knowing, or apprehending, reality that do not take the shape of an explanation. For example, we don't seek to know persons in the same way we seek to know nature. Knowing a person requires something other than the application of an experimental method or an inference to the best available explanation. To explain a person or have a theory about her is not the same as to know that person. The methods that result in explanations may give us knowledge about that particular person but not knowledge of her. Knowing another in a personal manner requires a mode of engagement with that person fitting of their reality as persons. There are no avenues to this kind of knowledge through intellectual methodologies. To seek to know her the way we seek to know things is to confuse these two orders.¹⁰⁶

Though reason is not adequate to give us personal knowledge of God or other persons, any more than it can alleviate loneliness, Pascal argues that it still plays an important regulative role of the beliefs we hold. This is evident in his claim that: “If we offend the principles of reason our religion will be absurd and ridiculous...” which he balances with the additional claim that if we rely solely on what reason can discover our approach to God will be inadequate - “Two

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., no. 781. H.R. Mackintosh also distinguishes between these two orders and the different modes of apprehension characteristic of each. Concerning knowing God he writes, “There is an immeasurable difference between knowing about Christ and knowing Him... Purely theoretical knowledge on the subject of Christ does not of itself lead us into the fellowship of God; it is indeed quite compatible with rejecting Him to His face.” From The Christian Apprehension of God, p. 55; also pp. 39-68 and 143-154. See also his Sermons, pp. 115-116.
excesses: to exclude reason, to admit nothing but reason.”¹⁰⁷ For Pascal the personal order transcends, but cannot transgress, the intellectual order.

The methods of the experimental sciences can at most give us knowledge about a person or persons but not knowledge of that person or persons. Regarding this distinction Abraham Heschel writes, “Having an idea of friendship is not the same as having a friend or living with a friend, and the story of a friendship cannot be fully told by what one friend thinks of the being and attributes of the other friend.”¹⁰⁸ In order to know a person as that particular person, Heschel writes, “…one must feel him, one must become aware of him emotionally.”¹⁰⁹ The manner in which we apprehend persons, which have an interior that we can enter only as it is made available to us by them, differs from the manner in which we apprehend things. Pascal seeks to make room for acknowledging and exploring this with his conception of the orders of reality.

John Macmurray, like Pascal, distinguishes between these orders and seeks to show the relationship between the two. He argues that theoretical knowledge possesses instrumental value as it helps to promote and secure the conditions necessary for individuals to know others, including God, personally. He writes, “All meaningful knowledge is for the sake of action; all meaningful action is for the sake of friendship.”¹¹⁰ Regarding the character of that kind of

¹⁰⁷ Pascal, *Pensees* nos. 173 and 183.

¹⁰⁸ Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets*, p. 221.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 256-257. This preliminary sketch of personal knowing will be developed more fully in the chapters to come.

¹¹⁰ Cited in John E. Costello's *John Macmurray: A Biography*, p. 325; it is from the introduction to
knowing that exists between those who love one another in a manner that is personal Macmurray writes,

> When you love anyone you want above all things to be aware of him, more and more completely... not because you want to make use of him but simply because this is the natural and only way of taking delight in his existence for his sake... You feel that it is good that it should be in the world... You want to know it, to know it better and better, and you want other people to do the same. In fact, you are appreciating and enjoying it for *itself*, and that is all you want.\(^{111}\)

This form of caring leads to, and constitutes, knowing another in a manner that is personal or intimate.\(^{112}\) As I've noted it is a mode of apprehension that differs sharply from a theoretical or explanatory mode. On Macmurray's account the conception of the human as *knower* is not primarily that of a reflective theorizer or explainer but as a friend – a person capable of knowing other persons through loving engagement or action. Macmurray shows how this form of knowing is motivated by a desire to encounter that person as himself and the knower finds satisfaction in that person that is known. Knowing here is not motivated by intellectual curiosity and the desire to find an explanation that solves a challenging and intriguing puzzle. It is grounded in a form of love in which taking joy in the one that is known – that is, in wanting to enjoy the presence of the

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\(^{111}\) Macmurray, *Reason and Emotion*, pp. 42-43. In later chapters we will look at the evaluative character of emotions. Note here that the emotion of joy appears to be such an evaluation. A part of its structure includes what he calls an affirmation that it is good that that particular other exists and to enjoy them as that particular other.

other as that particular other - is an essential component. Miall Edwards also
emphasizes the importance of these affective elements in knowing another
personally; he writes that, “…the intimate knowledge which friends have one of
another is not the result of a process of reasoning or scientific research, but is
based on mutual confidence and affection gained through practical experience
and insight.”113 This type of knowing between persons, being dependent on the
capacities of each to both give and receive love, is difficult to achieve and
sustain. As Emmanuel Mounier writes such knowing may be “rarer than
happiness” and “more fragile than beauty.”114

If we acknowledge the limitations of explanation for the personal order,
while recognizing that whatever phenomena described at that order might
transcend but cannot logically contradict the order of intellect beneath it, we can
ask: What manner of discourse can be made at the level, from within it, of the
personal order? Given the limitations of the intellectual order it may appear that
we are left bereft of tools to discuss and evaluate claims about the good life. If
not, where do we turn to find this orientation and how do we discuss it? In
Chapter One I argued that we can begin by acknowledging that there is room to
engage images that depict a vision of what we might do and be in order to gain
moral insight into how we should live. In order to answer the question - How
should I live my life? - Nussbaum writes that we search “for images of what we

Apprehension of God, pp. 62-63. Mackintosh himself writes, “…the sympathetic and trustful
insight which is a prerequisite of getting in touch with a person is not at all the same thing as
intellectual perception.” See p. 58.

114 Emmanuel Mounier, Personalism, p. 24.
might do and be” and as we search we “look for a fit between a view and what is deepest in human lives.”\textsuperscript{115} In doing that we can also acknowledge that we are already committed in practice to some vision, inchoate though it might be, of the good life. We have already made decisions about what to stake our lives on, that is, decisions about what is worthy of attending to and acting upon, and thus we can give witness to what has moved us. Borgmann argues that when our discourse centers around a matter of ultimate concern, like the good life, we engage others “by inviting them” to consider and examine for themselves that which has moved us.\textsuperscript{116} In doing this we also speak not only of our own experiences and aspirations but invite our readers or listeners to search their own.\textsuperscript{117} It is a non-coercive form of discourse. However, it remains contestable because it points to some feature of reality, one believed to address those aspirations, that is publicly accessible.\textsuperscript{118}

\textit{Conclusion}

Tolstoy’s religious writings embody a model of discourse that can be called \textit{modest explanationism}. It is modest in that it emphasizes the important role of personal judgment in the epistemological enterprise. When it comes to differences between persons concerning issues of ultimate concern, such as

\textsuperscript{115} Martha Nussbaum, \textit{Love’s Knowledge}, pp. 29 and 26.

\textsuperscript{116} Borgmann, \textit{TCCL}, p. 178. For a thorough account see Ch. 21, pp. 169-182.

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., pp. 181 and 177. The importance of exemplars and narrative imagery for moral discourse, which I will explore more extensively in Chapter Four, hinges on the fact that some things must be “shown” and not explained. See Nussbaum above and also Halliday’s \textit{Reconciliation and Reality}, pp.165-168.
ascertaining the character of the good life or of life's meaning, he recognizes that we cannot demonstrate to another person which account is better than another merely by appealing to a theoretical framework's explanatory power. This is so for several reasons. First, people may differ on the phenomena that they deem worthy of explanation. Second, if they agree on the phenomena worthy of explanation they may disagree about the veridicality of those phenomena. Third, even if they agree on the importance of the phenomena and their veridicality they may disagree about which explanation of that phenomena is best. However, there is still a role for explanatory power. An individual should assess the rationality of their own view on the basis of its ability to best explain the phenomena that that person judges to be the most significant to explain.

It is apparent that Tolstoy employs abduction, albeit in an implicit and modest manner, as he seeks to respond adequately to the phenomenon that is his own life. Within himself he experiences a question concerning his identity that demands an answer. He ultimately rejects the efforts of the sciences to answer this question because the explanatory commitments of the sciences leave them intrinsically unable to apprehend its character. In essence they judge the most assertive phenomena he experiences – the existence of his very self and the demand within himself for meaning – as a physical process or the product of a physical process, that is, as a feature of a thing, and not a person. As we will see even more clearly in Chapter Five the sciences, according to Tolstoy, leave no room for his aspirations for personal communion, significance, and moral goodness but rather explain them away. Ultimately, he judges these phenomena
as personal and cannot accept a view that holds no room for them as such. We will see that his question about his own life's meaning is not one directed at finding an explanation of how he came into existence or the material constitution of his being. Instead, he is looking for an answer that, if it is to be had, must take the form of an address. It is something that must be given by a Person. The significance he longs for is to be significant for Somebody.\(^{119}\) Though he does not use this terminology it is clear that he is looking for a kind of personal knowing. That is why he critiques the responses scientists give to his question as failures to understand its import.

Tolstoy is not primarily searching for an explanation. He is seeking to find that which will satisfy his hunger for personal communion, significance, and moral goodness. However, it appears that he thinks, at least implicitly, that the reality that is capable of addressing these is also that which would be able to provide their best account. It seems more accurate to say that he gives witness to a reality that he judges as one that fits, rather than explains, what he experiences to be deepest in his life.\(^{120}\) This reality affirms the centrality of these phenomena as he himself experiences them; it appeals to his aspirations. And in doing so it does also provide the best explanation of the phenomena that he deems most important. However, it would be misleading to emphasize that

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\(^{119}\) It may be for this reason that he initially felt that his questions about his life's meaning and significance "seemed so stupid, simple, and childish." See *A Confession and Other Religious Writings*, p. 29. C.S. Lewis also speaks of his hunger for significance as a desire to be found significant by, or pleasing to, God. Like Tolstoy he admits that in speaking of this hunger he has the feel of exposing something that should remain secret; he is tempted to laugh at himself for having it and to call it romantic, nostalgic, or adolescent. See *The Weight of Glory*, pp. 3-19.

\(^{120}\) Nussbaum uses this term in *Love's Knowledge*. See p. 26.
theoretical goal as his primary concern because it makes it appear like he is merely looking for a conceptual solution to an intellectual puzzle. It must provide the best explanation – he is not interested in merely wishful thinking - but he finds within himself a demand for a kind of knowing that goes beyond explanatory descriptions. I argue that his writing gives evidence that he is longing for a kind of knowing that comes in a personal encounter.

Discourse about issues of ultimate concern does lack the cogency of scientific discourse, however that discourse cannot be replaced by scientific discourse. The broad explanatory framework of the sciences cannot tell us what is significant to know. Ethical discourse centers on things we should care or be concerned about and science cannot tell us what, if anything, matters. It is unable to inform us of what is worth pursuing as the world conceived by it has no room for worth. Moreover, deciding what constitutes the good life is an emotionally evaluative process. It is one that engages us affectively. We must decide what is worthy of our fullest care and concern. These decisions are not made from a stance of affective neutrality. In the following two chapters I will explore the emotional character of reason and how narrative imagery or depictions of the moral life are indispensable for moral discourse. Narrative accounts of the good life are capable of depicting qualities that speak to our aspirations in a manner that theoretical accounts cannot. These two chapters will provide further justification for directly engaging the New Testament narrative.
CHAPTER THREE

RESPONSIVE RECEPTIVITY:

THE EMOTIONAL CHARACTER OF REASON

Introduction

In the previous chapter I argued that theoretical reason, as an inferential process, cannot inform us of what it is important to know. I identified this as the Problem of Significance or the Problem of Import. In this chapter I argue that reason is inescapably emotional because emotion is that which stands directly behind personal activity and determines the substance and direction of our actions. The impulse to act in accord with reality, that is, to be responsive to reality, is our impulse to rationality. It is an objective impulse. It is regularly overwhelmed by subjective impulses. For example, our anxiety and fear of pain often lead us to fabricate and embrace self-consoling fantasies, which in turn urge us to force reality to serve interests of our own that can be considered selfish. This struggle between the impulse to act in terms of the world and the impulse to favor self without regard to reality is one that is centered in emotion. This is not a struggle between reason and emotion, but rather one where one

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1 W.F. Halliday, in *Reconciliation and Reality*, identifies a pitfall I hope to avoid. He writes, “One of the greatest mistakes in philosophical and theological thinking is the radical separation of thought, love and will. They are qualities or activities of a personality, and can no more be really separated from the person than colour, form and scent can be separated from a flower. We may abstract them in thought, but to forget that we have abstracted and to deal with them as independent is fatal relative to any true solution.” See p. 116 and pp. 31, 59-60, and 113-117.
emotional stance or attitude is affirmed over another. If apprehending the world involves learning how to act in terms of the world, that is, if it requires exercising fidelity to reality, then what shape does that responsiveness take when the reality we are seeking to know is another person or persons? Given my focus on what constitutes personal knowing this is an important question.

In this chapter I take a modest step in furthering the case that our identity is ultimately personal, that is, that we are not fully who we are apart from being in relationships with others that are personal. If we start with the idea that our identity is ultimately that of an isolated individual who when fully autonomous has no need for other persons, God or human, then we will never be able to conceive of dependence on, or need for, others in terms other than enslavement or diminishment. The concern that our autonomy tends to be diminished by the influence of others is at the center of Ernest Becker's concern which I presented in Chapter One. In contrast I argue that relationships with others that are personal (i.e., ones that are marked by a certain kind of caring and receiving of care) are integral to our autonomy and that it is in and through such relationships that we can be autonomous. I begin to explore the conditions necessary for autonomy through an analysis of reason and emotion and the relationship between them. The conclusions of this chapter make room for engaging the New Testament narrative in Chapter Five.

*Ethical Reflection and Personal Identity*

As we saw with Tolstoy asking the question *How should I live?* is one of the most demanding questions a person can possibly face. It is a question of
great import that presses itself upon ordinary people from all backgrounds. As I argued in Chapter One this is a broad, inclusive, and human question that “presupposes no specific demarcation of the terrain of human life” nor does it fit neatly or securely into one single academic discipline to the exclusion of the rest.\(^2\) When I first felt this question press upon me I had the sense that in asking it I was asking what is worthy of staking my life on. It has since become apparent to me that by caring about what I stake my life on I am caring about myself, or my existence, in particular ways. To care about what one should do and be in this world is to care about one’s identity. Tolstoy’s testimony, which was examined in Chapter Two, invites us to consider that finding something that one judges worthy to stake one’s life on is an indispensable part of the good life. And it is possible, as Tolstoy feared, that there might not be anything to devote oneself to that meets the demands that one finds within one’s self. This possibility, as it seemed true to Tolstoy, evoked his deepest despair. Caring for our identity also involves caring about the reasons we have for deciding what is worthy to stake ourselves on. We want to reverence that which is worthy to be reverenced. We do not want to slavishly assent to the views of others or fall prey to what might be our own wishful thinking. Caring for the truth is an outgrowth of the desire for honesty, that is, the desire to be an honest person. This includes being honest with ourselves.

We have already staked our life on something that we take constitutes the

\(^2\) Martha Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge*, p. 25.
good life. \(^3\) Ernest Becker's question, that we looked at in Chapter One, can be profitably re-engaged at this point. Becker wants to know how we each can become the person who we truly are, or possibly are meant to be, if that involves some kind of dependency on someone or something beside oneself. He states that the “only real problem of life” is our need to “win a degree of self-realization without surrender to complete spiritlessness or slavery.” \(^4\) Framing the question in terms of its vital ultimacy he asks, “How does one lean on God and give over everything to Him and still stand on his own feet as a passionate human being?” \(^5\) In its broad contours this is a question about autonomy, authority, and personal identity and their interrelationships. It can be posed more broadly: Given the multitude of things we could care about and choose to stake our lives on, is there anything we can stake our lives on that will enhance and not diminish our identity as persons? Becker realizes that the answer to this question has a profound bearing on a person’s existence – nothing less than one’s identity is at stake – and the concern that is behind it is reflective of that and is not merely theoretical.

My effort in this chapter is directed at showing that the character of reason employed in addressing the question *How should I live?* is inescapably emotional. Deciding what is worthy of staking one’s life on is an evaluative effort that requires emotion. The first section will seek to show that our efforts to

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\(^3\) Albert Borgmann, in *TCCL*, writes, “The question of the good life... cannot be left open. What remains open is not whether but how we will answer it.” See p. 178 and also pp. 86-88, 92, 171, and 173 in *TCCL*.

\(^4\) Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death*, p. 82.

\(^5\) Ibid., p. 259. The urgency of his concern is evident in his remark that this is no mere “rhetorical question” but a “real one” that goes right to the heart of the problem of “how to be a man.”
apprehend reality are rooted in love. Knowing some things as they are in themselves, especially persons, requires a commitment to caring for them as the particular things that they are and not merely for how they can be used by me. In addition, our concern for truth or understanding is rooted in our care for our identity. In the second section I will seek to show that emotions are evaluative feelings. As such they are constituted by cognitive content and are not merely passive sensations or feelings. A person’s emotions can serve as an “optical instrument” through which she becomes aware of the character of her own moral convictions.⁶ The final section will explore the relationships between the emotional commitment necessary to apprehend reality, the character of autonomy involved, and personal identity. It is possible that what we judge as worthy to stake our lives on, that which we take as authoritative, may diminish our identity as Becker worried.

I will argue that our identity cannot be adequately based on just anything that matters to us. We need to identify ourselves with that which will enhance the personal character of our existence. Assuming we are personal we can reframe Becker’s question to ask: What are the characteristics of, and conditions for, that kind of autonomy necessary to live a life that is personal, that is, to engage in relationships that are characterized by personal forms of caring? In addition, it is important to ask: Is there room for the requisite kind of autonomy if personal knowledge of another person requires some form of fidelity to that other as a reality that exists independently of us? Answering these questions is an

⁶ See Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge*, pp. 46-47 for the role of literature in this process.
important part of my argument that the autonomy necessary for the realization of one’s identity is found in and through intimate, personal relationships with God and others. Our identity is ultimately personal, that is, we are not fully who we are apart from being in relationships with others that are personal.

Emotional Reason

Reason is directed by an evaluative perspective that is significantly emotional, that is, it is guided by what an agent deems to have import. It is the capacity to act in terms of the way things are, that is, to behave in terms of the nature of the object. John Macmurray argues that reason is “the capacity to behave consciously in terms of the nature of what is not ourselves”, that is, in terms of our knowledge of the nature of the world outside or of the true nature of a situation. It is the capacity to behave objectively, that is, the ability to allow our beliefs, feelings, and desires “to be fashioned by things outside us” in contrast to allowing these things to be fashioned by the vagaries of our subjective constitution or impulses. Similarly Daniel Day Williams writes that the reasoning person wants “to see what things are and how they go together,” that is, they want “to grasp reality” and this requires “allowing the object of knowledge ‘to be itself.’” Iris Murdoch also writes of reasoning as a “task” of coming “to see the world as it is.” I will take this view of reason as my starting point and argue that

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7 John Macmurray, *Reason and Emotion*, pp. 20-21; 26; and 29.
8 Ibid., pp. 22-23.
it is rooted in an emotional or desiderative attitude that can be described, at least partly, as a “wanting to do justice” to reality.\textsuperscript{11}

Our struggle to apprehend the world as it is and to act in terms of it, that is, the difficulty we face in exercising fidelity to reality, is often characterized as a struggle between reason and emotion. The common view is that reason and emotion are forces at odds with one another and “must be kept sternly apart” in order for our decisions to be rational.\textsuperscript{12} Irrational actions are taken to be the result of our emotions winning out over our reason. In contrast I will argue that emotions play an important role in the evaluative process of one’s practical ethical decision making. Regarding this Macmurray writes, “reason is primarily an affair of emotion” because emotion is that which “stands directly behind activity” and determines the “substance and direction” of our actions.\textsuperscript{13} Deciding on issues of import, that is, deciding what is worthy of attending to and acting upon, requires more than what can be provided through an inferential process. Theoretical rationality by itself, as we saw in Chapter Two, cannot tell us what matters. It is for reasons like the ones presented in that chapter that Macmurray concludes that “the real struggle” between our impulse to act in terms of the world and the impulse to act in favor of ourselves without regard to the world is one that “centres in the emotional field.”\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{11} David Ford and Daniel Hardy, \textit{Praising and Knowing God}, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{12} Macmurray, \textit{Reason and Emotion}, p. 16.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p. 26

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., pp. 22-23.
Many thinkers point out the struggle we face in laying ourselves open to reality in order to know it.\textsuperscript{15} If we attend to our engagement with the world we readily find examples of this struggle. Mounier observed that the world of others “…is a perpetual provocation to self-diminishment or aggrandisement.”\textsuperscript{16} Our efforts to enter into, and maintain, meaningful relationships with others is often hampered by our readiness to present distortions of ourselves to others in order to gain their acceptance. This can also hold for our engagement with non-personal reality. We can experience the world around us as “something alien” that possesses an “authoritative structure” that confronts us and that we “cannot take over, swallow up, deny or make unreal.”\textsuperscript{17} However, this does not mean that we stop trying to dominate or escape these structures. Murdoch points to the task of learning a language as an activity that progressively reveals reality as possessing a structure that exists independently of her. However, there are those who consider that same structure, the structure of grammar, as an illegitimate tyranny.\textsuperscript{18} Albert Borgmann writes of this pull to “rise above” or “escape” the claims or demands of the world, what he calls the “the regimen of reality,” and attributes it to our perception of these structures as “rigid and authoritarian.”\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{15} John Oman, \textit{Honest Religion}, p. 1. Oman writes that, “In every sphere the failure is less in discovering little, than in not finding the attitude of mind and interest and service which could have discovered more.”

\textsuperscript{16} Emmanuel Mounier, \textit{Personalism}, p. 18.

\textsuperscript{17} Murdoch, \textit{Existentialists and Mystics}, “The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts”, p. 373.

\textsuperscript{18} See W. Ross Winterowd’s \textit{The Contemporary Writer} as quoted in Wendell Berry’s \textit{Standing By Words}, pp. 26-27.

\textsuperscript{19} Albert Borgmann, \textit{Holding On to Reality: The Nature of Information at the Turn of the}
These thinkers, along with Becker and others we will look at, express the common concern that conforming to a reality that is not of our own making will diminish our personal identity.

Macmurray attributes this struggle to apprehend and act in terms of the nature of the world to a conflict within ourselves. The human condition is marked by contrary impulses. The impulse to act in accord with reality, that is, to be responsive to reality, he calls our objective impulse. This is the impulse to rationality. It is regularly overwhelmed by other impulses that he calls subjective. Macmurray writes that overcoming this bias in our own favor is “rarely pleasant” or “flattering.”

Our subjective impulses invite us to make ourselves “the central figure in the picture” and to believe that in various moral situations “life should make an exception in our favor.” In other words, our fear of diminishment may lead us to respond to others or the world in a manner that not only distorts our character but also the character of others and the world. Concerning these subjective impulses Iris Murdoch writes that our anxiety and fear of pain often lead us to fabricate and embrace self-consoling fantasies or illusions that act as a “falsifying veil which partially conceals the world.” This activity is reflective of what she calls our natural selfishness. This selfishness is characterized as an

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*Millennium*, pp. 12-13; 23.


21 Ibid.

22 Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics*, “The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts”, pp. 364 and 369. For an account of how we can embrace and nurture an emotion that can falsify our experience of the world see Max Scheler’s *Ressentiment*. 
effort to find consolation through fictions that inflate the self. Subjective impulses invite us to orient ourselves toward the world in a way to use it to serve the selfish interests of the self. Engaging reality in a way that enables us to think and act in terms of it, on the other hand, requires a pattern of activity that elevates the objective impulse and diminishes or appropriately restrains the subjective ones. Affirming the rational impulse requires the ability, or power, to conform ourselves to the character of the world. This internal conflict, or rift within the self, is often mischaracterized as a struggle between reason and emotion. This difficulty of learning how to act in terms of the world and the necessity of emotion for being appropriately responsive to it is one of the central themes in Wendell Berry’s work.

Berry, a farmer and author, is someone who regularly and perceptively writes about this responsive attitude. Nearing 80 years of age he has much to say from his daily engagement with the concrete “claims of reality” he has encountered on his Kentucky farm. Typical of his thought, Berry writes, “If one wishes to farm well… then one must submit to the unending effort to change one’s mind and ways to fit one’s farm. This is a hard education, which lasts all one’s life, never to be completed….“ To farm well requires that a farmer be

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23 Ibid., pp. 364-365. She writes that she cannot demonstrate through an argument that humans are selfish but instead that she assumes it as a starting point.

24 W.F. Halliday in *Reconciliation and Reality* similarly distinguishes between these impulses. We can exercise “supreme interest” in truth and let it “make its appeal to us,” that is, we can “let Reality speak to us” and to “respond to its appeal”, or we can respond to “selfish passion,” that is, our “irrational impulses,” and content ourselves with “pleasant self-delusion.” See pp. 114-117.

open to the particular character of his farm and respectfully adapt or conform his practices to it in order to promote its well-being. The farmer must “accept the place as an influence.” Fidelity is one of the terms that Berry uses for this enduring commitment to an affectionate, intelligent, and disciplined responsiveness. He writes,

Most farms...are made up of different kinds of soil patterns... Good farmers have always known this and have used the land accordingly; they have been careful students of the natural vegetation, soil depth and structure, slope and drainage. They are not appliers of generalizations, theoretical or methodological or mechanical. Nor are they the active agents of their own economic will, working their way upon an inert and passive mass. They are responsive partners in an intimate and mutual relationship.

Berry describes this relationship between the farmer and the land as a “sort of dance in which the partners are always at opposite sexual poles, and the lead keeps changing.” This responsivity should not be mistaken for some form of passivity. The farmer acts upon the farm and in turn allows himself to be acted upon by the farm. By carefully observing and attending to his farm over many seasons he learns how to protect and nurture the health of his soil. The soil in turn yields its crop. He must discover and cooperate with the integrity of the natural cycles that sustain it as a community of living beings. To keep this dance going the farmer must avoid damaging the land by imposing patterns of activity.

\[26\text{Ibid.}, \text{p.} \ 48.\]

\[27\text{Berry, } \text{The Unsettling of America}, \text{p.} \ 87; \text{italics mine.}\]

\[28\text{Ibid.}, \text{p.} \ 8. \text{For example, in one season the farmer acts as planter of seed and the soil as that which receives it and in a subsequent season the farmer is a recipient as the soil, through its crop, sheds the seed. Michael Pollan’s chapters on the grass farmer in } \text{The Omnivore’s Dilemma} \text{ provide an excellent account of this complex relationship.}\]
that are alien to those cycles. In this he practices an intelligent and disciplined responsiveness to the character of his particular farm.

Berry writes that the serious farmer maintains this “practical respect” for the “distinct individuality of their place and the neighborhood of creatures that lives there” as the “true discipline” of farming and its “most insistent and formidable concern.” Good farming is “particularizing work” where you “can’t deal with things merely according to category” but are required to consider “the uniqueness of a place or situation.” Fidelity is a practical outworking of an emotional investment – a glad respect or love – for the farm as a community. It requires being responsive to the limits and possibilities of a particular place. These limits are inescapable. He writes, “our acts are being measured by a real and unyielding standard that was invented by no human…” and that those actions which “are not in harmony with nature are inevitably and sometimes irremediably destructive.” If we use Macmurray’s terms we would say the good farmer diligently seeks to understand, be “fashioned by”, and “act in terms of”, the claims of reality on his particular farm. The confluence of Berry’s thought with Macmurray’s gives us a picture of rationality as a complex activity in exercising fidelity to reality.

Regarding our dependency on the earth Berry writes, “There is, in practice, no such thing as autonomy. Practically, there is only a distinction

29 Berry, *The Way of Ignorance*, p. 45.
30 Ibid., pp. 48-49. See also Berry’s *Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community*, pp. 35-38.
32 Ibid., p. 238.
between responsible and irresponsible dependence."³³ One of the fundamental features of our existence as living creatures is our dependence on good soil, clean water, and clean air. These things are necessary for the production of healthy food upon which our existence daily depends. In the simplest acts of eating and drinking we enact these dependencies every day. Though most of us are not involved in food production we each are faced with a choice of whether or not to buy food that has been produced responsibly. Berry argues that it is our desire to rise above these dependencies - particularly the significant demands they place upon us if we are to act responsibly - that lead us to embrace illusions.³⁴ He writes that, “we have an inordinate desire to be superior… to our condition. We wish to rise above the sweat and bother of taking care of anything…” and to be free of “the obligations of stewardship.”³⁵ When we act on this desire we impose our subjective impulses on reality.

It is interesting how when fidelity is eschewed, that is, when the responsibility of learning how to act in terms of the world is neglected, that such escapist behavior is considered free. Berry would agree with Iris Murdoch that what is often called autonomy is often nothing more than the “self-assertive movements of deluded selfish will.”³⁶ Autonomy is often characterized as an

³³ Berry, The Unsettling of America, p. 111.

³⁴ We may also choose to avoid these demands through willful ignorance; we can choose not to know whether our food was produced responsibly or not. Those of us who are not willfully ignorant may still choose to perpetuate harmful forms of agriculture that produce food less expensively because we desire to retain our money for things that we consider more valuable.

³⁵ Berry, The Hidden Wound, pp. 112-113.

absolute freedom that is incompatible with any moral obligation; an unfettered individualism. She writes, “Freedom… is not an inconsequential chucking of one’s weight about, it is the disciplined overcoming of self.” It is likely that Murdoch would agree with Berry when he says, “the ability to tender an appropriate practical regard and respect to each place in its difference is a kind of freedom; the inability to do so is a kind of tyranny.” This ability, he maintains, is rooted in, or constitutes a form of, love. It is not merely the application of “knowledge that involves affection” but is “a kind of knowledge that comes from or with affection” and that is not available to the unaffectionate. In its exercise it is a form of caring that involves a commitment to the identity and integrity of a particular place as a whole and not merely “to the powers and quantities to which it can be reduced” for the benefit of one’s personal economic interests. Love is an integral part of fidelity to reality for “When one works beyond the reach of one’s love for the place one is working in and for the things and creatures one is

37 Borgmann observes that the freedom “we proudly or defiantly flaunt” is a morally unbounded, unconditional self-determination that is typically “…restricted to… the inconsequential area of consumption.” Moreover, our actions are deemed private and are guided by an “absolute freedom that is beyond all moral obligation and justification.” See TCCL, pp. 172-173; italics mine.

38 Murdoch, Existentialists and Mystics, “The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts”, p. 378. Halliday, in Reconciliation and Reality, observes that “There is no real freedom, except in being a servant, and a willing one, to what is seen to be true… To do otherwise is to become a mere link in a chain of causes external to the moral and rational self, and therefore to become a “thing.”” He writes, “Freedom is not the ability to do anything” but is the power to “identify with those things” which develop our nature as moral persons. See pp. 114-118. In a manner that fits with Halliday’s argument Paul Moser, in a private conversation, added that the kind of autonomy that we need is the freedom to love as God loves and this love includes love for our enemies.


40 Berry, Sex, Economy, Freedom, and Community, p. 24.

working with and among, then destruction inevitably results.”

Berry describes this love in terms of affection in order to emphasize its emotional character. It is not merely an instrumental concern that is given in order to secure some other desired end. Regarding the role of emotion in fidelity he writes,

Our politics and science have never mastered the fact that people need more than to understand their obligation to one another and the earth; they need also the feeling of such obligation... A nation of urban nomads, such as we have become, may simply be unable to be enough disturbed by its destruction of the ecological health of the land, because the people’s dependence on the land, though it has been expounded to them over and over again in general terms, is not immediate to their feelings.

Berry’s work helps illustrate how a sense of import – an emotional sense that something is worth attending to and acting upon – is needed to be appropriately responsive to the world.

It is commonly believed that that reason and emotion are forces that are always at odds with one another and that they must be kept apart in order for our decisions to be rational. Berry’s work intimates that that the difficulty we face in exercising fidelity to reality, that is, that our struggle to apprehend the world as it is and to act in terms of it, cannot be rightly characterized merely as a struggle between reason and emotion. Emotion, on his view, plays an important positive role in fostering an ability to act in fitting ways with others and the world. Both Macmurray and Murdoch think similarly. As we have seen, Macmurray writes that “reason is primarily an affair of emotion” because emotion is that which “stands

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directly behind activity” and determines the “substance and direction” of our actions. Thus, “the real struggle” between our impulse to act in terms of the world and the impulse to act in favor of ourselves without regard to the world is one that “centres in the emotional field.” Being rational involves cultivating and affirming one emotional impulse over another. Macmurray uses an example of loving another person to support his point. I can enjoy him and “feel his existence and his reality to be important in themselves” or I can enjoy him merely for “the pleasurable emotions which he stimulates in me.” Enjoying him – taking joy in that other as that other - constitutes loving him objectively, whereas using him primarily as an instrument to bring me pleasure (with little or no concern for him as that particular other) is at best a selfish form of self-love. He argues that it is this capacity to love objectively that “is the core of rationality” because it is this love that is “the ultimate source of our capacity to behave in terms of the object.” Berry calls this responsive love fidelity. Given her similar view of rationality it should be no surprise that Murdoch also reaches this conclusion.


46 Why choose the rational impulse over the subjective one? We care about our identity as persons and want to devote ourselves to that which is worthy of devotion. We don’t want to be the kind of persons who embrace self-consoling fictions. We want to stake ourselves on what really matters. Thus, our need for truth is a facet of our personal well-being. See Helm, “Love, Identification, and the Emotions,” p. 16.

47 Macmurray, *Reason and Emotion*, p. 32. Enjoying another as another need not exclude enjoying them for what they mean to me. See Nussbaum in *Upheavals of Thought*, pp. 30-33.

48 Ibid., pp. 26; 31-32. Similarly, Halliday writes that to be rational is “to love rightly” and that involves having a “heart open to all that is noble.” To be irrational is to surrender one’s “true self”, that is, that which is realized in loving what is good, to impulses aimed at “selfish self-preservation or gain.” See *Reconciliation and Reality*, pp. 59-61.
She argues that in order to apprehend reality as it is we must “surrender ourselves to its authority with a love that is unpossessive and unselfish.”

The neurologist Antonio Damasio, in light of evaluating some of the most recent neurological research, also argues for the positive role of emotion for practical reasoning. He remarks that the “widely held view” that reason and emotion do “not mix any more than oil and water” is not the complete view. Emotion does wreak havoc in the processes of reasoning in certain circumstances. However, research indicates “that the absence of emotion and feeling is no less damaging, no less capable of compromising the rationality that makes us distinctively human.” Damasio presents evidence from brain-injured subjects that indicate that the rational decision making processes we rely upon for practical matters regarding our personal lives, including ethical ones, require an ability to experience emotion.

There are specific types of brain injuries that leave an individual’s capacity for abstract, theoretical rationality unimpaired though that individual’s capacity for emotion is absent or severely reduced. Individuals with these injuries are capable of reaching logically sound conclusions by employing rational thought processes, as evidenced through extensive cognitive testing, yet their ability to exercise reason in the practical, decision making circumstances related to their personal

49 Murdoch, Existentialists and Mystics, “The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts”, p. 372. In particular she argues for the role of love in understanding art. She thinks the moral life requires the same kind of surrender as art does. Both require a willingness to see and join “the world as it is” and this requires that the self, in terms of those of its impulses that are selfish, must get out of the way. See pp. 376-377. See also C.S. Lewis’ An Experiment in Criticism, p. 19.

50 Antonio R. Damasio, Descartes’ Error, p. xi.

51 Ibid., p. xii.
and social well-being was severely impaired. Typical of those with certain types of brain injuries are those who are “unable to reason and decide in ways conducive to the maintenance and betterment of himself and his family” and are “unable to decide properly... when the decision involved personal or social matters.” Without emotion, and access to the emotional learning of the past, the world presents itself as a “decision-making landscape... [that is] hopelessly flat.” In this emotionally flat landscape no course of action stands out as more significant and worthy of commitment than any other. It is a world without import. In this condition a person's ability to evaluate what is worth attending to and acting upon is impaired. This empirical research offers further support to observations like Berry’s that emotion plays an integral role in our ability to make rational decisions about what constitutes the good life.

**Emotions as Evaluative Feelings**

Damasio’s research fits well with the view of emotions as evaluative feelings that philosophers such as Macmurray, Nussbaum, Robert Solomon, and Bennett Helm espouse. Nussbaum describes the evaluative character of emotions as *eudaimonistic*. She writes, “The object of emotion is seen as *important* for some role it plays in the person’s own life.” A person’s emotions are concerned with the value of some object as it pertains to that person’s flourishing or well-being. However, she is careful to point out that this does not

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52 Ibid., pp. 49, 53, 61, 70, 78-79, and 138.
53 Ibid., pp. 38 and 43.
54 Ibid., p. 51.
reduce that object to one that only has instrumental value. She speaks of her emotion of grief at her mother’s death as centered upon her mother precisely because her mom is a valued part of her life. She did not value her mom in order to flourish but her flourishing existed in, or was animated by, her mom because of their relationship and the importance to her that it embodied. She loved her mom for “her own sake” and yet this is not contrary to having loved her as a valued constituent “of a life that is my life and not someone else’s.”\(^{56}\) In this way our emotions “insist on the real importance of their object, but they also embody the person’s own commitment to the object as a part of her scheme of ends.”\(^{57}\) Our emotional responses, like Nussbaum’s grief, can make intelligible, or reveal, our eudaimonistic orientation, that is, what’s at stake or matters to us in a given situation.

Bennett Helm’s analysis of the evaluative character of emotion provides some additional conceptual tools and terminology that will be useful for my argument.\(^{58}\) Having already looked at the problem of import in the previous chapter we saw that Helm argues that for some person or thing to have import for you is for it to be worthy of your attention and action. This means that a consistent pattern of attending to this object of import and acting, or being prepared to act, on its behalf is required if it is to be intelligible that it has import to you. He describes this attentiveness as a kind of vigilance for what happens or

\(^{56}\) Ibid., pp. 30-33.

\(^{57}\) Ibid.

\(^{58}\) See Helm’s “Love, Identification, and the Emotions”, pp. 9-12; and “Emotions as Evaluative Feelings”, pp. 4-8.
might happen to the object of import. To care about one’s health, for example, requires not only vigilance for healthiness but also a *preparedness* to act so as to maintain it. If an individual never attends to the condition of their own health and chooses not to discover and do the kinds of things necessary to nurture it, then regardless of what that person says we would conclude that their health fails to hold import for them.

Emotions are intentional mental phenomena. When we experience an emotion it is directed at, or about, several distinct objects. Helm illustrates this by exploring the emotion of fear. When we experience fear the *target* is that at which the emotion is directed, for example, a growling dog. What I am afraid of is the dog and its potential to harm me. The *formal object* is the kind of evaluation of the target relevant to the emotion, here dangerousness. And the *focus* is the background object that has import to the person having the emotion and whose relationship to the target makes intelligible the evaluation implicit in the emotion. In this case that focus is one’s personal safety. We experience an emotion when we are committed to the import, or value, of its focus. In this example we experience fear when our personal safety, something we are committed to as worthy of our attention and action, is threatened by the dog. A “person-focused emotion”, such as Nussbaum’s grief, is focused on, and hence commits one to, the import of a particular person as such; in this case, her mom.\(^59\) The emotions

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\(^59\) Helm, “Love, Identification, and the Emotions,” p. 15. People and things have import to us under particular descriptions. For example, I care about these particular photographs that document my parents’ family histories and not just any photographs. He writes, “Caring is always caring about something as something.”
an agent experiences are intelligible relative to those ends valued by that agent as part of their well-being, that is, they are eudaimonistic. Thus, our emotions are in some sense agent-relative, that is, they are normally reflective of our chosen ends or responsive to what has import for us. However, our emotions, like Nussbaum’s grief, are neither mere commitments to import nor are they mere phenomenal accompaniments to evaluative judgments - they are evaluative feelings.\(^{60}\) When we find something to be worthy of attention and action the relevant mode of attention and action is emotional.\(^{61}\) Emotions are intentional feelings of import that have a distinctive evaluative content.\(^{62}\) For example, the emotion of fear has a specific way of evaluating its object – to feel fear is to be pained \textit{by danger}.\(^{63}\) To feel grief is to be pained \textit{by loss}. The evaluative character of our emotions is part of a broader evaluative perspective of the world that includes evaluative judgments.

In finding something to be worthy of attention and action it is important to emphasize that the relevant mode of attention and action is emotional. As we saw in Chapter Two human desire is distinguishable from mere goal-directedness in that to desire something is to find it worthwhile. Helm writes, “to desire something is not merely to be disposed to pursue it as an end; it rather

\(^{60}\text{Ibid., pp. 24-25. Our emotions often have a phenomenal accompaniment as a component of them associated with changes in the body, as when our pulse quickens and our muscles tense when we are scared, however our emotions are not essentially those phenomenal qualities.}\)

\(^{61}\text{Helm, “Emotions as Evaluative Feelings, p. 5.}\)

\(^{62}\text{Ibid., p. 2.}\)

\(^{63}\text{Ibid., p. 3.}\)
involves the sense that this end is worthy of pursuit."\textsuperscript{64} We do not say something is worthy of pursuit because it is desirable. This provides support for the view that the moral quality of an action is dependent on its emotional character as it is the emotion that provides the motivational structure of that act.\textsuperscript{65} An illustration of this is found in Lawrence Blum's \textit{Friendship, Altruism and Morality}. He writes,

An integral part of the good to Sue in Bob's act of visiting her in the hospital is that he is thereby showing concern for her. We cannot envisage the act of visiting prompted by some other motive, while still preserving the good to Sue of that act. Suppose that Bob's motivation in visiting Sue is not concern for her but a sense of duty towards her. His attitude is not one of concern for how she is doing, or of making her feel better by his visit. There is no direct desire to see her.\textsuperscript{66}

Without the emotional aspects of love his action is not as great a good to Sue as it could be. The character of Bob's act itself is dependent on the character of the emotional evaluation that provides the motivational structure of that action. If the focus, or background object, that Bob finds worthy of attending to and acting upon is primarily being a morally good person, then Bob could find satisfaction at visiting Sue whether or not he was glad to see her. In fact, Bob could have a sense of self-satisfaction even if upon arriving at her floor the nurses said she needed rest and told him he could not see her. In either case he may sense that he has fulfilled his duty. However, notice how this shifts if Bob's focus is Sue. In this case what is worthy of attending to and acting upon is Sue. She is the object

\textsuperscript{64} Helm, "Emotional Reason – How to Deliberate About Value," p. 9.

\textsuperscript{65} Helm, "Emotions as Evaluative Feelings", pp. 7-8.

\textsuperscript{66} As cited in Caroline J. Simon's \textit{The Disciplined Heart}, p. 31.
of Bob’s care and concern. What holds import for Bob is this particular person and not primarily his sense of moral goodness that comes from fulfilling his duties. In this situation we would expect Bob to be glad upon seeing Sue and disappointed if he was turned away. This provides support for the position that the moral quality of an act, at least in some cases, is shaped by its emotional content.

It is commonly thought that when there is a conflict between an evaluation provided by one’s emotions and that provided by one’s intellect through deliberation that the emotional one is the one that is faulty. However, our emotions can provide us with important evaluative information that our judgments, by themselves. If we consider Nussbaum’s grief it is not the case that she first forms the judgment that her mom has value, that her mom’s death represents a loss of that which is valued, and then has the corresponding emotion based on an evaluative judgment based on these things. She does not first make the judgment and then have the emotion. Rather, the evaluation, that is, the assessment of the full character of what has occurred, cannot be known

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67 Robert Adams, in *Finite and Infinite Goods*, argues similarly. He writes, “What persons need in their relationships with others goes far beyond anything that can or should be spelled out in a system of rules of duty... If I am committed only to do my duty to you, my commitment seems more to duty than you.” Love involves being committed to a particular person as such and “not just to appropriate behavior.” See p. 172.

68 It is outside the scope of this paper to provide a full account of the relationship between emotional evaluations and intellectual ones. However, Bennett Helm offers a promising line of argument in “Emotional Reason: How to Deliberate About Value”. He provides an account of how emotions and judgments are tightly interconnected evaluative perspectives that constitute elements of a broader evaluative perspective in which each can correct the other. See pp. 10-14.

69 Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, pp. 41-45. She writes, “When I grieve, I do not first of all coolly embrace the proposition, ‘My wonderful mother is dead,’ and then set about grieving. No, the real, full recognition of that terrible event... is the upheaval.”
apart from her emotion – the grief reveals the value of that which is lost; it reflects the degree to which her mom was treasured by her. That treasuring of her mother, and of her relationship with her, is a measure of her import that cannot be expressed or recognized without the distinctive character of these emotions. Our emotions may reveal to us the depth of import a person holds for us, the depth of wanting to be with them, in a manner that an evaluative judgment without emotion could not. It is not the case that Nussbaum disinterestedly forms an evaluative judgment of how much her mom means to her and then has an emotional response that indicates that.

Damasio’s findings also offer empirical support for Macmurray’s observation that “a judgment of value can never be intellectual in its origin.”

Macmurray states that “there is one crucial thing that thinking cannot do” and that is to decide whether the thing that is revealed to it is “good or bad, beautiful or ugly, to be shunned or sought.” This is Macmurray's way of stating what I presented in Chapter Two as Tolstoy's Problem of Significance or Helm's Problem of Import. Inferential processes, by themselves, cannot tell us what is worthy or deserving of our care. Our ability to make evaluations, that is, to determine the value of a thing, is dependent on our emotions. To engage in practical reasoning, in contrast to theoretical reasoning, requires emotion. It is often the case that a moral evaluation is formulated into a normative standard and passed on to others who embrace it even though they do not share that

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70 Macmurray, *Reason and Emotion*, pp. 36-37.

71 Ibid.
evaluation in their own emotional experience. In such cases a person may “consent without conviction to what others believe”, that is, he may hold to beliefs that he does not see for himself are true and right.\textsuperscript{72} One can accept as authoritative that which one has not judged for oneself is rightly so. Such consent, sometimes given due to external compulsion, Halliday describes as “a form of slavery.”\textsuperscript{73} It constitutes a failure to engage the world in a manner that is \textit{personal} because it fails to win from us our own consent. A helpful example of this is found in Mark Twain’s \textit{Adventures of Huckleberry Finn}.\textsuperscript{74}

As Huck travels down the Mississippi with the escaped slave Jim a friendship begins to develop between them and Huck grows into the awareness that Jim is a man, that is, a person just like himself. This leads to what Huck considers a conflict of conscience. His cultural and religious upbringing leads him to affirm the judgment that Jim is someone’s property and that he doesn’t have any worth of his own. Moreover, he believes that if he doesn’t turn Jim in that he, Huck himself, is worthy of punishment in hell. His judgment about a black man’s worth and the punishable character of his own action are ones that he is not quite yet capable of recognizing as not fully his own. They come into painful conflict with the perspective that is beginning to form on the basis of his own experience with Jim. Its resolution comes when he decides to embrace \textit{his} own evaluation,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[72] Halliday, \textit{Reconciliation and Reality}, p. 30. See pp. 27-40 for a thorough account of the centrality of subjective insight for that kind of life that can be considered moral or personal.
\item[73] Ibid., pp. 29-30.
\item[74] See Chapter 31 of \textit{The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn}. As we will see this story provides a plausible example of where an emotional evaluation corrects a value judgment. Though I wrote this section several years ago I recently discovered that Bennett Helm also briefly alludes to the same scene in his paper “Emotional Reason: How to Deliberate About Value”. See p. 13.
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rooted in *his* emotional apprehension of Jim through their developing friendship, instead of the one he has been taught. He tears up a letter he is composing that exposes Jim’s whereabouts to his owner and says to himself, “All right, then, I’ll go to hell.” He rejects his previous beliefs about Jim’s personhood even under the threat of external compulsion.

Twain, through Huck’s example, hints at the importance of embracing one’s own evaluations as an integral part of responsibly engaging the world.\(^75\) We must own our convictions as our own. We must believe, not merely because we are told by others what to believe, but because we cannot help it – we see for ourselves that it is true and right.\(^76\) This “ownership” is part of the subjective insight, or personal conviction, necessary for our engagement with others and the world to be *personal*. It is important to note that one can affirm this and not affirm subjectivism. Something is not morally right merely because one believes it to be morally right. Emphasizing the necessity of personal insight is not the same as endorsing the view that a subject’s beliefs are determinative of what is morally right. In other words, the individual is not the source of that which is morally authoritative. Something is authoritative because it wins from us our consent *and* because we take it to be objectively worthy of that consent. We would not use the word authoritative to describe something that we take is merely a matter of our own opinion. We need to look at whether the authoritative character of reality, moral or otherwise, is compatible with the autonomy requisite for the realization

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\(^{75}\) Macmurray, *Reason and Emotion*, pp. 36-37.

of our identity.

_Fidelity, Autonomy, and Identity_

If apprehending the world involves learning how to act in terms of the world, that is, if it requires exercising fidelity to reality, then what shape does that responsiveness take when the reality we are seeking to know is another person or persons? Answering this is important given my effort to identify the character of that form of caring or love necessary for knowing others in a manner that is personal or intimate. It is commonly thought that the autonomy necessary for mature moral agency or for the realization of one’s unique personal identity is diminished by the influence of other persons. In contrast, I argue that our identity is ultimately personal, that is, we are not fully who we are apart from being in relationships with others that are personal. At stake in the conflict between these two positions are issues about autonomy and authority that bear on the nature of the self and the character of our identity as moral persons. There are two other important questions that are important to ask. First, what are the characteristics of, and conditions for, that kind of autonomy necessary to live a life that is personal and to engage in relationships that are personal? Second, is there room for the requisite kind of autonomy if knowledge of another person requires some form of fidelity to that other as a reality that exists independently of us? I will begin to sketch an answer to these questions here that will get more fully

77 Helm, in “Love, Identification, and the Emotions”, also raises this question. When it comes to caring for particular persons in a manner that is personal he asks “…what sort of responsiveness – what sort of vigilance and preparedness to act – is demanded from the subject…”? See pp. 15-16. Cicero, in _De Amicitia_, also explores the moral considerations that shape the character of that fidelity which it is appropriate to extend to another. See chapters 10-13.
developed in the fifth and final chapter of this paper.

As we have seen the subject of fidelity, or responsive receptivity, raises deep and important concerns. It is possible that nowhere are these concerns more emotionally charged than in the arena of our relationships with other persons, including God. The notion that apprehending reality might involve some form of surrender, conformity, or receptivity to a reality independent of ourselves seems incompatible with the autonomy necessary for our well-being. Earlier I relied on Ernest Becker to identify this concern. He thinks that the central problem in life is our need to “win a degree of self-realization without surrender to complete spiritlessness or slavery.”

Concerning its cosmic, or personal, dimension he asks “How does one lean on God and still stand on his own feet as a passionate human being?” Thomas Nagel shares a similar concern. He makes clear that one need not believe that God exists for the mere possibility of God's existence to evoke fear. He candidly describes his own fear in terms of having a “cosmic authority problem” and intimates that God's existence would impinge on his life in ways he does not welcome. Recognizing the evaluative character of emotion enables us to explore these emotional responses in an effort to discover what they might reveal about our conceptions of autonomy, authority, and identity as they bear on our notion of the good life.

We seem to be faced with an unsatisfactory choice: either we express

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78 Becker, *The Denial of Death*, p. 82.

79 Ibid., p. 259.

ourselves and disregard any reality that would seek to constrain that expression or we respect reality and disregard ourselves.\(^1\) I take it that each of these alternatives, presented here rather starkly, are problematic. Possibly, not many of us would be comfortable adopting either. However, they seem to be undergirded by, or the outcome of, the common assumption that our identity is realized through an autonomy that we exercise most fully on our own. God and other persons seem to constitute influences that undermine or threaten that autonomy. If so, the choice before us is apparently between an unfettered individualism in which the autonomy of a person can be fully developed and expressed independently of others or a dependence on others that inevitably involves some diminishment of that autonomy. This concern to safeguard autonomy from diminishment by influences external to the self is also expressed in the work of Henry David Thoreau. Seeking to capture the spirit that animates Thoreau, Philip Hallie writes:

> He would not let himself be enslaved by other people’s demands, or by his own fear and ambition... He believed that the land of redemptive, joyous living was wherever and whenever you sauntered, if only you wholeheartedly turned your back on the suicidal, quietly desperate, mutually enslaved slaves of human society... As for him, he felt himself coming alive only when he was free of social bondage. A tame dog lives to please its human masters; a wild animal does not. In fact a wild animal is somewhat surly when you try to use it for your purposes... Their energies are vivaciously self-indulgent.\(^2\)

Thoreau thinks that most people live “hidden inside little nutshells of timid

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\(^1\) John Oman characterizes this as a choice in which either we ride over reality or reality rides over us. See his \textit{Grace and Personality}, Part One, Ch. 8.

\(^2\) Hallie, \textit{Tales of Good and Evil, Help and Harm}, pp. 119-120.
obedience.” He recognizes that there are ways in which we order our lives to secure the acceptance of others that is a form of enslavement to them. This conformity constitutes a form of obedience that is self-diminishing and as such is ill-fitting to our character as persons. Paul Gooch sums up this awareness as: “Obedience is a virtue – in dogs.” We are suspicious about obedience, Gooch writes, because we recognize that “…every obedient dog has, necessarily, it’s master.” Being under a master connotes a relationship marked by domination and servility. Thoreau suggests that the alternative to gentle, dog-like compliance is a kind of wild self-indulgence patterned after the untamed natural order. Perhaps he is merely engaging in hyperbole as Emerson does when Emerson says he wants to cultivate speaking the “rude truth” in all relationships that he might be more capable of being himself. Whether hyperbole or not Thoreau draws attention to the crucial point that being personal requires an independence or uprightness that involves stepping out of a manner of relating to others that constitutes a form of enslavement.

Thoreau, Becker, Nagel, and Gooch draw our attention to what can be called the Problem of Authority. Gooch describes the issue in this way:

“...obedience, in that it always looks toward some master or authority, diminishes

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83 Ibid., p. 129.


85 Ibid., p. 162.

86 Ralph Waldo Emerson, Complete Essays and Other Writings, “Self Reliance,” p. 262. He writes, "I am ashamed to think how easily we capitulate to badges and names, to large societies and dead institutions. Every decent and well-spoken individual sways me more than is right. I ought to go upright and vital, and speak the rude truth in all ways." Italics mine.
the freedom and autonomy we think the inalienable possession of mature moral agents. However, I will argue that we cannot resolve this problem merely by ridding ourselves of those things that we might consider masters or authorities. In practical terms something becomes authoritative for us, whether it should be so or not, when we stake ourselves on it, that is, when we exercise a consistent pattern of attending to it and acting on its behalf. We will conform ourselves to something that we take as authoritative. It may be that even conformity to our own impulses, in contrast to conformity to external influences, is not itself sufficient to avoid diminishment or enslavement. One important question is: Who or what should we conform to, that is, who or what should be authoritative in our lives? This is Borgmann's point when he writes that we are “always and already engaged in drawing the outlines of... a way of life, and we have to take responsibility for this fact and ask whether it is a good life.” The shape of these lines is determined in important ways by what we have already chosen to take, and continue to choose to take, as authoritative in our own lives. A second and related question, which was raised earlier, is: Is there any authority whose influence will result in the flourishing of one's autonomy? I will argue that whether conformity will enhance or diminish our autonomy is dependent not only on the character of the conformity but also on the character of that to which we conform. I will explore a biographical story by Tim O'Brien to help illustrate how these issues of authority and autonomy are intimately connected to the character of our

87 Gooch, Reflections on Jesus and Socrates: Word and Silence, p. 162.

88 Borgmann, Real American Ethics, p. 6.
identity as persons.

Tim O'Brien provides a compelling account of the diminishing effects of social conformity in his short story “On the Rainy River”. O'Brien recounts a week he spent on this river, one of the watery boundaries between Minnesota and Canada, wrestling with whether to serve in the Vietnam War or flee to Canada. He worries that if he flees he will be labeled a “treasonous pussy” by his father and the other men from the small Midwestern town he calls home. From their perspective it is “a war to stop the Communists, plain and simple” and they believe it is justified to feel disgust toward those who have “second thoughts about killing and dying” for “plain and simple reasons.” O'Brien's reasons for not wanting to fight are mixed. Yes, he fears death; he states, “at the very center, was the raw fact of terror, I did not want to die. Not ever. But certainly not then, not there, not in a wrong war.” But beyond this fear, and more importantly, he emphasizes that he does not want to give allegiance to a cause that he sees as suspect. He admits to being young and politically naïve yet to him the war seems wrong as “Certain blood was being shed for uncertain reasons.”

O'Brien anguishes over his decision for a week at the Tip Top Lodge under the “mute watchfulness” of eighty-one year old Elroy Berdahl. Elroy seems to sense, but is willfully silent about, the reason why O'Brien is there. His face, unlike those from his own community, affirms O'Brien’s struggle; he does not seek to manipulate him with threats, taunts, or even kindly advice. Late in the week Elroy takes him fishing within swimming distance of the Canadian shore.

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O’Brien recalls,

It struck me then that he must have planned it. I’ll never be certain, of course, but I think he meant to bring me up against the realities, to guide me across the river and to take me to the edge and to stand a kind of vigil as I chose a life for myself.

Under Elroy’s compassionate, watchful presence, he begins to cry. Quietly at first and then with loud, hard convulsions. He tries to will himself out of the boat and over to Canada. In that moment he is confronted with a swirl of faces from his hometown, the whole universe – parents, old teachers, Huck Finn, Abe Lincoln, a New York cabbie, veterans of the Civil War, cheerleaders, and more – all yelling at him “Traitor!”, “Turncoat!”, “Pussy!” O’Brien writes,

I couldn’t endure the mockery… the shore just twenty yards away, I couldn’t make myself be brave. It had nothing to do with morality. Embarrassment, that’s all it was. And right then I submitted. I would go to the war – I would kill and maybe die – because I was embarrassed not to. That was the sad thing. And so I sat in the bow of the boat and cried.

Sensing O’Brien’s decision Elroy says, “ain’t biting”, reels in their lines, and quietly turns the boat back to the Minnesota shore. O’Brien returns home to submit to the demands of his government and, more so, the expectations of his community. I take it that it is this kind of diminishing social conformity – one that constitutes a failure to rise to the demands of living a life that is personal – that Thoreau finds so repugnant. His story offers support of Emerson’s observation that we easily capitulate to others in a manner that constitutes a failure to walk upright.⁹⁰

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⁹⁰ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Complete Essays and Other Writings*, “Self Reliance;” p. 262.
O'Brien's story, along with Twain's *Huck Finn*, helps us to identify two aspects of the capacity for uprightness indicative of moral autonomy that distinguish it from that kind of conformity to others that undermines it. Conformity to others fails to rise to the level of personal action when it involves acting in accord with another's demands or expectations when those fail to appear to the agent's own insight to be right and fitting. Such actions involve a kind of dependence on others that is irresponsible; they constitute an abdication of one's need to exercise one's own insight. Voicing this concern W.F. Halliday writes,

... that men should stand upon their own feet, that their belief should be the outcome of their own convictions and held in the light of the whole of their experience... to consent without conviction to what others believe... is a form of slavery.\(^91\)

The need for personal insight is echoed in H.H. Farmer's comments about the conditions required to relate to God in a manner that is personal. He writes,

For if the demands of God are to enter a man's soul in a truly personal way, they must present themselves to his own insight as reasonable and right and relevant to the situation in which he is, otherwise they would have no intelligible meaning, or, having meaning, could only be obeyed as a horse obeys the whip.\(^92\)

Being able to perceive something as reasonable, right, and fitting and being able to maintain, or affirm, that insight, even in the face of pressure to do otherwise is

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\(^91\) Halliday, *Reconciliation and Reality*, pp. 9-10; 29-30. Halliday thinks that this capacity for uprightness is one that can be fostered by a loving, personal agent. He criticizes the influence of organized religion throughout history, including Christianity, as a hypnotic force that has undermined this capacity. Yet he argues that the God of Jesus is one that seeks to promote it.

\(^92\) H.H. Farmer, *The World and God*, p. 190. John Oman, in *Grace and Personality*, describes the importance of this facet of autonomy in this way: "Action, though otherwise not wrong, is less than right, unless we, of our own insight, judge it right; and when it conflicts with that insight, its innocuousness does not hinder it from being, for us, wrong." See Part One, Chapter 7.
an integral part of engaging others or the world in a manner that is personal. This is the case whether that pressure comes from others or from impulses within oneself that are contrary to one's moral insight. To “obey the whip” constitutes a failure to stand upright. However, moral autonomy is more than the absence of external compulsion; it is more than freedom from an external master. It has to do with the capacity to act in accord with one's insight. On this account being personal is an attainment.  

We are responsible for our actions whether or not they conform to, and are an expression of, our moral insight. However, we fail to be personal – to realize or express our moral personality – when we act against our own insight.

It should be apparent that not only is moral autonomy more than the absence of external compulsion but that also it cannot consist in an unqualified conformity to ourselves, that is, it cannot consist of the unrestrained expression of our own impulses. Even Thoreau recognizes that there are impulses within us to which if we yield will result in a diminishment of the self. We cannot wildly indulge all our impulses and yet be free. To secure our own well-being there are impulses within ourselves that we should affirm and those that we should not. Like Emerson he recognizes we should resist conforming to our desire to gain acceptance from others if doing so involves violating our personal moral insight. Thus, implicit even within Thoreau is a normative notion of identity. To submit

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93 Halliday writes, in *Reconciliation and Reality*, that the “essential nature of man is not mere individuality but personality” and that though “personality is our real nature, it is also an attainment.” We are capable of surrendering our “true self,” that which is capable of rightly loving what is noble, to a “selfish individualism” in which we are concerned only with “selfish self-preservation or gain.” See pp. 59-61.
oneself to an authority that one does not apprehend as rightful and true, that is, as one that should be obeyed, is to be enslaved.\textsuperscript{94} It is to diminish one's identity.

A second facet of autonomy, and one that is interrelated with the first, is that which can be called self-determination.\textsuperscript{95} An act is self-determined when that act originates or is initiated by the self. Being personal requires that we exercise our wills in accordance with our moral insight, not in violation of it. An action is personal when that act is an expression of what the agent sees for himself as right and true. John Oman states, “...a moral person is self-determined according to his own self-direction [personal insight].”\textsuperscript{96} Accidentally doing the right thing does not constitute personal action. And choosing to do what others deem is right but that you do not, as in O'Brien's social conformity, also fails to constitute action that is personal. He fails to be appropriately responsive to his character as a moral person and surrenders that in favor of embracing a decision which he thinks will prevent rejection. He presents a façade, or shell, that resembles himself to his community while his real face is hidden from their sight. In so doing he fails to recognize that acceptance or affirmation from others – if it is to be personal - is itself morally conditioned. If others accept him only on the basis that he does what they think he should do, regardless of whether he sees it as right, their behavior constitutes a failure to treat him as a person. His story helps us to see that we can seek to satisfy our hunger for communion in ways that makes

\textsuperscript{94} See Halliday's \textit{Reconciliation and Reality}, pp. 28-30.

\textsuperscript{95} John Oman, in \textit{Grace and Personality}. See Part One, Chapters 6 and 7.

\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., Part One, Chapter 7.
communion – an activity of the highest personal order – impossible. His actions, along with the character of acceptance he is inviting others to extend, constitute a failure to engage with others personally. He fails to respond to his identity as that which is personal and instead treats himself as a thing. He presents himself as an object, or commodity, whose value lies in being found appealing to others on grounds external to those which constitute his self as personal.97

O’Brien’s failure to stand upright, to live up to those values he recognizes are worthy of his fidelity, results in a persistent shame. He begins his story by saying, “This is one story I’ve never told before... For more than twenty years I’ve had to live with it, feeling the shame, trying to push it away.”98 Shame is the emotion we experience when we fail to uphold the values that we recognize are worthy of staking our lives on. It is indicative of an awareness that one has failed to realize the values central to one's identity. Helm’s work is helpful here. He writes,

To be a person is, roughly, to be a creature with a capacity to care... about yourself and the motives for action that are truly your own. To care about yourself in this way is to put yourself at stake in your engagement with particular things... things that you thereby value... [it] is, in effect, to define the kind of life it is worth your living and so your identity as this particular person.99

97 We regularly speak of treating people as objects or things. We say that a man treats a woman as a sex object when the satisfaction he seeks from her is not based on knowing and enjoying her as the particular person she is but in merely using her for his own sexual gratification. Conversely, a woman can present herself as a sex object when she considers her capacity for being personal as irrelevant to the satisfaction she seeks to bring to another. See Donna Frenta’s Sex & The Soul for recent research on the socialization of girls in our culture as sex objects, that is, the manner in which they are presented as things for others’ sexual use; esp. pp. 144-148.


Our well-being as persons is not merely a matter of our psychological or physical health. Helm argues that our well-being crucially depends on whether we uphold the values constitutive of our identity, that is, whether we succeed or fail to live the kind of life we think is worth our living.\textsuperscript{100}

Howard Thurman, a “grandfather” of the Civil Rights movement in America, provides further testimony that our well-being crucially depends on whether we uphold the values constitutive of our identity. In his book \textit{Jesus and the Disinherited}, which was first published in 1949, Thurman as a black American writes from his familiarity with the violence, or threat of violence, used by whites to control blacks in the pre-Civil Rights south. He reports that the inability to find effective ways to uphold one’s own values and constructively respond or resist one’s oppressor “at the moment of descending violence is to be a coward, and to be deeply and profoundly humiliated in one’s own estimation and in that of one’s friend and family.”\textsuperscript{101} Such failures to stand upright are experienced as deep, personal failures. The emotions evoked by these failures reveal the important connection we judge to exist between autonomy and identity. The shame evoked by these failures and the moral weakness to which they attest may partially explain the strong criticism that Thoreau and Emerson level at them. I sometimes wonder if the biting character of that criticism is fueled by the hope that it could help lift them out of that weakness. Regardless, recognizing the evaluative character of emotion enables us to explore these emotional responses in an

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{101} Thurman, \textit{Jesus and the Disinherited}, p. 46.
effort to discover what they might reveal about our conceptions of autonomy, authority, and identity.

Shame is not merely an awareness that we have failed to uphold the values constitutive of our own identity but, as Thurman points out, also includes a sense that others evaluate us as falling short of a recognized standard or value that we share. To experience an emotion is to be committed to the import or value of something that is that emotion's focus. With shame the agent has failed to attain some end that is valued as part of what constitutes their well-being. What might be that focus or end? What is it that we want that when we fail to attain it we experience humiliation not only in our own eyes but also fear the same from others? To answer this question it is important to return to my earlier account of emotion. Consider my example of the emotion of fear. The focus of an emotion (e.g. fear) is a background object having import to the agent (e.g. safety) that is related to an emotion's target (e.g. a snarling dog) in such a way as to make intelligible that evaluation of the target, or formal object, relevant to the emotion (e.g. dangerousness). It is apparent that shame not only includes a self-referential evaluation that Helm identifies but a social one as well, that is, it also has to do with an evaluation of where we stand in relation to others. Shame is the feeling that we are deserving of the disapproval of others and thereby possibly being unworthy to be known and loved. This is to say that the focus of shame, that is, that which has import to the subject experiencing it is being

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valued or wanted by others. The target of shame, that is, that at which this emotion is directed is social rejection. The implicit evaluation of shame's target, its formal object, is that such rejection is diminishing of one's value. Shame is often indicated or accompanied by the emotion of fear – we fear having our shortcomings made known, even when they have not been so made, because we fear disapproval and rejection. The power and character of shame seems best explained in light of our need for some form of emotional connection to others. Shame provides evidence that we consider some sort of belonging to others to be a central part of our well-being. In other words, we are aware in some fashion that we have needs that are central to our identity that cannot be satisfied in isolation from others. This can be so even if the one experiencing shame has yet to identify this need. As evaluative feelings our emotions can reveal to us convictions that we hold about what constitutes the good life that we might not otherwise recognize or acknowledge as such. We can apply Helm's analysis of the evaluative character of emotions in an effort to surface the evaluations implicit in the emotions evoked by the issue of authority.

The issue of authority, as we have seen, is one that can evoke fear. It may also evoke anger, resentment, or revulsion. Given that our emotions are evaluative they can reveal that which is of import that we take to be jeopardized by such authority. Surely, Thoreau's emphatic response to authority identifies one issue of import to him – there is a way of relating to authority that is diminishing. We recognize, along with Thoreau, that our well-being requires protecting some sort of self-determination or autonomy. A slavish conformity is
repulsive. Being personal requires exercising personal insight. In addition, the character of that which we conform to is also critical. It is right to feel resistance toward a person that would ride over us and obliterate our identity. We should not take as an authority that which would treat us as things and not persons. However, as Nagel intimates, one's emotional response to authority may involve an evaluative perspective about autonomy and authority that differs from these. Nagel describes his “fear of religion” in terms of having a “cosmic authority problem.” He thinks this fear, and the authority problem associated with it, is widespread. If this is so, what evaluations about autonomy, authority, and identity might be a part of this emotional aversion to religion or a divine personal authority?

It is not clear that Nagel's emotional aversion to a cosmic authority is best described as fear though he does associate the two. He never explicitly identifies the emotion that the contemplation of a cosmic authority evokes. He merely states, “I don't want the universe to be like that.” One could fear religion itself and fear that it is true because it is inconsistent with one's evaluation about what constitutes the good life. In other words, one's fear may be secondary to a more fundamental emotional aversion to authority. Nagel's fear of religion may be an

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104 Nagel, *The Last Word*, pp. 130-131. I too wrestle with the problem he describes. I have no interest in disparaging him about this aversion though I think it is worthy of further exploration.

105 I am not suggesting in the pages that follow that Nagel or Becker would describe human autonomy as either unfettered individualism or unconditional self-determination. Undoubtedly, there are many moral values to which each would conform. However, each expresses the concern that fidelity to God, if God exists, would seem to diminish the full realization of the human self. The concern seems to be that conforming to the demands of a divine personal authority is diminishing in a manner that conforming one's self to impersonal moral demands is not.

outgrowth of his commitment to a particular conception of personal identity, autonomy, and authority that is necessary for living the kind of life he thinks worth living. Religion is feared because, if true, it constitutes a reality with an authority structure that is incompatible with what he takes is necessary for his well-being. I take it that his problem is not merely conceptual, that is, it is not solely a matter of intellectually puzzling out who is worthy of our allegiance or of reconciling moral autonomy with authority, but is something more difficult to neatly identify. To put it in Becker's terms being subject to the authority of another may not fit Nagel's conception of what it is to be a man. If so, he is not unusual in experiencing an aversion to an authority that challenges his own. It is an emotional response that is commonly experienced, and widely attested to, by the practitioners of the world's monotheistic religions. For many it forms the central struggle of their religious lives.

Many of us find it hard to imagine an authority besides one's own self that has import, that is, that is worthy of our attention and action. Freedom, or autonomy, is freedom from interference. We just want to be left alone to do our own thing. One may be deeply committed to this manner of “being in charge” and judge that any authority that interferes with that is a threat to that value. If this is the case, one’s fear of religion (or certain kinds of religion) and one’s emotional aversion to a cosmic authority are interconnected. What makes the connections

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107 My sense is that many of us find it more acceptable and desirable to be responsive to an abstract moral law, that is, an impersonal authority, than a personal one. The possibility that there might exist a personal reality that has authority over us is perceived as more intrusive and threatening to our desire for personal sovereignty.
between these emotions intelligible is their shared focus. To experience an emotion, as Helm writes, is to be committed to the import of its focus. The focus that these two emotions share is that of being in charge or, what Borgmann calls, unconditional self-determination. These emotions are connected in a way that one’s fear of religion and one’s anger at a kid who accidentally scratches your car door is not. The emotional response to the child is not evoked because you perceive him as a threat to your authority but because he damaged an object of value to you. Thus, it makes sense that Nagel associates his fear of religion with his emotional aversion to a cosmic authority. In each of these his commitment to an unconditional self-determination is threatened.

Nagel is concerned about these emotions and writes that “one should try to resist the intellectual effects of such a fear (if not the fear itself), for it is just as irrational to be influenced in one’s beliefs by the hope that God does not exist as by the hope that God does exist.” We can agree with the insight implicit here that what is true is true regardless of one’s feelings about it. With that said however, we should be careful to avoid characterizing the struggle to apprehend reality as one in which the emotions are solely cast in the negative role of irrational influences that will corrupt one’s beliefs or interfere with the pursuit of truth. The analysis of emotions as evaluative and of reason as emotional suggests that we cannot simply resist the intellectual effects of our emotions as

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109 Borgmann, TCCL, pp. 172-173. This conception of freedom could also be called absolute personal sovereignty.

in some instances they may already constitute an evaluation concerning what is good. In other words, if we are fearful it may not be the case that we can merely resist the emotion of fear. Given what holds import for our fear may be part of a larger rational pattern of emotions that should be expected. If my aversion to authority is an indicator of my commitment to a vision of the good life that includes an unconditional self-determination, then the worry that fear as an irrational force is going to hinder the intellectual process may obscure a more significant concern. The issue of critical concern may not have to do with what we fear but with what we love. Practically speaking we have already answered, and are presently answering, what we take as worthy of staking our lives on. Our only option is to ask ourselves whether or not those things are worthy of our love. Revering our own sovereignty might itself be irrational not because of the influence of the emotion but because of the object that is loved – it is possible that our own sovereignty is not worthy of that devotion. We need to ask whether this kind of life is the good life.

To ask ourselves if that which we love - that which we practically identify as having import through consistently attending to it and acting on its behalf – is worthy of that love is to acknowledge that it is plausible that we can reverence the wrong things. If we can reverence the wrong things, then our identity,

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111 Albert Borgmann, in *TCCL*, writes, “The question of the good life... cannot be left open. What remains open is not whether but how we will answer it.” See p. 178 and also pp. 86-88, 92, 171, and 173 in *TCCL*.

112 Macmurray writes, “What a man feels to be sacred, what raises the sense of reverence and holiness in him, may not be in itself and in its nature sacred or holy at all. Then our question becomes: what is it in experience that is objectively sacred in its own right? Not... what is it that people feel reverence for? No! What ought they to feel reverence for?” See John E. Costello,
which is dependent in some manner on what we care about, can be prevented from its proper development and expression. It would entail that we can be less than what we should be as we fail to love those things that can promote the realization of the self. It is this identification with what we love, this commitment to what we have judged to be worthy of staking our lives on, that seems to entail that we are dependent on something external to ourselves for our identity. And, as we have seen, many people fear that being dependent on something external to the self is diminishing. Helm seeks to provide an account of caring that is personal or intimate, one distinguished by a strong sense of identification with the one loved, yet is not diminishing. Interestingly, his approach underscores the concern Becker raised that fidelity to a reality external to oneself, that is, being subject to an authority not of one’s own making, is intrinsically diminishing. His account of love is dependent on a particular conception of autonomy that he considers to be central to one’s personal identity.

*Autonomy and Intimacy – Are They Related?*

Helm presents an agent-relative account of identity that is rooted in his account of agent-relative normativity. In what appears to be an effort to safeguard the requisite autonomy for personal life he concludes that our identity is up to us. Your well-being is dependent on whether you have upheld the values that constitute your identity and consequently on whether you have succeeded or

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failed to live the kind of life you have determined is worth living. Autonomy consists in exercising the capacity to be responsible for your evaluations of who you should be and for your efforts to acquire this identity. Because you not only have the capacity to control what you value but also to “autonomously create” those values you control your identity. Identity is agent-relative. Being personal involves being the author of your own identity – via the path of one's being the autonomous creator of one's values - and this identity serves as a normative standard by which you can judge how your life is going. With this conception of identity we can assess how it might fit the concerns that we have seen both Tolstoy and Becker raise.

On Helm's account we can find someone to stake our life on, to be intimately identified with, and not have to worry about being diminished unless we surrender our capacity to be the author of our own values. Loving another may alter what we find worthy of devoting ourselves to and hence may alter our identity but that is not a diminishment as long as within that process we remain the autonomous creator of those values. We choose to adopt these new values as we affirm our desire to embrace a new sense of identity. If we take Helm to be advocating a strong account of authorship, either of moral value or personal identity, this fails to address the demand for significance Tolstoy finds within himself. He wants to know if there is anything worthy of devoting himself

114 Ibid.
115 Ibid.
116 Ibid.
117 Ibid., p. 6.
to. The strong account would say that the reality to which you are to be responsive to is your own self. What is worthy to stake your life on is whatever you decide for yourself is worthy to stake your life on. There is nothing that you should find worthy. Love is merely an evaluative response that you make, it is not a response that is evoked by (and fits) reality as it is in itself. You are the author of your own values.

Helm’s approach, on this interpretation, affirms that the good life consists in unconditional self-determination. Tolstoy would say that this view presents a diminished view of moral reality, the other, and the self. He desires a significance of which he cannot be the author. He wants to give himself to something that he can see is worthy of his devotion. A life of creating one's own values is not adequate for the demand he experiences within himself. Moreover, it fails to make sense of his moral experience. Tolstoy senses that he fails to treat others in a manner which their reality as persons demands; it is much more than merely a failure to uphold his own values. It also lacks the resources to help him address his moral failures and his aspirations to be morally good. To Becker it says that there is no way to obey God and not be diminished. Autonomy is not a responsive receptivity to a reality that exists independently of you. It is not a responsiveness to the demands of membership in an order whose goodness we can participate in but of which we are not the creator. Instead, it is a capacity to assert ourselves in particular ways.

Helm could affirm a softer version of authorship regarding moral values and personal identity. On this account we discover values and consent to them
as normative not because we are their source, but because we see for ourselves that they are good and we take that they are objective. We do take responsibility for our evaluations of what is worthy of staking our lives on. However, we own these values as our own not because we are their author or creator but because they capture from us our hearty consent. Huck Finn did something like this in his affirmation of Jim's personhood. Possibly we could say of such consent that it is marked by the conviction that if we were capable of creating values these are the ones that we would create. We affirm these values by seeking to manifest them in our lives but that does not make us their author. There is room for a responsive receptivity, or fidelity to reality, that is not diminishing because that reality possesses such a character that it wins from us our own consent.

It is not clear which of these views Helm advances. Being personal, on the strong account, is not a matter of being capable of engaging in relationships that are personal; it is a matter of being able to autonomously create one's values. We need not ever choose to love others and we could still adequately realize our identity, that is, being in relationships that are personal is not central to our identity. This autonomy seems too shallow to do justice to our character as persons. The implications of the strong account appear to be in tension with another account of which he gives but promising suggestions. On this account it would not be accurate to say that what is normative is agent-relative. What is normative involves being in relationships that are personal, that is, one's marked by what he calls intimate identification. Autonomy is the capacity for intimate identification, that is, it is the capacity for engaging in relationships that are
marked by personal caring. Being in a relationship characterized by intimate identification requires that you care not only for the realization of your own identity but also for the realization of the other’s. If so, is there anything that can enhance our autonomy?

In the final paragraph of his paper Helm points to a loving parent with a young child as a picture of how to take another’s identity to heart in a manner that will help her to discover and uphold her identity.\(^{118}\) He wonders if being loved in this personal manner may help “enhance our autonomy,” that is, whether it might increase our capacity to “determine our identities as persons.”\(^{119}\) And, I would add, will it increase our capacity for helping others determine their identities? He states that our interpersonal, or social, nature is central to our autonomy and that “we should not conceive of our autonomy as a capacity we exercise on our own and apart from others.”\(^{120}\) At this point his conception of love begins to look more like a loving relationship and less like an evaluative attitude.\(^{121}\) If growing in our capacity for autonomy requires being loved, this means it is dependent on something that one has to receive. We cannot exercise fidelity to just anyone or anything and expect our autonomy to mature and grow. Moreover, receiving love is something we do. It is possible that somebody could love us, take our identity to heart, and for that love to have no effect. We could be indifferent to that love.

\(^{118}\) Ibid., p. 27. I think the ancient story of Job provides an illustration of this kind of engagement between God and Job.

\(^{119}\) Ibid.

\(^{120}\) Ibid.

\(^{121}\) Ibid., p. 2. Early on he states that his account of love will be as an evaluative attitude and \textit{not} as a loving relationship.
What is involved in receiving love? It appears to require taking that person's care for you to heart, that is, their care for you becomes an important part of your own identity. If their love, as the particular person that they are, does not matter to you, it is difficult to see how it would help you to grow. When we discover that we are loved by one whom we would want to be loved by the effect of this can be transformative. Being loved can evoke a response of love. As Edmond La B. Cherbonnier writes, “In ordinary human experience one loves as a result of having first been loved.”

Conclusion

Helm's comments hint at a direction that might help address Becker's Concern. Being the recipient of a particular kind of love and participating in a loving relationship of a particular sort may enhance and not diminish our identity as a person. If so, our identity is not established in isolation from others. Fidelity to reality is not intrinsically diminishing. Fidelity's effect on identity is dependent not only on the character of that fidelity but also by the character of that reality toward which it is directed. That reality that it is worth being receptive to is one that can help us realize our identity as moral persons, that is, one that can increase our capacity for engaging in relationships that are personal. Being personal, on this account, is a moral adventure that requires both receiving and giving love.

122 H.H. Farmer remarks, “A child’s trust in his parents is their greatest gift to him, for it is evoked and sustained in him only by their continually presenting themselves, revealing themselves, as trustworthy.” See The World and God, p. 88. We help our children grow by being the kind of person with them that we actually want them to become.

123 Cherbonnier, Hardness of Heart, p. 55; see also p. 133.
It is possible that our identity is ultimately personal, that is, we are not fully who we are apart from being in relationships with others that are personal. If we start with the idea that our identity is ultimately that of an isolated individual who when fully autonomous has no need for other persons, God or human, then we will never be able to conceive of dependence on, or need for, others in terms other than enslavement or diminishment.\textsuperscript{124} Helm’s dependence on the image of a parent-child relationship to portray love intimates a need for metaphor, exemplar, or narrative in moral discourse. Nussbaum writes that the knowledge of love is the knowledge of a love story.\textsuperscript{125} Love is not a general phenomenon and its character cannot be depicted merely as a set of “necessary and sufficient conditions.”\textsuperscript{126} It is an activity of persons. Adequately describing the character of a particular love will require the telling of a story that involves characters with aims and purposes. In the following chapter I will argue that narrative accounts are needed to image the normative content of love. The normative character of a love is narrative dependent, that is, it requires a story or an exemplar to be fully portrayed.

As we seek to answer the question \textit{how should I live} we search for images of what we might do and be and look for a fit between an image and what is deepest in our lives. We need narratives because they can portray the character

\textsuperscript{124} See Halliday, \textit{Reconciliation and Reality}, pp. 58-62 and 114-118. He argues that our true nature is personality, not individuality and that freedom, or autonomy, is the capacity to identify with those things that will develop our nature.

\textsuperscript{125} Nussbaum writes, “…that it is difficult to say much about it [love] in the abstract... [and] that knowledge of love is a love story.” See \textit{Love’s Knowledge}, p. 274.

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid.
of the moral life in ways that a theoretical account, by itself, cannot. In doing so we can consider whether the image they convey fits with our aspirations. This is to suggest that Becker's concern cannot be addressed merely theoretically. If the character of the good life cannot be fully depicted in theoretical form, then a theoretical account may fail to speak to us as fully as we need in order to assess whether it fits or illuminates our experience. For example, he finds the "problem" of "how to be a man" a pressing concern.\textsuperscript{127} If it were possible to present a theoretical account of how fidelity to God is not intrinsically diminishing, that would not by itself present an image of what it is to be a man that fits his aspirations and what is deepest in his experience.\textsuperscript{128} His concern has theoretical dimensions but it goes beyond that.

I will argue that the New Testament portrayal of the person of Jesus and his relationship with the God whom he calls Father can address Becker's concern in a manner that a theoretical response cannot fully do. This relationship images a way in which there can be mutual fidelity between persons that enhances and not diminishes the personal character of the agents involved. In so doing it presents a vibrant image, or exemplar, of what it is to be a person. Our need for exemplars to help us determine whether fidelity diminishes autonomy gives us grounds for engaging the New Testament. The following chapter will provide further justification for directly engaging this narrative. I claim that this

\textsuperscript{127} Becker, \textit{The Denial of Death}, p. 259.

\textsuperscript{128} A full account of love and fidelity cannot be presented in an abstract or general, that is, discursive, manner. The following chapter will argue that these concepts are metaphorical or narrative and that to convey the depth of their normative character requires a story or exemplar.
engagement is justified by arguing that narrative imagery can convey content about the normative character of love that exceeds that which can be presented discursively as a list of normative principles. The volitional, desiderative, and emotional aspects of the love that the New Testament maintains constitutes Reality, as well as the love that constitutes an appropriate response to that Reality, can only be portrayed in sufficient depth through a narrative. It provides a relational image of love that is capable of addressing Becker's Concern.
CHAPTER FOUR
NARRATIVE AND NORMATIVITY:
IMAGINATION AND EMOTION IN MORAL THINKING

Introduction

The overarching goal of this chapter is to provide further justification for directly engaging the New Testament narrative. This is important because in the chapter subsequent to this one I turn to the New Testament to develop an account of personal knowing in terms of the relational image of agape that is central to it. I claim that this engagement is justified by arguing here that narrative imagery can convey normative content that exceeds that which can be presented discursively as a list of normative principles. The normative character of this love is narrative dependent, that is, it requires a story or an exemplar to be fully portrayed. Oftentimes exemplars are presented to us in story form and sometimes, though possibly less so today, they are presented through the well-lived life of an actual person that we are fortunate to know and observe. When conceptual analysis is employed to distill normative guidelines from a narrative it inadvertently diminishes the normative content of the love portrayed therein. It assumes that the content that matters ethically is separable from affective content without loss. Analysis diminishes the character of volitional, emotional and desiderative elements central to love that may be describable discursively but that require narratives to portray their full character or “depth.” I argue that
the moral quality of an action is dependent on the full character of these elements. I will engage Soren Kierkegaard in his *Works of Love* to illustrate how his effort to account for the normative character of agape results in a diminished account of its normative character.

Narratives play an indispensable role in our reflection on the good life. I support this claim by arguing that narrative imagery can convey normative content that exceeds that which can be presented discursively as a list of normative principles. Conversation, or discourse, about what constitutes the good life will be inadequate to meet the demands of our lives if it fails to take into account our need for narrative. In Chapter Two I concluded that explanationism plays an important yet modest role in ethical reflection. Important because the view that we hold must provide us with the best explanation. Our concern to be honest with ourselves and with others demands that. However, it is modest because it cannot identify for us what phenomena are in need of explanation nor can it serve to adjudicate between competing explanations held by individuals who begin with different basic phenomena they consider veridical. Though a vision of the good life must have explanatory power, that is, though it should appeal to us because of its ability to explain phenomena that we judge are crucial to explain – it must also make appeal to our aspirations of what me might do and be. In this chapter I argue that we need narrative imagery because of its capacity to provide us with exemplars of what constitutes the good life.

This will allow us to return to and address Becker's Concern. He asks: Is there a way to be in a relationship with God that enhances rather than diminishes
what it means to be the human being that I am?\(^1\) I think the New Testament portrayal of love as imaged in the Father-Son relationship between God and Jesus provides an example of how one person may depend on another in a way that enhances, not diminishes, the individual character of the person in the relation.\(^2\) This relational exemplar, that is, who Jesus was in himself as he addresses the circumstances of his life, provides an “answer” to Becker’s question. It will be the purpose of Chapter Five to explore this image and show how it is capable of addressing his concern as well as ones that Tolstoy invites us to consider about life’s meaning. In particular, I will show how the New Testament illuminates for me the character of an important array of phenomena that I take are central to both personal knowing and meaning. Part of its ability to do that will hinge on the thesis that is the focus of this chapter.

_Explanationism and Exemplarism_

It is important to note that when I use the word “image” it can refer to something as complex and dynamic as the relationship between Jesus and his Father. It is not merely picturing something that is simple or static. Here ‘image’ is synonymous with ‘exemplar’ – the narrative _portrays, images, or shows_ a relationship of a particular character. Imaging of this sort is sometimes more like a movie than a single picture or snapshot. However, speaking of exemplars or narratives as imaging normative content can be misleading. Exemplars present

\(^1\) As stated in the previous chapter there is a way in which the intent of the question is broader than what it may appear here. Becker wants to know if any of the persons or things that we depend on to give our lives meaning can do so in a way that does not diminish our identity.

\(^2\) I take it that even though this image is of divine persons in relationship with one another it is
us with more than a batch of moral prescriptions. They speak not only to our sense of moral obligation but also to our aspirations – they show us not only what we must “do” but what we might “be.” They portray a life, or a way of being, that can address concerns like Becker’s of “how to be a man” - that is, of how to live a vibrant life. Theoretical ethical discourse, by itself, cannot do this. Its inability to adequately portray the character of the good life in its fullness means that we cannot turn to it as a view of life that might “fit” with, or speak to, that which is deepest in our lives.3 This is another reason why narratives are essential for reflection on what constitutes the good life.

The fact that I must rely extensively upon the New Testament narrative raises two interrelated issues that I have been addressing progressively throughout this dissertation. The first has to do with the place of direct engagement with religious works as a part of the practice of philosophy. The second has to do with what value such a portrayal of agape might hold. Concerning the first I follow Nussbaum, Murdoch, Hallie, and others in arguing that a variety of narrative forms should be incorporated into philosophical reflection as part of our effort to deepen our moral understanding. Questions about the good life or life’s meaning do not fit neatly into one academic discipline to the exclusion of the rest. Engaging a variety of narrative forms can serve as an indispensable vehicle for critical reflection about the nature of love and personal presented as the pattern for which humans are to enter into relationship with these persons.

3 Nussbaum, Love's Knowledge, p. 26. Both Halliday, in Reconciliation and Reality, and Borgmann, in TCCL, speak of narratives as a form of discourse that invites the listener to search his or her experiences and aspirations. See pp. 165-167 and 176-180 respectively. See also
relationships. One of the reasons for this, that I have mentioned and will argue for in this chapter, is that narratives convey normative content that otherwise could not be portrayed in non-narrative form. Thus, engaging the New Testament narrative of agape is essential for an adequate portrayal of the normative character of that love. The second issue needing further attention involves clarifying the value of engaging this particular narrative. There are many narratives. What is the value of the New Testament's narrative image of love? Why commend it to the reader? These questions return us to the account of modest explanationism that I provided in Chapter Two.

When we seek to commend our views on ultimate issues, like the character of the good life or life's meaning, or when we seek to show the value of a particular view, our efforts will be inescapably personal. For example, there are several reasons why I value the New Testament image of love and its account of what constitutes a vibrant life. I find that it helps me to understand features of my experience as a person that for me are crucial to understand. Like Tolstoy I too have hungered for significance, I have experienced moral failure and a desire for forgiveness, and I have longed for a love that will overcome my aloneness. As I previously argued in Chapter Two I cannot demonstrate either that these phenomena, or those associated with them, are veridical or that they are the most significant to explain. Yet these experiences demand my attention in

Linda Zagzebski's “The Admirable Life and the Desirable Life” concerning the need for narrative detail to portray moral exemplars.

Borgmann, in TCCL, provides an excellent account of the necessity of testimony in addressing issues of ultimate concern. See especially his chapter “Deictic Discourse” pp. 169-182.
ways that I find inescapable and evoke in me a desire for understanding. This fits with Nozick’s observation that the original impulse for engaging in philosophical reflection is not about “trying to get someone to believe something whether he wants to believe it or not” but “puzzlement, curiosity, a desire to understand.”⁵ Our aim in philosophy is “explanation rather than proof.”⁶ However, even if we agree with Nozick we might be tempted to prove to others that one view is better than another by arguing that one view has superior explanatory power relative to another. Possibly to lend our efforts a more objective air this approach obscures the reality that our explanations rest on our personal judgments about the phenomena. When it comes to issues of ultimate concern we should only hold a view that we think best explains, or accounts for, the phenomena, but proving to others that this view possesses superior explanatory power is something we cannot do. However, we can give witness to the explanatory value it holds for us, including the phenomena we deem worthy of our attention, and invite others to give these their consideration.

Given that discourse about issues of ultimate concern rests on personal judgments it must include personal witness or testimony. We cannot excise the need for this from ethical discourse by an appeal to explanatory power. In a comment that fits nicely with Nozick’s above Leif Enger states,

The lovely part of being a witness is that you can’t compel belief. All you can do is say: here is what happened. In saying this the witness is only doing his job; how people respond is their own

⁶ Ibid.
burden, their own responsibility. Whom would you say has more credibility: the man who pounds on the table insisting his story is true, or the one, who having the reputation of honesty, frees his listeners to decide for themselves?\textsuperscript{7}

Why give witness? What's the point of philosophical discourse if it ultimately boils down to this? Speaking directly to this question Borgmann writes, “if there is something that I have experienced as greater than myself and of ultimate significance” and if I “have profound regard for... [my] fellows [and their] welfare”, then I will want to join these concerns and act upon them.\textsuperscript{8} And this leads us beyond explanationism to exemplarism. Because narratives can convey normative content that theoretical discourse cannot they are able to portray a compelling vision of a life, or a way of being, that appeals to aspirations of what we might do and be. We address others by inviting them to search their experiences and aspirations and see for themselves if this view addresses these.

I turn now to my argument that narrative imagery can convey normative content, including a vision of the good life, which exceeds that which can be presented discursively as a list of normative principles.

\textit{Image and Analysis: Narrative Imagery for a Normative Agape}

There are several possible ways to engage the New Testament narrative to develop an account of agape. The first is a distillative approach that relies upon conceptual analysis. The second is a metaphorical approach. The third involves some combination of the two. On the first approach one surveys the


\textsuperscript{8} Borgmann, \textit{TCCL}, p. 178.
central images of agape in the narrative and seeks to distill the normative content of agape from each of those images and present that content in discursive form as a set of moral principles. For example, in Gilbert Meilaender’s book on friendship he begins with the story of the Good Samaritan and relies on it as the central image to provide the determinative account of agape’s normative content.\(^9\) The content distilled from this image constrains the way agape is conceptualized. Agape is a form of neighbor love - it is a disinterested and universal form of benevolence.\(^{10}\) It is universal and disinterested in that it is a kind of caring that we direct toward all people without regard for, or consideration of, what distinguishes one person from another. It is an impersonal mode of concern akin to compassion. In contrast, a caring that is personal requires that I enjoy you as the particular you that you are am committed to helping you become that you both for your sake and mine.\(^{11}\) Later in this chapter, and in the one that follows, I will argue that personal caring involves intimate identification. If a broader approach is taken that surveys a greater number of images, once the content has been distilled from each image one may develop a general account of love that best accounts for the various particulars that have been identified.

One could also aim to determine the normative content of agape by relying

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\(^9\) See Meilaender’s *Friendship: A Study in Theological Ethics*. The parable of the Good Samaritan is found in Luke 10:30-37.

\(^{10}\) Ibid., pp. 34, 15, 7, and 64.

\(^{11}\) On this account it is a good that I know you as the you that you are. There is nothing egocentric or selfishly self-serving in my wanting to enjoy you, or become capable of enjoying you, because the joy of knowing another in an intimate manner is a mutual or shared good. To know another in this fashion is an end that requires each person to become their truest self and to share that self with the other.
upon the distillations of others. Gene Outka, in *Agape: An Ethical Analysis*, exercises this kind of approach. He surveys a period of literature on the subject of agape in order to assess its basic normative content in its utmost generality, that is, the kind of content it possesses irrespective of circumstances.\(^{12}\) For practical purposes he restricts his survey to claims about neighbor-love, that is, to “those features most commonly said to characterize agape as an other-regarding principle.”\(^{13}\) He states that in so doing he will pay a “large price” as some of the “profoundest themes,” for example, how love for God may shape the normative character of neighbor-love, will be explored only briefly or not at all.\(^{14}\) Given this restricted scope Outka relies on the distilling work of others to present what John Cottingham calls “the main fact-stating propositional core” of agape’s normative content.\(^{15}\) For Outka this content is formulated in his principle of “equal regard.” Outka recognizes that the distillative approach of conceptual analysis leads to a general, and hence reduced, account of love and love’s demands.

The second method of developing a robust account of agape can be called the metaphorical approach. It maintains that apprehending the normative content of the narrative depiction of agape requires more than mere conceptual analysis of its imagery. The content of agape is not presentable apart from analogies or examples of agape-like love presented in narrative fashion. The depth of its emotional, volitional, and desiderative elements cannot be captured

\^12\ Outka, *Agape: An Ethical Analysis*, p. 7.

\^13\ Ibid., pp. 8-9.

\^14\ Ibid., p. 8.
fully in a discursive account but must be “shown.” Rather than providing us with precisely worded conceptions of agape’s normative demands, the narrative provide snapshots of agape that taken together form a family photo album of sorts.\textsuperscript{16} Each image contributes to a fuller depiction of the love that is agape. Stories about common experiences like scouring the house for a lost coin, searching the surrounding countryside for a lost animal, and waiting for the return of a beloved son who has lost his way are used as metaphors to image the character of agape. I take it that the New Testament portrayal of the relationship between God and Jesus is the preeminent narrative image of agape. As I present support for the claim that narrative imagery can convey normative content in excess of that which can be captured in a set of normative principles I will also begin to untangle the relationship between this metaphorical approach and conceptual analysis.

\textit{Conceptual Analysis and Normative Content}

The central thesis of this chapter is that non-narrative normative accounts of love’s demands fail to convey normative content that is otherwise capable of depiction in narrative form. One way of making this evident is through examining a part-whole problem that faces conceptual analysis. Analysis is a process of idea formation where a generalization is derived from individual instances. Heschel observes that one of the dangers of this process is that it involves

\textsuperscript{15} John Cottingham, \textit{The Spiritual Dimension: Religion, Philosophy, and Human Value}, p. 83.

\textsuperscript{16} If my line of argument is correct, the use of narrative is important not merely as an aid to foster understanding for those who lack the interest or capacity for sophisticated, abstract thought but because it has the potential to convey content that cannot be presented in non-narrative form.
“separating a partial aspect or quality from a total situation” which implies that there can be “a split between situation and idea.” The problem with such a process is that it encourages us to “disregard... the fullness of what transpires” in a given situation, that is, the whole, and mistake that partial aspect, the part, for that whole. ¹⁷ Cottingham uses the metaphor of a juice extractor to illustrate this part-whole problem that faces conceptual analysis. He writes,

A juice extractor does not... give us the true essence of a fruit; what it often delivers is not a very palatable drink plus a pulpy mess. Someone who has only tasted strawberries via the output of a juicer... may have a radically impoverished grasp of what it is about the fruit that makes the strawberry lover so enthusiastic. ¹⁸

To someone who is familiar with strawberries the juice distilled from them could not be mistaken as their essence. That essence can be captured only by the whole. If we were to introduce someone to strawberries who was unfamiliar with them and we only had the juice and the pulp to give them, there is no way they could develop an adequate conception of the whole strawberry from such a partial representation.

Conceptual analysis gives primacy to intellectual or cognitive content that can be stated in abstract, propositional form. Because metaphorical language is considered to be imprecise and ambiguous, painstaking efforts are made to express these facts in literal fashion. When it approaches metaphorical or figurative discourse, Cottingham argues, it seeks “to extract the juice... the

¹⁷ Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets*, p. 221.

¹⁸ Cottingham, *The Spiritual Dimension*, p. 80.
relevant set of theses – from what is taken to be a largely irrelevant background ‘pulp’ or ‘mush’ of emotive, poetic, narrative, and symbolic elements.” It assumes that “we may distill out from the story a core of metaphysical claims”, that is, it assumes that there exists a “pure cognitive juice” to be extracted. The critical assumption here is that the content that matters ethically can be separated, or split, from the narrative and be expressed in non-narrative form without incurring loss. Cottingham states,

> On this view, there are ‘the facts’, which are expressible in quite unambiguous and literal terms; and any emotional component is seen as a kind of extraneous ‘add-on’ – of no real interest in terms of the structure and the properties of the facts…

A narrative, on this account, may supply or indicate an emotional content for the moral principle it illustrates but this emotional aspect is not a part of its normative content. This assumption concerning content may lead us to overlook the possibility that there is normative content that is at least partly emotional and desiderative in structure that cannot be conveyed to the necessary depth without narrative imagery. One way the inadequacy of conceptual analysis can be made evident is to take the distillations of agape by someone like Kierkegaard and try to “build back up” to the New Testament imagery of agape. In examining Kierkegaard in this manner it will become apparent that the moral principles he generates lose critical normative content that is contained in the narrative

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19 Ibid., pp. 79-80.

20 Ibid., pp. 80, 82.

21 Ibid., p. 83. The view of emotions implicit here is one that is critiqued in the previous chapter. I argue there that emotions are evaluative judgments or evaluative feelings whose structure contains cognitive content. They are not passive sensations like taste or touch.
account. These principles fail to fully portray the character of that love that is presented in the narrative.

There are many images used to portray the character of agape in the New Testament. Two important ones are the Parable of the Prodigal Son and the Father-Son relationship between God and Jesus. These images represent “wholes.” When conceptual analysis is applied to these wholes it breaks down these images into “parts”. There are several steps we can take to show that these analyses represent only partial aspects of the original whole. First, identify the elements that have been distilled, that is, the content or parts. Second, take the parts and based solely on them find an image to convey that content. In this step we attempt to reverse the process of the juice extractor. Ultimately we want to know if we can build back up to strawberry from only the juice and pulp. Third, compare that image to the original image. What we will discover is that what serves as a suitable image for an account of love that is based on the distillations given in a discursive account will be something less than was found in the original image. The images based on the abstract normative account will fail to convey the fullness of the love depicted in the original image. We cannot take the parts and build back up to the whole. Imagery, that is, a complex narrative, is necessary to show the normative content in its fullness or depth. An illustration of how the results of conceptual analysis, when taken by themselves, yields a diminished account of this content can be found in Kierkegaard’s *Works of Love*.

*Soren Kierkegaard's Analysis of Love*

When we take Kierkegaard’s distillation of the essence of love and love’s
demands, found in the early chapters of *Works of Love*, and seek to find an image to convey it that fits appropriately with that content, that image will present a diminished picture of love compared to the image(s) of agape found in the New Testament. The images rooted in his analysis fail to convey the fullness of the love that is imaged in the Father-Son relationship or of that portrayed in Jesus’ story of The Prodigal Son. In the first few chapters Kierkegaard is occupied with distancing the Christian conception of love, agape, from the pagan ideal of friendship that is based on preference and natural inclination. He writes,

> One must rather take care to make the issue very clear in order calmly to admit in the defense that Christianity has thrust erotic love and friendship from the throne, the love based on drives and inclinations, preferential love, in order to place the spirit’s love in its stead, love for the neighbor....

Though distinguishing agape from these other loves is a worthy and important goal, it appears that in his desire for clarity he presses his point too far and ends up with a diminished account of agape.

According to Kierkegaard love is only “eternally secured against every change” and thus of “enduring continuance” when it has “undergone the change of eternity”, that is, when the sole motivation for love becomes duty.\(^\text{23}\) He writes, “Only when it is a duty to love, is love eternally secured.”\(^\text{24}\) Such love is independent.\(^\text{25}\) This is important, he argues, because loving another cannot be

\(^{22}\) Soren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, p. 44.

\(^{23}\) Ibid., pp. 29, 31, and 32.

\(^{24}\) Ibid., p. 32; italics his.

\(^{25}\) Ibid., See pp. 37-40 for his account of love’s independence.
based upon, or depend on, one’s need for love, though it is not incompatible with that need. Nor can love depend on the object of love. When love is a response that is evoked by love’s object it is dependent on something outside itself. These are both forms of dependence because the law of love’s existence in each, that is, the principle that animates love, is something external to love itself. Such externally motivated actions are not love. Instead, love loves because it shall love, that is, by becoming duty; love “depends only on love itself through eternity’s shall.”\(^\text{26}\) The animating force in love is duty. It is a dutiful response to God’s commandment to love, such a command being eternity’s shall, that alone strips the imperfections from our otherwise merely human loves.\(^\text{27}\) The charge brought against erotic love and friendship is that they are preferential loves, that is, they are based on the lover’s preference for the character of the one loved, and as such they are merely forms of self-love.\(^\text{28}\) In these cases the lover loves that which he naturally enjoys or finds pleasurable; he’s merely satisfying his own inclinations. Such love is selfishly self-serving.

Christian love, in contrast to friendship and erotic love, is love for neighbor and according to Kierkegaard that is self-denial’s love. Eternity’s shall guarantees the self-denial that enables love to be directed to all. We must deny the inclinations that would lead us to prefer one person over another. To love from duty alone secures that the self will not be loving others merely because there is

\(^{26}\) Ibid., pp. 38 and 39.

\(^{27}\) Ibid., p. 43.

\(^{28}\) Ibid., p. 52-53.
“something in it” for the self. Kierkegaard writes, “Insofar as you love the beloved, you are not like God, because for God there is no preference... But when you love the neighbor, then you are like God.”\textsuperscript{29} Neighbor love is the essence of God’s love. The neighbor for Kierkegaard is the “utterly unrecognizable dissimilarity between persons” or the “eternal equality before God” that is common to all persons, even our enemies.\textsuperscript{30} The neighbor is seen “only with closed eyes”, that is, only when we are blind to the features that make one individual different from another.\textsuperscript{31} It is these differences that form the basis for friendship and erotic love – we prefer one person over another on the basis of such differences. God loves blindly in that he loves all without distinction. The one who loves God must love others in the same fashion as God. With this characterization of love we are now ready to consider what image would most fittingly portray it.

As I seek to image Kierkegaard’s distillation of the essence of agape it is important to acknowledge his positive effort to elevate something important about the character of Christian love. By making love an expression of duty he seeks to secure love’s eternality or unchanging character. By making love blind he seeks to secure its universality or unconditionality. He aims to emphasize that God loves everyone and that that love, which we also are to extend toward others, is not based upon worldly characteristics or behavior that might distinguish one

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., p. 63.

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., p. 68.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
person from another. Rich people are not intrinsically more worthy of love than
the poor, the virtuous more than the immoral, or the beautiful more than the ugly.
Many of us find it difficult to love people without giving preference to some of
them based on such characteristics as these. Kierkegaard wants to make it clear
that such actions do not constitute Christian love.

Keeping these positive aims of Kierkegaard in mind, we must still ask:
What image might best fit, or portray, the content of Christian love that he has
provided in these chapters? This is the second step in the three-step process
outlined above. Interestingly, Kierkegaard himself supplies the following
metaphor to represent, at least partially, the normative content of his extraction.
Love for another, to meet the exacting demands of Christian love, must be blind.
A blind person images the spirit of God’s love because such a person can’t see
who they are loving and must love all without reference to any distinctions.
Moreover, love issues forth from duty and has no aim, nor purpose other than the
giving of love itself. There is nothing about the other as _that_ particular other that
evokes love or makes love a fitting response, nor can there be any desire or
inclination in the lover that makes love what love essentially is, that is enduring
and eternally secure, except love issuing forth out of duty. Love is not externally
motivated but only internally so.³²

Anders Nygren, following Kierkegaard, characterizes God’s love as

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³² Kierkegaard’s conception of love seems to be that kind of “overmoralized ideal of benevolence”
that Robert Adams aims “to combat” because it “would not allow God to desire, for its own sake,
a relationship with creatures.” He appears quite possibly to be one of the “many [who] have
concluded that divine love should be identified with benevolence with no place in it for self-
interest.” See Adam’s _Finite and Infinite Goods_, pp. 132 and 136.
“spontaneous and ‘unmotivated’”, that is, as a love that has “no motive outside itself.”  

Similarly, Max Scheler writes,

> There is no longer any ‘highest good’ independent of and beyond the act and movement of love! Love itself is the highest of all goods! The *summum bonum* is no longer the value of a thing, but of an act, the value of love itself *as love* – not for its results and achievements.  

The account of God’s love provided by Kierkegaard, and echoed by Nygren and Scheler, may possibly be best imaged as an impersonal, unidirectional force like a river. A river moves forward, it flows, without desired end or aim; it is blind. God’s love spills out of him because it is the character of such love to be spilled out. It’s pouring forth has no desired relational end or aim; it cares not about a response from the one loved. Instead of Aristotle’s Unmoved Mover we have God as Unmoved Lover. God loves not as an expression of an interest to accomplish some goal, for example, to establish personal communion or fellowship with the one loved but merely because it is the character of God to

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33 Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, p. 76. In particular, for Nygren, God’s love is not motivated by the personal worth of men or women, that is, it is not dependent on our moral goodness. God’s love is “indifferent to value” and “any thought of valuation whatsoever is out of place in connection with fellowship with God.” As cited in Paul J. Wadell’s *Friendship and the Moral Life*, p. 88.

34 Max Scheler, *Ressentiment*, p. 66-67. Like Nygren he emphasizes that agape is not motivated. He writes, “in the Christian view, love is... [an] act of the spirit (not a mere state of feelings, as for the moderns), but it is nevertheless not a striving and desiring, and even less a need. These acts consume themselves in the realization of the desired goal. Love, however, *grows* in its action. And there are no longer any rational principles, and rules or justice, higher than love, independent of it and preceding it, which should guide its distribution among men according to their value.”

35 Moreover, both the character of human agents and the character of the love with which God has them love also appears impersonal. Nygren, in *Agape and Eros*, writes that a person “is merely the tube, the channel, through which God’s love flows.” See p. 735 and also p. 740.
Moreover, in its Kantian character God doesn't will the good of others because it brings him joy to love others but because it is God's duty. His love lacks an emotional concern for us as the particular persons we are (or are being fashioned by God to be). On this account a personal communion that is both nurtured and sustained, indeed constituted, by ongoing acts of love aimed at enjoying the other and being enjoyed by that other (or creating the conditions necessary for such enjoyment) are extraneous to the character of love. It should be evident that the moral character of loving actions will take their shape according to how the volitional, emotional, and desiderative features that constitute love are characterized.

As we examine the images that seem to portray best the content of love according to Kierkegaard we need to ask two questions that are closely related. These two questions are a part of the final step in the three-step process, outlined above, of assessing whether we can build back up to the whole from the

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36 What is the character of this “spilled out” love? Scheler describes it as a love that stoops, or bends down, to serve. See Ressentiment, pp. 65-70. This leads me to ask: In what ways do we most need to be served? Our deepest needs may indicate the profoundest ways in which someone who loved us could serve us. What if our deepest need is to be in a relationship with God characterized by intimate personal knowing? Regarding this Adam's writes, “the moral value of actions often depends at least as much on what they express about personal relationships as on what they cause, or are meant to cause by way of benefit... to individuals... [and] there is a range of behavior in which benevolent motivation and an interest in a personal relationship for its own sake are intertwined... [for example] expressions of affection normally indicate an interest in our relationship with the other person, and are not sincere if we do not value the relationship for its own sake.” From Finite and Infinite Goods, p. 143. As with Kierkegaard it's not clear that Scheler's account of God's love has room within it to include this kind of self-interest as part of its motivation.

37 Liz Carmichael describes this as a “disinterested altruism” in which a person does good things for another, not only because it is good to do so (that is, it is not done merely to gain some advantage), but also without any interest or desire to enjoy a mutual relationship – of giving and receiving - with the one on whom the goods were bestowed. See Friendship: Interpreting Christian Love, pp. 102-104, 186-187, and 200. For a helpful discussion of both the values and limitations of this altruistic conception of benevolence for capturing important characteristics of a
parts. First, is this the way the New Testament images the love between God and Jesus or that love portrayed in the Parable of the Prodigal Son? The loving relationship between Jesus as Son and God as Father provides essential narrative imagery because the character of love that Jesus commands others to love with is that which is exemplified in this unique relationship. Second, could we build back up to these New Testament images on the basis of Kierkegaard’s analysis?

In response to the first question, on Kierkegaard’s account Jesus loves the Father not because of who the Father is as the particular person that he is but because it is Jesus’ duty. The same holds for the Father’s love toward Jesus. Their love to one another, in order to be love, must be an expression of duty alone or the eternality of their love is jeopardized. Neither the Son’s love for the Father, nor the Father’s for the Son, can be motivated because it is the fitting response to the one who is loved; their love for the other cannot be born from wanting to do justice to that other by responding appropriately to him. If their love for the other is evoked by a vision of the particular character or unique personhood of that other, such love is no longer blind. Moreover, their love for one another could not be an expression of a mutual longing for personal relationship where each desires to give of their self to the other and receive the self of the other. They must love each other with passionate devotion because it

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38 For more on love as “fitting response” see Daniel Hardy and David F. Ford, *Praising and Knowing God*, pp. 1-11.
is their duty not because it is their desire. The essence of God’s love is neighbor love. This love is distinct from other lesser loves because by its very nature it is a “moral task.”\textsuperscript{39} The pagan view of erotic love and friendship are deficient because they lack a moral task; they are merely good fortune. Agape is distinct from pagan loves in its emphasis on duty and its corresponding stringent moral character.

Kierkegaard’s image of the essence of God’s love is very different than the manner in which the New Testament images this relationship and the love that characterizes it. Jesus’ love for the Father and the Father’s for Jesus are each focused on the particularity and distinctiveness of the other. As Hardy and Ford put it - the focus of fascination, wonder, amazement, and commitment is the other person in all their individuality.\textsuperscript{40} In the relationship between Jesus and the Father each is the focus of the other. But if Christian love is blind, there can be no such external focus. Love is blind to the particularity of the other. Neighbor love, as the essence of God’s love, dictates that what is loved is the “eternal equality before God” that is common to all persons.\textsuperscript{41} The particularity of the individual cannot serve, even partially, as the motivation for love. The gravity of the error here may be illustrated with a question. Would it sound right if God said

\textsuperscript{39} Kierkegaard, \textit{Works of Love}, pp. 50-51. He seems to think that love in order to be love must be hard and cut against the grain of our character. Though it is the case that loving others is hard for us, especially those who have injured us, would love cease to be love if it became both easier for us to love others and something we desired to do? If love ceases to be love when loving others becomes easy, then the Father’s love for Jesus must not be love either.

\textsuperscript{40} Hardy and Ford, \textit{Praising and Knowing God}, pp. 6-7.

\textsuperscript{41} Kierkegaard, \textit{Works of Love}, p. 68.
to Jesus, “I love you, but only because it is my duty”? How would that sound if we were to say that to God? While it may be my children’s duty to love me, if they only love me because it is their duty something is amiss. Put somewhat differently, love involves more than merely doing good for another out of a sense, or a fulfillment, of one’s duty. Robert Adams argues that such an account would fail to depict the fullness of love. He writes, “What persons need in their relationships with others goes far beyond anything that can or should be spelled out in a system of rules of duty... If I am committed only to do my duty to you, my commitment seems more to duty than you.” In contrast, love involves being committed to a particular person as such and “not just to appropriate behavior.” This brings us to the following related point.

Love’s dynamic, or movement, is completely internal according to Kierkegaard. It is neither a response to, nor does it seek a response from, the one loved. Agape is not aimed at “seeking to preserve and create community,” that is, its aim is not to establish and sustain personal fellowship, nor is it “a

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42 Commenting on this Josef Pieper writes “…to repeat the words of Karl Jaspers, it is perfectly possible for there to be ‘charity without love,’ a doing good that lacks something decisive to make it love…” See *Faith, Hope, and Love*, pp. 196-197. I provide an example of this from Lawrence Blum in the section “Emotions as Evaluative Feelings” in Chapter Three that is worth restating here. He writes, “An integral part of the good to Sue in Bob’s act of visiting her in the hospital is that he is thereby showing concern for her. We cannot envisage the act of visiting prompted by some other motive, while still preserving the good to Sue of that act. Suppose that Bob’s motivation in visiting Sue is not concern for her but a sense of duty towards her. His attitude is not one of concern for how she is doing, or of making her feel better by his visit. There is no direct desire to see her.” Without the emotional aspects of love Bob’s action is not as great a good to Sue as it could be. From *Friendship, Altruism and Morality*, p. 142 as cited in Caroline Simon’s *The Disciplined Heart*, p. 31.


44 Ibid.
willingness to go to any length to restore community.” Instead as Scheler and Nygren claim, and in which they appear to express acutely Kierkegaard’s notion of love’s independence, the aim of love is the act of love itself, not anything that results from the act. Agape, to be agape, must not be seeking to effect, or achieve, anything external to its own expression. Love has no aim or vision other than the expression of itself. Works of love are important for their own sake. They are not warranted or find their motivation in the blessing they may bring to the ones loved. If love was motivated by such inclinations it would become something less than a moral task.

This conception of love seems to be rooted in a legal view of morality in which respect for law is elevated over a passionate concern for persons and personal relationships. Fulfilling the demands of love seems akin to our relationship to a justice that is imaged legally as when depicted as a blindfolded virgin. Justice so imaged has no aim other than its own impartial administration; it is important for its own sake and neither its validity nor its motivation lies “in the blessings it brings to man.” Howard Robinson describes this legal conception of justice as one that lacks vision. This justice doesn’t recognize fellowship – that

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45 Martin Luther King, Jr. as cited in *A Theory of Agape* by Stephen G. Post, p. 25. Heschel critiques such notions of independence. He writes, “What the Lord requires of man is more than fulfilling one’s duty. To love implies an insatiable thirst, a passionate craving. To love means to transfer the center of one’s inner life from the ego to the object of one’s love.” See *The Prophets*, p. 207 ff..

46 See Norman Robinson, *Christian Justice*, pp. 55-59 and 69-71; Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets*, pp. 215-220; and George MacDonald's, “Justice,” in *Unspoken Sermons*. Our legal conception of justice, though possibly necessary to ensure impartiality, is an incomplete account of justice precisely because it fails to see the interpersonal character of personhood.

we owe ourselves to one another - as its aim.\textsuperscript{48} An unloving act is condemned because a law has been broken, a duty shirked, rather than because a person has been hurt. It fails to recognize that breaking fellowship, or failing to seek to establish it, may constitute our greatest moral failure. The ethical character of God’s love is not passionate concern for the lives of individual persons but the ethical in and for itself.\textsuperscript{49} Such a love is impersonal.\textsuperscript{50} Thus, in answer to the first question it appears that the New Testament images the character of God’s love differently than does Kierkegaard.\textsuperscript{51}

It should be apparent that we could not take Kierkegaard’s analysis and imagery and build up to the imagery of the Father-Son relationship or that of the Parable of the Prodigal Son. This is the answer to the second question raised above. A father, like the one in the parable, loves his children with his eyes wide open. Love is creative of distinction, not blind to it. Each child is passionately loved in their particularity with a vision toward nurturing and establishing that child in their unique individuality. One child is not interchangeable with another.\textsuperscript{52}


\textsuperscript{49} Heschel, \textit{The Prophets}, p. 215-219.

\textsuperscript{50} Gilbert Meilaender writes, in \textit{Friendship: A Study in Theological Ethics}, that being loved with agape “does not offer all that we need or want. To be loved with agape alone is, however important, not sufficient: for it is too impersonal.” See p. 64. It is impersonal because it is not aimed at wanting to know the other, that is, it is not aimed at establishing a relationship with the other as \textit{that} other. On Kierkegaard’s account God can fulfill the demands of love completely without wanting to know us. See also Paul J. Wadell’s \textit{Friendship and the Moral Life}, pp. 89-90.

\textsuperscript{51} I am not alone in recognizing the austerity of Kierkegaard’s conception of love as depicted in the \textit{Works of Love}. Henry Bugbee admits that though he may be misreading this work it seems to have “much to say about love, the neighbor, and loving the neighbor, but little in it to quicken the understanding with respect to these.” See \textit{The Inward Morning}, p. 95.

\textsuperscript{52} One charge brought against that love that is characterized as unidirectional and independent is
In the prodigal son story the father’s response on the return of his estranged son - he runs out to embrace his son while his son is still far off - indicates a fierce longing for union or re-union with his son. He wants to be with, that is, to share in the life of, his son. The depth of the father’s joy upon his return is an indicator of the depth of the father’s longing. If the father did not desire to be with his son as that son, his son’s return would mean nothing to that father. The story relies on the unique character of a father’s heart toward his son to get its force; his love has an aim – a loving relationship with his son – and that aim is intrinsic to the character of his love. The shape of that love is made evident through the characters and events of the story. If the essence of God’s love is its independence - that in its abundance it blindly flows like an impersonal river with no other purpose than the expression of itself - there would be no cause for the father’s joy upon the son’s return. This would be so because that father has no personal stake in that relationship. The son, like any number of stones in a river, is loved because he is in love’s path.

The cost of conceptualizing love’s motivation as strictly internal is that love is shut up within itself; it is reduced to an impersonal force. Love does not find its consummation in the creating and sustaining of personal relationships. It is indifferent to response. It does not long for reunion. Its satisfaction is found in its expression and is not enhanced by the response of the one it touches. Its joy is

that the recipient of such love is interchangeable with any other. Wadell raises this charge in Friendship and The Moral Life, pp. 89-90; and Daniel Day Williams in The Spirit and The Forms of Love, p. 114. Williams writes, “If I am loved merely as one who illustrates a general type, then I know that I am really not loved at all. I dissolve into a universal who is ‘loved’ by another universal.” It is an impersonal conception of love. Outka, in Agape, responds to this charge as it is
solitary. Its independence leaves no room within itself to house the motivation provided by what Kierkegaard conceives of as an external aim. Its fundamental aim is internal, that is, to follow law. We may need, and seek, relationship but this is not love’s need or demand. We must now return to Cottingham’s juice extractor. The tender affection and longing for joyful re-union with an estranged child, as conveyed by this narrative, is not picture-able in terms of a blind person who, as a stranger, loves everyone that he happens to encounter. If all we have to begin with is this picture of blind love, we could not build from it to the longing imaged in the parable any more than we could know the flavor, texture, and character of tasting a fresh strawberry if all we had to go on was a glassful of pulpy extract. On Kierkegaard’s analysis love and love’s demands has been presented in such a way that diminishes or distorts the original whole.

If love is to be conceived personally, that is, as more than just a power or force, it must contain within it a joyful hope of reciprocity – a longing that the person loved would gladly enter into relationship by responding with self-giving to, and a joyful reception of, the other. Mutual affection, characterized in part by this wanting to be received by the one you have given yourself to as well as a wanting to receive the self of the other, is an essential part of this personal giving and receiving.\textsuperscript{53} The emotional and desiderative character of joy is a facet of this

\textsuperscript{53} Edmond La B. Cherbonnier, in “Macmurray’s Transformation of Ethics,” writes, “Mutual affection, then is what human beings are made for... Morality is the expression of personal freedom. That freedom is grounded in our capacity to be real and to love reality. The supreme reality of human life is the reality of persons and of persons in personal relation with one another. Friendship, therefore, is the essence of morality.” The intention of God in creation is to form a universal community of persons characterized by friendship. Cherbonnier’s exploration of
affection; it forms part of the evaluative perspective that it is good to know the other as that particular other; thus, it also involves a commitment to the identity of the other.\(^\text{54}\) When love is characterized as having a higher purpose than the securing and sustaining of personal communion, love might be service but such service by itself does not constitute a love that is personal. Stooping low to serve is not the essence of God and God’s love as Scheler claims it to be.\(^\text{55}\) It may be a facet of love but it’s not the whole. Service can be a form of giving that is hollow, that is, it can easily be empty of the self. Such a love may seek “to remedy misfortune without creating intimacy,” in fact, it need not even aspire to intimacy, and yet be approved as adequately fulfilling the demands of love.\(^\text{56}\) This represents a failure to realize that man’s greatest misfortune, because it is his greatest need, is intimate personal relationships. God’s stooping reveals not the essence of God’s love but is a reflection of the depth to which God is willing to descend in order to establish and sustain personal communion.\(^\text{57}\) It reveals the extent of God’s longing for union with human beings.\(^\text{58}\) God gives his self

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\(^{54}\) In Chapter Five I will provide an extended account of the kind of identification central to personal love.

\(^{55}\) Scheler, *Ressentiment*, p. 67.

\(^{56}\) Post, *A Theory of Agape*, p. 27.

\(^{57}\) Ibid., pp. 25-27, 33, and 49-50. Abraham Heschel writes that the essence of God’s moral character as revealed in the Hebrew scriptures is God’s “willingness to be intimately involved in the history of man.” See *The Prophets*, p. 225.

\(^{58}\) Concerning the character of God’s longing as portrayed in the biblical narrative H.R.
because he desires that self to be received. He wants to enter into relationships with others, that is why he gives himself. Love is the giving of one’s self and it hopes to be received and hopes to receive the other’s self-giving. A love that has no room for this is a love that appears to go beyond Kierkegaard’s idealization of self-denial to some form of self-annihilation – there is no room for the self in this account of love; the self does not have any legitimate desires that can legitimately be satisfied by another.

*Affective Normative Content Requires Narrative Imagery to Portray It Fully*

We cannot distill a set of normative principles from the New Testament narrative that can adequately portray the normative character of that love. Any set of principles will inevitably provide a diminished account of that love. Further support for this thesis is that affective normative content is dependent on narrative imagery or exemplars to be conveyed. This becomes evident when we seek to capture the character of intimate, personal knowing in a set of normative principles. It is not the case that any account of friendship or communion will count as personal knowing. A set of normative constraints will likely help us identify conceptions that are faulty. Any account that says that doing wrong for a friend is morally acceptable, as Cicero argues, would be an inadequate account. However, a set of normative constraints is no substitute for an account of love in narrative form as a set of constraints, by themselves, cannot

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Mackintosh writes, “that while in one sense God might seem to have no need of us, since we can add nothing to His glory and His power, yet in a far deeper sense He does need us, and in his longing is prepared to go all lengths to reach and win the guilty. We are dealing with a love that does not wait to calculate the return upon its capital before flinging its riches wide upon the needy.” See his *Sermons*, p. 144.
adequately image the fullness of that love’s content.

One could respond to these claims by saying that a normative account of agape reached through conceptual analysis may not be as robust as that which is capable of being portrayed in a narrative account yet still serve as an indispensable guide to right living and right thinking about love’s demands. It might also be argued that my evaluation of Kierkegaard’s analysis was inadequate because it left out affective normative content. Surely Kierkegaard as well as Scheler and Nygren would concur that God’s love is a fatherly, tender, and yet fierce, love that it is characterized by a longing to be reunited in loving relationship with his children. If these emotional and desiderative qualities of agape are considered normative and put into propositional form, then Kierkegaard’s analysis could be saved. It would provide the robust conception of agape that we need.

I maintain that the qualities of tenderness, fierceness, fatherliness, and longing for reunion cannot be portrayed without narrative imagery supplied by literary sources or actual exemplars. Thus, to the extent affective qualities like these are part of the normative content of agape, right thinking about love’s demands will require intimate engagement with narrative imagery. For example, not only the character of love’s tenderness but also its depth are qualities that can only be shown. I concur with Hallie when he remarks that he can understand moral guidelines only insofar as he can “understand a story that embodies them” Without stories to illuminate moral principles, he writes, “I would not understand

59 Cicero, De Amicitia, xi-xiii.
the principles at all. They would be words about words about words.” Like Murdoch he realizes that robust moral content cannot be adequately conveyed as a list of principles but must be shown. Of course such stories can include those that are embodied in the actual lived lives of others. We could consider such exemplars as living images or stories. It is time now to examine why affective normative content is dependent on narrative imagery.

Consider the following candidate for one aspect of an affective normative constraint distilled from the Prodigal Son story: *You should love others with a tender-hearted, fatherly compassion.* Setting aside questions about how and why someone would come to hold this as a constraint, I suggest that these affective qualities of compassion – “tender-heartedness” and “fatherliness” cannot be adequately portrayed for our understanding without relying on narrative imagery. This includes those that are portrayed in the actual interaction between persons that Caroline Simon calls the “storied” character of our experience. Whether these images are supplied from a story like the Prodigal Son or the account of the relationship between Jesus and his Father or from persons that we actually know, the need for narratives to fill out the volitional, desiderative, and emotional character of such an affective normative constraint becomes evident when we try to portray these affective qualities without a story or an exemplar.

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60 Philip Hallie, *Tales of Good and Evil, Help and Harm*, p. 6.

61 Simon, *The Disciplined Heart*, p. 33. She writes, “Lived experience has the elements of narrative: it involves purpose as well as mystery, plans and intentions as well as accidents, particularity as well as “the moral of the story.” In trying to understand ourselves, we develop a narrative grasp of our lives.” When I refer to narrative I intend this term to be understood in this broad sense that includes actual examples that can be found in the storied character of our lives. It is only through the particularity of narratives that the full character, or depth, of those elements
We know that there are good fathers and bad fathers. What principle could we identify that would help us distinguish between these fathers? For starters consider this principle: *A good father does no harm to his children.* This *do no harm* principle, however, is so general that it applies to the actions of all people and thus gives us no insight into what is distinctively fatherly. Maybe it could be stated: *A good father takes joy in his child; he delights in his child and desires a heartfelt union with his child.* This constraint gets us closer to fatherliness than the first. Notice however, that in order for it to be helpful the need for specificity, that is, for additional narrative detail, increases. To unpack the constraint would involve trying to convey what delight, joy, and longing for heartfelt union mean. This unpacking would require additional metaphorical description or actual exemplars of these qualities, that is, it would require that we move back into the domain of narrative description or imagery to aid our comprehension. To portray the character of the constraint would require telling a story in which it is embedded or pictured. After all, what does taking joy, delighting, or longing for heartfelt union look like? This constraint by itself would not be enough; the depth of its particular normative character must be shown. For example, the depth of longing for heartfelt union will depend upon the character of its narrative portrayal. There are a variety of depths at which this longing, or the other affective qualities, can be portrayed. What depth of longing makes one a good father? Two further examples, one from Aristotle and one from Bennett Helm, offer additional help to show the importance of sufficient narrative detail for that constitute love can be portrayed.
portraying affective normative content.

In the *Nichomachean Ethics* when Aristotle wants to capture the affective qualities of that kind of love characteristic of the highest form of friendship he turns to the image of a loving mother delighting in her infant or young child. It is this familiar yet potent image that provides one of the targets that Aristotle aspires to hit in his analysis of the character of that love. If we ask Aristotle: What is the character of that love that exists between friends? He gives us that picture. The reality that gives this image its currency can be analyzed to assess some of its normative content. For example, Aristotle points to circumstances in which a mother cannot hope to both love her child and have that love returned. Loving mothers love their child anyway. Though he argues that the highest form of friendship exists when a certain kind of love between individuals is mutual or reciprocated, he also argues that friendship depends on this capacity and willingness to love like a loving mother, that is, to gladly love even when that love may not be returned. However, to understand the character of that delight or gladness that a friend should love another with requires a narrative depiction or exemplar. It requires pointing to an image and saying, “Delight looks like *that.*” It’s a quasi-Kripkean approach to the meaning of this moral term. The character of delight is narrative dependent – it needs an exemplar. Another way to put this is that some moral content can only be shown. A moral principle that tells us to delight in another yet does not provide us with a narrative example that provides content regarding that delight would be to give us a vague or empty command.

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There is normative content that is at least partly emotional and desiderative in character and cannot be conveyed without narrative imagery.

Some argue, based on Aristotle's passage from 1155b30-1156a5, that his conception of friendship can be adequately captured in the definition that two people are friends provided: 1) they have goodwill for each other, and 2) each is aware of the other’s goodwill. While these two conditions are necessary for friendship they are insufficient to capture the intimate character of love that Aristotle thinks characteristic of friendship. He writes, “But such men may bear goodwill to each other; for they wish one another well and aid one another in need; but they are hardly friends because they do not spend their days together nor delight in each other and these are thought the greatest marks of friendship.” (1158a5-9) And, as we have seen, to portray that delight he provides an image of a mother and her child. Moreover, in 1166b30-1167a20, he argues that goodwill by itself, even when mutual, is not identical with friendship because it does not amount to the intimacy that is characteristic of friends. This underscores my point that describing a love that is intimate or personal requires more than a set of necessary and sufficient conditions. When Aristotle seeks to describe the intimacy that constitutes the highest form of friendship he appeals to narratives or exemplars to portray both the character of delight and the character of that

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63 That passage reads: “…but to a friend we say we ought to wish what is good for his sake. But to those who thus wish good we ascribe only goodwill, if the wish is not reciprocated; goodwill when it is reciprocal being friendship. Or must we add ‘when it is recognized’? For many people have goodwill to those whom they have not seen but judge to be good or useful; and one of these might return this feeling. These people seem to bear goodwill to each other; but how could one call them friends when they do not know their mutual feelings? To be friends, then, they must be mutually recognized as bearing goodwill and wishing well to each other for one of the aforesaid reasons.”
activity involved in spending their days together.\textsuperscript{64}

Another example of the importance of narratives or exemplars for depicting the character of love is provided by Bennett Helm. He argues that the kind of concern that distinguishes personal love from impersonal forms involves “taking to heart” the identity of the one loved.\textsuperscript{65} A person’s well-being is crucially dependent on her identity, that is, “on whether she has upheld the values constitutive of her identity” and whether she succeeds or fails to live the kind of life she has determined is worth living.\textsuperscript{66} Personal concern for that person involves a commitment to respond emotionally to that which significantly impacts her well-being in either positive or negative ways.\textsuperscript{67} For example, if one cares for her personally her successes will evoke pride. This concern is not for one’s own well-being but her’s. It is a commitment to her identity for her sake and involves sharing her values, not in the sense that they become one’s own, but out of one’s respect for her role in shaping her own identity.\textsuperscript{68} He calls this commitment “intimate identification.”\textsuperscript{69} It is a deep concern for her identity that is analogous to

\textsuperscript{64} For more on the character of this condition of spending their days together see \textit{Nicomachean Ethics} 1170a5-1171b15 and 1166b30-1167a20. Aristotle appears to link the desire friends have to spend their days together with the other hallmark of friendship, that is, delight. He observes that when we genuinely delight in someone, where that delight is an expression of love and not merely the anticipation of how another can increase our own pleasure, that we will “long for” him when absent and “crave for his presence.” See 1167a1-10.


\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., p. 16.

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., p. 21.

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., pp. 22-23.

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid, pp. 5-6.
concern for one's own. He seeks to convey something of the depth of its interpersonal character by describing it as *taking her identity to heart*. He places these terms, identified here in italics, in quotations whenever he uses them. This seems to indicate an awareness on his part of their metaphorical character and that he needs their help to fully describe the affective character of love. I find his analysis extremely helpful, however, unlike Aristotle he fails to provide exemplars or images to give content to his notion of taking to heart another's identity. Depth of identification can vary – to what depth must love go? Showing that depth requires a narrative.\(^{70}\) Interestingly, in the final paragraph of his paper, he briefly points to a loving parent with a young child as a picture of how to take another's identity to heart in a manner that will help her to discover and uphold her identity.\(^{71}\) Again, here is normative content that is at least partly emotional and desiderative in character and as such needs to be conveyed with the help of exemplars or narrative imagery.

Returning to our discussion about fathers one could object to this conclusion that links normative content and narrative imagery by arguing that additional constraints about fatherliness would fill out its character. Perhaps for fatherliness we could say: A good father contends with tender fierceness for – passionately seeks to nurture – the reign of goodness both in his own heart and in his child's. The natural response to such proposed affective normative

\(^{70}\) In Chapter Five I will show how the New Testament narrative relies on its images of Jesus' loving relationship with God and his loving relationships with others to give content to the character of agape. These images are used to convey the depth of this kind of love.

\(^{71}\) Helm, “Love, Identification, and the Emotions”, p. 27.
constraints would be: Show me what you mean. One might ask: How deeply does a good father contend? And, again, to do that requires a story. The qualities of “tender fierceness” or “passionate seeking” must be imaged and not merely stated discursively. Philip Hallie expresses our need for stories in order to think morally in the following way:

At their best Kant and Mill’s philosophies are ingenious generalizations about particular people doing and feeling particular things. I can understand their principles only insofar as I can understand a story that embodies them. If there were no stories to illuminate their principles, I would not understand the principles at all. They would be words about words about words.\(^{72}\)

Even when stated with affective terminology a normative principle or constraint cannot image, or portray, the character of that affective normative content.\(^ {73}\) We need examples or stories to supply that content. Regarding the importance of images for moral discourse, Murdoch writes that it seems impossible

\[\ldots\text{to discuss certain kinds of concepts without resort to metaphor, since the concepts themselves are deeply metaphorical and cannot be analysed into non-metaphorical components without a loss of substance.}\]\(^ {74}\)

It is for reasons such as these that I concur with Nussbaum, Murdoch, and Hallie when they argue that emotive or literary styles are capable of capturing moral insights in ways that abstract theoretical writing is not. This is critical to keep before us as we seek to characterize the normative demands of agape.

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\(^{72}\) Hallie, *Tales of Good and Evil, Help and Harm*, p. 6.

\(^{73}\) Outka, *Agape: An Ethical Analysis*, p. 93.

Having established that discursive accounts of love’s demands fail to convey normative content that is otherwise capable of depiction in narrative form we need to explore some of its implications for our own moral thinking and for our discourse with others. One implication already mentioned is that we cannot fully discuss the normative character of love, in particular, agape, without engaging the narratives about agape. If “knowledge of love is a love story,” as Nussbaum writes, then getting to know the character of a particular love, in this case agape, will require attending to the narrative that tells that story.\textsuperscript{75} Moreover, this narrative approach assumes that there are other faculties important for knowing in addition to those relied upon in abstract styles of discourse.\textsuperscript{76} Conceptual analysis presents distillations for our comprehension with no barriers to our understanding these facts beyond the proper application of our intellectual faculties.\textsuperscript{77} One way the narrative approach differs from this is that it recognizes that apprehension of content involves engaging emotional and moral facets of our being through our imagination and not merely our intellects.

At this point it becomes important to consider Nussbaum’s comment that trying to grasp some truths merely intellectually, especially truths about love, may

\textsuperscript{75} Nussbaum, \textit{Love’s Knowledge}, p. 275.

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., pp. 21 and 7. See also Chapters 1 and 11. See also my Chapter Three where I presented evidence that suggests that practical moral reasoning requires emotion.

\textsuperscript{77} H.R. Mackintosh, in \textit{The Christian Apprehension of God}, remarks that there are intellectual methodologies, like scientific analysis, that “have no purchase on the entire personality” because they aim at knowledge that is “severely intellectual, impersonal, and unemotional” and, in so doing, leave the “conscience untouched.” See pp. 50 and 62.
be a way of “not suffering, not loving... [but] a stratagem of flight.”

Our aversion to narrative forms of moral discourse may be based in our awareness, as Murdoch writes, that “Metaphors often carry a moral charge, which analysis in simpler and plainer terms is designed to remove.” Narratives, unlike discursive accounts, invite the reader to invest themselves in the story in an imaginative and emotional way and thus have the potential to reveal the reader’s moral commitments. They require that you “put yourself” in the story. In doing so they hold the potential to evoke emotional responses that can reveal what constitute one’s core evaluative judgments about the good life that are often hidden from one’s own view. Our emotions are eudaimonistic – they are concerned with the value of some person or object as it pertains to our flourishing or well-being. Our emotional responses hold the potential to illuminate our orienting convictions - one's central evaluative judgments about the good life that guide our actions - that otherwise might remain hidden. Thus, we may need to approach narratives with a willingness to be searched ourselves rather than merely, or primarily, being the searchers. Narratives that provide “sufficient attention to particularity and emotion” require a kind of participation from the reader, Nussbaum argues, in which the text can serve as an “optical instrument” through which “the reader

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78 Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge*, pp. 268-269. She writes that there are “certain contexts in which the pursuit of intellectual reasoning apart from emotion will actually prevent a full rational judgment – for example by preventing an access to one's grief, or one's love, that is necessary for a full understanding of what has taken place when a loved one dies. Emotions can, of course, be unreliable – in much the same way that beliefs can... But the fact that some beliefs are irrational has rarely led philosophers to dismiss all beliefs from practical reasoning.” See p. 41-42.

becomes a reader of his own heart.”

Narratives in their ability to robustly depict visions of the good life and that demand our emotional engagement for their apprehension can reveal our moral commitments and challenge us with an alternative moral vision.

Imaginative participation with a narrative regularly requires an emotional participation with the narrator - we must be open and available to experience the emotions she is seeking to evoke - in order to understand the idea she is seeking to convey. To see things the way she sees them may require helping us to feel things the way she feels. In this case emotions are integral to the character of the normative content that is being presented and not merely a subjective response related to that same content. Cottingham argues that the emotional coloring that a narrative provides not only adds a subjective reaction to an objective state of affairs, but that the emotional coloring is a way of reconstituting the state of affairs itself.

He writes, “Emotion is partly constitutive of the facts that are experienced”, that is, the emotion is part of the factual content that is to be experienced and yet itself is not of the character that it can be captured propositionally. We don’t know the quality of an emotion through a linguistic

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80 Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge*, pp. 46-47. Halliday, in *Reconciliation and Reality*, also gives witness to this ability of narratives. He speaks of his experience with the New Testament narrative, in particular its account of the person of Jesus, as having the power to “unveil” his moral condition to himself. See pp. 165-166.

81 Macmurray, in *Reason and Emotion*, writes that “…there is one crucial thing that thinking cannot do at all. It cannot decide whether the thing it reveals is good or bad, beautiful or ugly, to be shunned or to be sought. For the determination of values we are dependent on our emotions – or on those of someone else.” See pp. 36-37.

82 Cottingham, *The Spiritual Dimension*, p. 85.

83 Ibid, p. 88. His notion of “emotional coloring” fits with my argument that narratives are needed
description any more than we know the taste of coffee through such descriptions – we know such things through phenomenological acquaintance with them, that is, through experience.

In this way narratives can provide us with an opportunity to participate in what Cottingham calls “transformative ways of perceiving reality.”\textsuperscript{84} Peter Goldie describes it this way:

Coming to think of [the world] in [a] new way is not to be understood as consisting of thinking of it in the old way, plus some added-on phenomenal ingredient – feeling perhaps; rather, the whole way of experiencing, or being conscious of, the world is new... The difference between thinking of X as Y without feeling and thinking of X as Y with feeling will not comprise just a different attitude towards the same content – a thinking which was earlier without feeling and now is with feeling. The difference also lies in the content, although it might be that this difference cannot be captured in words.\textsuperscript{85}

If having certain emotions are integral to the character of normative content and not merely a subjective response related to that same content, then imaginatively entering into an emotional experience as fostered by a narrative may help us apprehend normative content. The emotional experience is one of the facts that constitutes a part of this new way of seeing. It is not that we come to a narrative with an emotion that we will use to aid this new way of seeing. It is a willingness to engage with a narrative in an emotional manner, that is, to allow it to evoke in us an emotional response that itself may partly constitute the normative attitude to portray affective normative content that cannot be portrayed fully in discursive form.

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., p. 85.

\textsuperscript{85} Peter Goldie, \textit{The Emotions}, pp. 59f., original emphasis. Cited in Cottingham, \textit{The Spiritual Dimension}, p. 85.
we are to have toward others.

If Cottingham and Goldie are correct, one can come to a narrative without this willingness to engage it emotionally and fail to apprehend normative content that cannot be apprehended through an emotionally detached or disinterested approach. We may resist the manner in which narratives may unveil us to ourselves. Our understanding of the moral dimensions of our engagements with others may be occluded by self-protective emotional commitments. This fits Nussbaum’s earlier comment that trying to grasp some truths merely intellectually, especially truths about love, may be “a stratagem of flight.” ⁸⁶ An example of how a narrative and narrator can engage us emotionally in order to help us apprehend normative content that is emotional in character is found in the New Testament story The Parable of the Prodigal Son. ⁸⁷

In the emotionally colored story of the Prodigal Son Jesus invites his audience to participate in a new way of seeing. The parable is directed toward religious leaders who are criticizing Jesus for spending time with people that they perceive to be morally and spiritually unfit. Their judgment is that if Jesus is good, he would not spend time with people of such undesirable character. In response Jesus offers a narrative. It addresses their unspoken assumptions about God, in particular the character of God’s love, the value of others, and their proper

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⁸⁷ See Luke chapter 15. The fact that this story is self-referential, that is, that the narrator is speaking about himself in some fashion to people who know him or of him to varying degrees, means that the force of this narrative – at least to its original audience – would depend on one’s assessment of the character of the person telling this story. Members of the audience cannot reject the opportunity for moral self-evaluation that the narrator is providing without rejecting, to some extent, the authority of the one telling the story.
relationship to both God and these others. He addresses them as if they asked, How are we to love? His answer: Like the father in this story. Agape is like this father’s love and still yet more. To understand his picture of love he invites his listeners to “step inside” this story and imagine what it would feel like to be loved like this son or to love like this father. It is as if he asks, “What would it be like to have a dad that races out of the house to hug you and tell you he loves you after you did something you were sure would disappoint him and possibly lead him to reject or abandon you?” Or, possibly, “If you had a wayward child that returned home to you like this, wouldn’t you feel like celebrating too?”

By picturing a familiar set of relationships that evoke a familiar range of emotions Jesus seeks to engage the imagination of his listeners to convey the affective normative character of this love. I take it that the emotions it evokes toward the returning son are aimed at revealing the nature of their attitude toward the outcasts. One might discover that they’re like the older brother who feels resentful that his father shows this love to his brother. Like the older brother they may not be able to see the goodness of the father’s love. They might find themselves judging that it is morally repugnant for the father to love the son in this manner. Thus, by evoking the emotions of the listeners, which are themselves morally evaluative, this parable is able to challenge their vision of God’s love. He invites his critics to shift from seeing these others as worthy of rejection because of their moral and spiritual offenses to seeing them, as this father sees his son, as estranged family members for whom they should sorrow for and long for reunion. Love requires seeing them completely differently, that is,
having a different valuation of them, and that transformed way of seeing will be partly constituted by certain emotions.

Part of the moral robustness of the narrative depiction of agape is its affective normative content. Joy is an emotion, that is, it is an affective evaluative attitude that is a component of agape. In his famous passage on love the apostle Paul strives to articulate that agape is more than an indifferent benevolence even when that benevolence is exceptionally generous and sacrificial.\(^{88}\) Love, and the justice that issues from it, involves joy - and joy involves wanting the other and myself to be made the kind of persons capable of personal communion, that is, capable of enjoying the presence of the other as well as being enjoyed by that other.\(^{89}\) It is an affirmation of the evaluation that the other who has injured me is one that remains worth knowing in a manner that is personal. It recognizes that their present actions make them less the person they truly are and need to be while resisting the temptation to believe otherwise. The narrative imagery of this parable aims to give content to the affective character of this love; if a love does not possess this affective content then it is an altogether different kind of love. This is Goldie’s point above. This love involves seeing others in a way that we previously did not see them. The necessity of this emotion as part of agape’s structure makes the normative content of that love different.\(^{90}\)

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\(^{88}\) See 1 Corinthians Chapter 13. I will develop this position more fully in the following chapter.

\(^{89}\) See “Love Thine Enemy” and “Justice” in George MacDonald’s *Unspoken Sermons*.

Conclusion

Narratives can serve as an indispensable vehicle for critical reflection about the character of love, personal relationships, and the good life. I have supported this thesis by arguing that narrative imagery can convey normative content that exceeds that which can be presented discursively as a list of normative principles. In light of this it is the case that conversation, or discourse, about what constitutes the good life will lack the requisite depth to meet the demands of our lives if it fails to take into account our need for narrative. However, speaking of exemplars or narratives as imaging normative content can be misleading. Exemplars present us with more than a batch of moral prescriptions. They speak not only to our sense of moral obligation but also to our aspirations – they show us not only what we must “do” but what we might “be.” They portray a life, or a way of being, that can address concerns like Becker’s of “how to be a man” - that is, of how to live a vibrant life. A narrative may also unexpectedly awaken and illuminate aspirations that until then we did not know that we had. Theoretical ethical discourse cannot do this. Its inability to adequately portray the character of the good life in its fullness means that we cannot turn to it as a view of life that might “fit” with, or speak to, that which is deepest in our lives. This fact that narratives can convey normative content that otherwise could not be adequately portrayed provides us with grounds for engaging the New Testament directly to explore how it portrays the good life including the character of love and personal relationships.

In the following chapter I argue that the New Testament presents a portrait
of intimate, personal knowing in terms of the relational image of agape that is central to it. To understand agape we need to look at it in the context of the love story of which it is a part.91 This narrative presents two primary images of that love. The first is the pattern of engagement between God and Jesus that constitutes their love for one another. I use the term intimate identification for this pattern. The second is the manner in which God and Jesus seek to draw human persons into a relationship with God and others that shares the same character. I argue that the distinctive quality of this love requires narrative imagery or exemplars to be fully portrayed through.

The New Testament presents intimacy as a form of personal knowing that is a shared activity between persons that involves an ongoing encounter of their genuine selves. I argue that joy is an emotional and desiderative element of agape that shapes its moral character and is necessary for intimacy. Love for another as that other involves taking joy in that other, that is, it involves wanting to be with that other and to enjoy that other as the particular other that they are. Joy is both the result of, and a condition for, intimacy.92

I argue that this account of agape has the resources to address Becker’s Concern that fidelity to another, in particular God, diminishes a person’s autonomy. This narrative presents a portrait of the self, or person, as one in

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91 Nussbaum, Love’s Knowledge, p. 275.

92 It is important to reiterate that the concept of intimacy as I use it refers to a quality of a relationship and not a class of relationships. Our family relationships are sometimes referred to as “intimate” because of the close association that is shared among those who live together and/or are biologically related. However, it is not uncommon for family members to be estranged from one another and for those relationships to lack intimacy. This kind of familiarity or biological kinship does not by itself amount to intimacy. Such relationships may be in fact anti-intimate.
which the capacities essential for personhood such as autonomy are not diminished through intimate identification with God but instead are most fully realized. Participating in an intimate, personal relationship with God requires an identification with God that, given God's character, requires and nurtures the development of our autonomy. Our capacity for intimate, personal engagement with God and others increases as our capacity for autonomy increases. Jesus, in his unparalleled capacity to engage God and others in a personal manner, is presented as the portrait of “how to be a man”, that is, of how to live a vibrant life. His identity is not diminished or obscured, but instead finds its unique expression in identification with the God he calls Father.

I will also show that this kind of personal knowing is capable of addressing the existential problem of meaning. On this account the human hunger for meaning, or significance, is one that finds its satisfaction not in theoretical or explanatory knowledge but in intimate, personal engagement with God and, through God, with others. Significance is found in being significant for Another, that is, in being loved by One who is worthy of our fullest love. Leo Tolstoy's testimony from his religious writings will be engaged to help support this view. This will contribute further to the view that our identity is not found in isolation from God and other persons but is most fully realized through participation in intimate, personal relationships with God and others.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE INTIMACY OF AGAPE

Introduction

We can only discuss the normative character of agape to the depth we need by engaging the New Testament narratives about agape. The narrative imagery of the New Testament conveys normative content that exceeds that which can be presented discursively. This narrative is nothing if not a “love story” and the character of the love it portrays cannot be adequately depicted any other way.¹ Two illustrations of the narrative dependency of normative content will orient this chapter’s exploration of agape. The first is found in Jesus’ admonition to his disciples where he states: “You are to love others as I have loved you.”² To grasp the content alluded to here requires that we look at how Jesus loved those who he spoke this to. To do this requires looking at the narrative. In so doing we discover a second illustration of the narrative dependence of normative content, one that bears on the content of the first, in Jesus’ statement that, “As the Father

¹ Nussbaum, Love’s Knowledge, p. 275. Charles Baxter writes that narratives provide “depth” by the way in which they address certain questions. Several essential ones are: “What do these characters want? ...what are they afraid of? ...what’s at stake in the story? [and] ...what are the consequences of these scenes or actions? ...if you don’t know what’s at stake in the story, it means that nothing stands to be gained or lost in it. Something has to be risked. The characters have to want something or wish for something.” Glimmer Train, Summer 2001, pp. 75-76.

² John 13:34 and 15:12.
has loved me, so have I loved you.” Thus, the character of the love with which his followers are to love others is further elucidated by that love which is portrayed in the particular relationship between Jesus and his Father. To learn about the character of their love for one another we must turn to the narrative for the needed content.

Jesus' loving relationship with God and his loving relationships with others constitute the two central images of agape in the New Testament. These images have two sources - Jesus’ words, often in the story form in which he taught, and his life or person, that is, who he is in himself, that is portrayed through the manner he engages God and others. I focus primarily on that picture of agape as manifested in the relationship between Jesus and his Father. I use the term intimate identification for the pattern of engagement between God and Jesus that constitutes their love for one another. I consider their relationship to be one of the central images in the New Testament account of this love. Daniel Day Williams writes, “The failure to see that the understanding of love in Christian faith is given in the Father-Son relationship in God himself has vitiated many Christian theologies of love.” Similarly, George MacDonald writes, “The secret of

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4 H.H. Farmer, in his Gifford Lectures, writes: “The term ‘Father’ as applied to God is obviously metaphorical, the metaphor being drawn from human relationships... But there is one basic element in the meaning of the term ‘father’ as used of the human relationship that Christian worship refuses to take metaphorically when it transfers it to God, and that is the personal element. When the Christian faith says, ‘God, Father’ it says ‘God, radically other as God, yet veritably personal and entering into personal relations with men’. “ Revelation and Religion, pp. 57-58.

5 See also Chapter Three for more on the character of this pattern.

6 Daniel Day Williams, The Spirit and the Forms of Love, p. 35.
the whole story of humanity is the love between the Father and the Son. That is at the root of it all. Upon the love between the Son and the Father hangs the whole universe.” However, it is not possible – nor desirable - to focus on this one image to the complete exclusion of the other because the character of agape is also made evident by the character of the effort the Father and Son undertake to draw others into the loving relationship that they share.

God’s efforts to draw others into this loving relationship are portrayed in many ways but two images in particular are crucial to the character of those efforts. These are Jesus' incarnation and his crucifixion. Incarnation is the word used for the act of Jesus entering the created order as a human person. Prior to becoming a man Jesus, according to the narrative, eternally co-exists with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit in a loving relationship. Jesus, as God's Son, willingly becomes man and willingly accepts death at the hands of humans in an effort to draw them into the loving relationship that he shares with his Father. Crucifixion is the manner in which Jesus was put to death by the Roman government. These images of incarnation and crucifixion are central to the narrative's depiction of God's efforts to reconcile humans, who are portrayed as at enmity with God, to himself. They reveal the lengths God is willing to go to draw human persons into the personal fellowship that exists between the Father,

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7 MacDonald, From the Pulpit, p. 278. Also, W.F. Halliday writes, “This filial relationship, with God as Father, was to Jesus the solution of everything.” See Reconciliation and Reality, pp. 158-159.

8 This enmity is portrayed as a desire to live independently from God. It is congruent with those who otherwise live exemplary lives as when a good person says, “Why do I need God, I am good?” Sometimes the attitude behind this question is that God should leave me alone to enjoy myself because I have done nothing to warrant his unwanted intrusion or interference in my life. It is that attitude, or something quite like it, that constitutes the enmity that God seeks to address.
Son, and Holy Spirit. My focus will not primarily be on these two images but on the kind of relationship with God that God seeks to restore humans to which is imaged in the relationship between Jesus and his Father.

In its image of the Father-Son relationship the New Testament provides a vibrant image of what constitutes personal knowing. That knowing is a form of intimacy that is a shared, or mutual, activity between Father and Son. It is something that is not capable of being established or secured by the efforts of a solitary person. Moreover, this intimate identification, or loving communion, is constituted by volitional, emotional, and desiderative elements particular to the agents themselves. Halliday reminds us that these are “qualities or activities of a personality” and cannot be radically separated from the person, or from one another, even though we regularly do so in thought. For example, volition is often portrayed as a pure activity that operates independently and uncolored by emotion and desire. By elevating volition as separate from and more central to love than emotional and desiderative elements agape is sometimes misportrayed, as we saw in Kierkegaard’s account of agape in Chapter Four, as a disinterested benevolence or the legal fulfillment of a moral duty. The character of these commitments, emotions, and desires is reflective of the character of the agents. And it is these operating as elements of a whole that determine the moral quality of an action. Thus, we must explore how the narrative depicts these to

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9 The person of the Holy Spirit is also portrayed in the narrative but there is much greater detail about the relationship between Jesus and his Father. Thus, my focus will be on that relationship.

10 Halliday, *Reconciliation and Reality*, p. 116; see also pp. 31, 59-60, and 113-117. For example, if we are to *treasure* God as Jesus indicates in Matthew 6:19-24, this kind of action involves more than merely following God’s commands. It involves emotional and desiderative elements that are evaluative and that shape the character of that action.
understand the character of the Father and Son's love for one another.

In what follows I argue that this account of agape as intimate identification addresses Becker's Concern that fidelity to another, in particular God, diminishes a person's autonomy. This narrative presents a portrait of the self, or person, as one in which the capacities essential for personhood such as autonomy are not diminished through intimate identification with God but instead are most fully realized. Participating in an intimate, personal relationship with God requires an identification with God that, given God's character, requires and nurtures the development of our autonomy. Moreover, Jesus' unparalleled capacity to engage God and others in a personal manner, is presented as the portrait of “how to be a man”, that is, of how to live a vibrant life. His identity is not diminished or obscured, but instead finds its unique expression, in identification with the God he calls Father.

I also argue that this intimate identification constitutes a kind of personal knowing that is capable of addressing the existential problem of meaning or significance that Leo Tolstoy identified in Chapter Two. On this account the human hunger for meaning, or significance, is one that finds its satisfaction not in theoretical or explanatory knowledge but in intimate, personal engagement with God and, through God, with others.11 Tolstoy's religious testimony will be engaged to help support this view of the personal nature of meaning. His life

11 Concerning this Cherbonnier writes, “Part of the uniqueness of Christianity, however, is its contention that true fulfillment is to be found, not in the splendid isolation of the beatific vision, not in the self-contained certitude of contemplation, but – of all places – in a certain quality of relation between free agents (agape).” See Hardness of Heart, p. 105.
gives witness to a hunger for something more than explanatory knowledge as such knowledge cannot meet the existential demands he finds within himself. These demands include the need for forgiveness coupled with a demand for moral perfection, the need for significance, and the need for a love that will overcome his aloneness. In addition, I argue that Tolstoy embraces Christianity, at least in part, because to him it makes the best sense of the powerful existential demands he experiences. In doing so he employs a modest form of explanationism. The manner in which he gives witness to his deepest aspirations and to that which he has found to satisfy them models the character of discourse, or conversation, that best fits these issues of ultimate concern. He does not claim that he can demonstrate that his view is more reasonable than others but in sharing his experiences he invites others to investigate their own. At this point it is time to examine how the New Testament narrative portrays the character of that love for one another that exists between God and Jesus.

God’s Glad Fidelity to His Son

The New Testament provides us with an image of God as a Father who finds his supreme joy in being intimately identified with one who is uniquely his Son. This identification is not one in which their identities are “blurred or erased”, however, it is one in which the character of their relationship is integral to each of their identities. Jesus is portrayed as the Son of God and God as the Father of

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12 See my second chapter for an account of modest explanationism.

13 Helm, “Love, Identification, and the Emotions”, pp. 2-3. He critiques robust union accounts of intimacy for construing intimacy in a way that undermines the separateness of the two persons. His concern is that there is no way of caring for another as that particular other if intimacy
Jesus. Their identities, though defined in relation to one another, are yet distinct. For example, the passion narrative highlights their distinctiveness. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus does not give up his will in place of his Father's but exercises his will to freely affirm his Father's.\

Throughout the New Testament the character of God's identification with Jesus is evidenced in how God gladly makes his self unreservedly available to his Son. I will explore how the narrative portrays the volitional, emotional, and desiderative elements of this identification. God entrusts himself to Jesus in that he gladly yields his purposes and the power to fulfill his purposes to Jesus. The character of the Father's responsiveness to Jesus is a reflection of the supreme import Jesus holds for his Father.

The depth of God's commitment to attend to and act on Jesus' behalf reveals the depth of his identification with Jesus. The narrative portrays the Father as one who fully reveals and entrusts his purposes to his Son. Jesus' cousin John the Baptist tells his followers concerning Jesus that, “The Father loves the Son and has placed all things into his hands.” (John 3:35) The Father exercises his authority to defer to and affirm the authority of his Son. On a separate occasion Jesus says something similar. When some highly religious people are infuriated at him for healing someone on the Sabbath, a day believed to be a God-ordained day of rest, Jesus answers them by saying he can do

dissolves or blurs the identities of each of the selves in the relationship.


15 Helm identifies these two things – a consistent pattern of “attending to” and of “acting on behalf of” - as indicators of something or someone having import to you. The depth of that import is revealed by the depth and character of these two activities. See “Love, Identification, and the Emotions,” p. 9.
“nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing” and that the “Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing.”¹⁶ (John 5:20) Note the link between loving and revealing. The narrative repeatedly makes this link. The Father reveals himself fully to Jesus because the Father loves him. In another place Jesus himself links this kind of disclosure to a special relationship, to friendship, when he tells his disciples – “but I call you friends because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.” (John 15:15) Jesus discloses himself to his friends, like the Father discloses himself to his Son. In healing someone on the Sabbath Jesus justifies re-interpreting and re-orienting their religious traditions by attributing the authority behind his actions as coming from God. His remarks indicate that he perceives that the Father entrusts himself fully to him. And implicit in his understanding is that the Father’s unreserved disclosures reveal an intimate closeness - God considers him to be his friend.¹⁷

Herbert Henry Farmer, in *The World and God*, offers a helpful description of the phenomenological conditions necessary for one individual to exercise trust in another.¹⁸ This can help us understand more clearly the character of God's

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¹⁶ Consider also Luke 10:22 where Jesus states “All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”

¹⁷ Congruent with this view that God's love toward Jesus is akin to friendship is Cicero's observation that love toward friends leads us not to seek our own advantage, but to gladly obligate ourselves toward our friends at our own expense for their good. A genuine friend may even willingly die in the place of another friend. This is a view that Jesus shares. See Cicero’s *De Amicitia* xvi. 57 and vii. 24 and John 15:12-15.

¹⁸ Farmer, *The World and God*; see especially pp. 18-25, 70, and 85-88.
trust in Jesus as evidenced in God's disclosures to Jesus. Farmer writes that an individual’s will always stands in a particular kind of “irreducible tension” with the wills of other persons that he encounters.\(^{19}\) This tension is rooted not in antagonism but in the awareness that the will of the other is independent of ours and serves as a natural barrier to our own. The other’s will presents itself to us as an “inaccessible source of activity” that continuously creates an “invisible frontier between his being and ours”.\(^{20}\) We are aware that the will of the other stands as an inaccessible limit to our own - the other belongs to an order that morally binds or limits the expression of my will - and that there is no entering this frontier except that that person “invites us to do so”.\(^{21}\)

The extent of the Father's disclosures to Jesus represent that the frontier of God's self is fully open to Jesus. It is this invitation that makes it possible for one self to be personally *present* to another self; God is as fully attentive to Jesus as he possibly can be. Trust involves a “volitional encounter” where “the will of each party must impinge on the will of the other.”\(^{22}\) Here the Father's will is exercised in the form of an invitation to the Son and of which the Son chooses to accept. The necessity of this volitional encounter for knowing someone

\(^{19}\) Ibid., p. 21.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., p. 19.

\(^{21}\) Ibid.

\(^{22}\) Edmund La B. Cherbonnier, “A.J. Heschel and The Philosophy of the Bible”, p. 27. Knowledge of another person, he writes, “does not consist entirely of descriptive data about observable facts; it is an understanding of another's will... the prerequisite of such knowledge is a volitional encounter. The will of each party must impinge on the will of the other. If the encounter is hostile, then their knowledge of each other remains minimal.”
personally becomes clear when we contrast it with situations where it is absent. Consider someone who comes to learn true things about me but who learns these things incidentally by overhearing a conversation or through gossip. In neither of these instances is the disclosure personal because I did not freely choose to entrust myself to that other person. I did not invite them to enter that frontier that constitutes my self. That act, as it is directed and sustained toward another, is an integral part of encountering me. Without that a person lacks a “direct acquaintance” with me. Thus, they fail to have knowledge of me, even though they may know facts about me.23

Returning to the narrative we find a consistent pattern of the Father exercising his authority to defer to and affirm the authority and purposes of his Son. In Helm’s terms the Father is not only fully prepared to act on the Son’s behalf but consistently does so. One example is found in chapter 10 of Luke where Jesus says,

All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. (Luke 10:22)

Another is found in John 10:17-18. Here Jesus, speaking of his impending death, says,

For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down my life that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on my own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from my Father.

23 Ibid.
These examples indicate the depth to which the Father identifies with Jesus. Helm argues that what makes identification a form of intimate personal concern, in contrast to an impersonal one, is that when you love that person you must take an interest not just in her well-being but also in her identity itself. A personal love cares for the other as that particular other. Personal care involves taking that person's identity to heart, that is, it involves a commitment to respond emotionally to that which significantly impacts her well-being in either positive or negative ways. This concern is not for one's own well-being but for her's; it is a commitment to her identity for her sake. The narrative presents the Father's concern for Jesus – the depth of the import Jesus holds for his Father - not only as a commitment to respond emotionally but also as a commitment to help him realize his full identity. In this way the narrative portrays God's love for Jesus as fatherly. God is not portrayed as an absolute monarch who begrudgingly condescends to yield his power to a lesser subject, but instead demonstrates a filial concern that we are familiar with in some sense from the best we've encountered in parent-child relationships. God is a gracious father.

24 Helm, “Love, Identification, and the Emotions”, p. 5. Though I think Helm makes his case that such a love is personal, I think he fails to adequately capture what constitutes intimacy. This will be addressed in greater detail later.

25 Ibid., pp. 5, 21, 23 and 25. The narrative regularly depicts Jesus' care for God in these ways. For example, Jesus experiences anger at people who are desecrating his Father's house, the temple, by using it not as a house of prayer but as a place to seek monetary advantage over others. In so doing they use it for concerns that are incongruent with his Father's - they fail to attend to and act on God's behalf, that is, they fail to intimately identify with God. See Matthew 21:12-13, Mark 11:15-19, and Luke 19:45-48.

26 Ibid., pp. 22-23.

27 The narrative considers it to be more than this yet the narrative consistently turns to the arena of human relationships to give insight into the character of the divine. Even though these
A good parent embraces, as a part of his or her identity as a parent, the commitment to helping their child develop into one who can see the good and choose to embrace it though it might exact a personal cost. In Chapter Three we saw how Huck Finn stood upright in this way. In affirming the personhood of an escaped slave named Jim he both found and exerted a costly moral independence as he stood against the conventional religion of his day. We also saw how Tim O'Brien failed to find the moral independence he needed to refuse to go to Vietnam. O'Brien's actions were less personal than Huck's – in failing to act according to his own insight he fails to inhabit his action with himself. Good parents focus their attention and efforts to provide the care to their child that is needed in order to help her develop in this way. Moreover, as their child matures they create the space for their child to exercise her identity in a way that increasingly makes her acts her own. Love is creative of distinction – it wants the other to be the other. This commitment is not diminishing but creates the possibility of intimacy.\textsuperscript{28} Loving relationships enhance our autonomy which enhances our capacity for intimate identification.\textsuperscript{29} The New Testament, in some fashion akin to this, intimates that God is committed to exercising his agency in a manner that enhances Jesus’ capacity to express his character, or identity, as the particular person that he is.

\textsuperscript{28} Spouses also seek to cultivate this capacity for moral independence in one another as do friends. Consider St. Francis de Sales remarks that “We challenge our friends to be who and what they really are without ever implying in the challenge a withdrawal of our affection for them.” See his \textit{Introduction to the Devout Life}.

\textsuperscript{29} Helm, “Love, Identification, and the Emotions,” p. 27.
At one point the narrative explicitly links God's act of entrusting himself to Jesus with God's concern for Jesus' identity. God's commitment to Jesus' identity, that is, the depth to which he takes his identity to heart, is indicated by God's desire that Jesus may be known and honored. Moreover, it is revealed not only by God's desire but also by God's willingness to give himself fully to Jesus to realize that end. Consider John 5:19-27 where Jesus says,

For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes. For not even the Father judges anyone but has given all judgment to the Son, in order that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father….

God is presented as caring for Jesus' identity for Jesus' sake. One of God's central purposes is to attend to Jesus, and act on his behalf, in order that others would know him and honor him. God's actions here intimate that he delights in Jesus and wants others to delight in him. When we take joy in someone we want others to take joy in him as well. Macmurray speaks of this as glad awareness. He writes,

When you love anyone you want above all things to be aware of him, more and more completely... You want to see him and hear him, not because you want to make use of him but simply because this is the natural and only way of taking delight in his existence for his sake... You want other people to look at it and enjoy it too... You want to know it, to know it better and better, and you want other people to do the same.30

This seems to fit God's intentions as imaged in the narrative. God wants others to delight in his Son in the manner that he does. We will explore this subject of joy

God’s willingness to let Jesus “call the shots”, that is, the sharing of his authority with Jesus, indicates God’s willingness to be influenced by the life of his Son. It portrays the kind of engagement that God wants to have with his Son. In Helm’s terms the emotional import of Jesus to God is revealed in God’s consistent pattern of attending to Jesus and of acting on his behalf. God puts himself at the disposal of his Son. God identifies with his Son - he purposes to support the purposes of Jesus. This reveals further the filial character of God’s personal concern for Jesus. It also fits one of the hallmarks of intimacy. Catherine Wallace states that intimacy occurs when “the inmost depth is opened to what another may bring in.” God knows and loves his Son and trusts him enough to gladly receive the consequences of Jesus’ choices. He doesn’t override Jesus in some benevolent fashion. Jesus is not a mere “puppet” installed to govern by a larger power yet not invested with any real power of his own. When God invites Jesus into the frontier that constitutes his self he invites Jesus to bring who Jesus is to bear on God and influence God in some regard. God seeks a volitional encounter with Jesus and this requires nurturing Jesus’ moral independence or autonomy. Jesus must freely choose his course of action in order for it to be his. God’s receptiveness to Jesus in this manner and Jesus’ responsiveness to his Father constitutes one facet of the intimacy they share.

Another way the New Testament images the way in which God identifies

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32 Catherine Wallace, For Fidelity: How Intimacy and Commitment Enrich Our Lives, p. 95.
personally with Jesus is through God's entrusting his power to Jesus. Implicit within the examples we have just looked at is that God not only reveals himself fully to Jesus but he shares his power with Jesus. God is portrayed not only as one who initiates and effects his own purposes but also as one who aligns his loving agency behind, or in support of, the purposes of Jesus. In so doing God puts his very self at the disposal of his Son.

The New Testament also images the identification between God and Jesus through the delight, or joy, that God takes in Jesus. On two important occasions in Jesus' life God declares Jesus to be his “Beloved”. The first occasion is when Jesus leaves his trade as a carpenter to teach publicly about God and God's kingdom. At this time Jesus goes to his cousin John to be baptized. It is recorded that at his baptism, people hear an audible voice that says, “You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased.” The other occurs shortly before Jesus is crucified. Apparently in preparation for that event God affirms Jesus for the second time in a manner that is audible to those around him. Anticipating his crucifixion Jesus goes to pray on a mountainside with Peter, James, and John. During that time they hear a voice that says, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him.” (Matt. 17:5)

The book of Isaiah, written several hundred years before Jesus' life, and from which the author of Matthew's narrative regularly draws, states “Here is my

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33 This account is found in Luke 3:22, Matthew 3:17, and Mark 1:11. Interestingly, this instance and the following one are the only two occasions in which the gospel narratives depict God as making himself present in an audible manner.

34 See also Luke 9:28-36 and Mark 9:2-8 for these stories.
servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my
spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.” (Isaiah 42:1) Matthew, in
quoting this section of Isaiah, presents Jesus as this one in whom God delights.
(Matthew 12:15-21) Moreover, the narrative portrays Jesus as carrying this
awareness of being God’s Beloved throughout his life. He perceives himself as
one who existed in a loving relationship with his Father prior to the existence of
the universe.35

God’s command that Peter, James, and John listen to Jesus is another
indicator of how God gives himself unreservedly to his Son. God desires others
to be attentive to Jesus in a manner that involves receiving what he says and
allowing it to decisively impact or influence the course of one’s life. God is
affected emotionally by how others respond to his Son and desires that others
love him. Here this act of entrusting is linked to the joy, or pleasure, God takes in
Jesus as his Son. By affirming Jesus as his Beloved God intimately identifies
himself with Jesus. The character of this identification as intimate is made
apparent not merely by God’s willingness to attend to and act on Jesus’ behalf
but through the emotional and desiderative character of God’s activities.36 These
activities are what they are because of the joy with which they are done and the
joy toward which they aim. The orientation of God’s heart in these activities, and
not merely his will, give them a character they would otherwise not have.


36 Actually intimacy is a quality of a relationship, that is, of a particular kind of engagement
between persons. It is not something that can be established unilaterally. However, wanting to
enjoy the presence of that other as that particular other can be exercised unilaterally and is
necessary to make intimacy possible.
Joy is the affective element of God's response to Jesus that makes their identification intimate. It is possible for one to identify with another in the manner Helm describes and yet that identification lack something necessary to make it intimate. One can attend to and act on another's behalf and take their identity to heart, that is, one can be emotionally impacted by whether or not they are successful in upholding their identity, and yet such concern not rise above a kind of benevolence. Such care for another is personal in the limited sense that it is a care for that other as that particular other, yet that by itself does not make it intimate. Dostoevsky, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, speaks of this through the reflections of his character Zosima. In writing about his relationship with a man he had known earlier in his life Zosima states, “And we should have become very close friends if he had spoken to me about himself as well. But he hardly said a word about himself, but only kept asking me about myself.”

37 This man intimately identified with Zosima - in the manner Helm describes - yet their relationship lacked intimacy. This is so even though Zosima deeply loved this man. Intimacy involves a desire to know and be known. This desire to be known is not reflected in Helm's account of intimate identification. In his concern for Zosima this man maintains an isolation that is incompatible with intimacy. He refuses to present himself to Zosima in a manner to be known. Thus, his concern for Zosima is personal, in the limited sense mentioned above, rather than intimate. Intimacy requires that each person in the relationship open the frontier of their life to the other and that each accepts the other's invitation and enters their frontier. It is

37 Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, p. 302.
constituted by an encounter between persons. Helm puts forth a more limited notion of what is personal than I have been using throughout this dissertation. I have been using personal to denote a kind of intimate engagement or encounter between persons. I think his account describes how one can care for another person, very deeply in fact, yet that account does not adequately describe what constitutes intimacy. A unilateral concern for another person's identity, even one that affects you emotionally, is not sufficient by itself for intimacy.

Intimacy is a quality of a relationship. It is dependent on a mutual identification between persons that is shaped by the affective element of joy. As Macmurray pointed out above we know from our own experience, even if only in a small way, that a part of the structure of delighting in, or taking joy in, another is the desire to enjoy the presence of that other as the particular other that they are – it is the other we find enjoyable. In this way love is creative of distinction; it wants the other to be other. Aquinas maintains that it is the wish to be with the other, what he calls the “unio affectus,” that makes the doing of good an expression of love, that is, it is what is needed to make love personal. Moreover, as Meilaender points out, this desire to be with the other is a “desire to enjoy the other person in a reciprocal union of affections.” The reciprocal character of this desire is necessary for that broader sense of personal that

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38 Josef Pieper, *Faith, Hope, and Love*, pp. 196-197. Pieper writes, “...it is perfectly possible for there to be ‘charity without love,’ a doing good that lacks something decisive to make it love.” Aquinas’ comments are found in *Summa Theologica* II, II, 27, 2. Helm thinks this account of intimacy makes love egocentric. However, it does not seem incompatible to desire to enjoy the presence of the other as that particular other and to be committed to that other's identity for their sake. Thus, we may be committed to their identity both for their sake and our own.

includes intimacy. It is not merely the desire to enjoy the presence of the other that makes love personal but it is also the desire to be so enjoyed by that other. We wish to be loved much by one whom we love much.\(^\text{40}\) It must matter to me that I matter to you. If it does not matter to me whether or not the person I care for receives my care, that is, whether or not they would be gladdened by it, this kind of concern lacks that which is needed for a relationship to be intimate.\(^\text{41}\) The depth of my wanting to be received by you, of wanting to matter to you, can be an important indicator of how much you mean to me.\(^\text{42}\)

One might object that intimacy has no necessary connection to joy on the grounds that some intimate relationships are extremely painful and unpleasant and involve no joy at all. In response it is important to reiterate that the concept of intimacy as I use it refers to a quality of a relationship and not a class of relationships. Our family relationships are sometimes referred to as “intimate” because of the close association that is shared among those who live together. However, it is not uncommon for family members to be estranged from one another and for those relationships to lack intimacy. The kind of familiarity that family members have of one another does not by itself amount to intimacy or

\(^{40}\) Carmichael, *Friendship: Interpreting Christian Love*, p. 86. In the 12\textsuperscript{th} century Richard of St. Victor observed that love requires two persons and described its mutual character in this way.

\(^{41}\) This is not advocating that we love others in order to be loved. Love is not love if it is merely mercenary. However, if we love someone for their sake, which involves desiring to enjoy their presence, that will be accompanied with the hope that they would enjoy our presence as well.

\(^{42}\) There is room for self-interest in love without love being egocentric. A person is not using another person if they want to enjoy that other for that other’s sake. However, if I want to spend time with someone solely for the way they make me feel, the pleasure I get when I am with them, then one might rightfully claim that I am using them. If I desire to be with them only to get something from them other than the joy of knowing them, then I am not loving them personally.
emotional closeness. In other words, the intimacy that constitutes personal knowing is not equivalent to extensive biographical knowledge or the shared history of family life. Such relationships often fail to reach intimacy or are anti-intimate. On the other hand there is evidence to support the position that the emotional closeness characteristic of intimacy involves joy.\textsuperscript{43}

To take joy in another for their sake is a desiderative and emotional response indicating that that person holds the highest import. It involves desiring to be with him when he is \textit{not} present and the enjoyment of him - itself marked by the ongoing desire to be with him - when he \textit{is} present. In responding to Jesus as his Beloved or Delight the narrative presents God as one who considers Jesus his greatest treasure. The character of God's attending to and acting on Jesus' behalf gains its shape from these emotional and desiderative aspects of joy. In other words, God's fidelity to Jesus wouldn't be what it is without this joy. We must now look at Jesus' response to God to see if this glad fidelity is mutual.

\textit{Jesus' Glad Fidelity to His Father}

The New Testament presents an image of Jesus as one who finds his supreme joy in the God he calls Father. One way the narrative portrays Jesus' intimate identification with his Father is in his unswerving fidelity, or loving responsiveness, to his Father. The character of that fidelity is elaborated by an exploration of the biblical conception of obedience. Another manner in which that identification is portrayed is through Jesus' reflections on what it means for human persons to be his friend. Jesus describes a pattern of engagement with

\textsuperscript{43} See my section on “Aristotle and the Neuroscientists” in Chapter One.
him that constitutes friendship and indicates that it is similar to his relationship with God. Indirectly this account of friendship provides us with insight into the intimacy that the narrative considers him to share with God.

The narrative portrays Jesus' intimate identification with God in terms of Jesus living a life of unswerving fidelity, or passionate responsivity, to his Father. On one occasion while facing hostile religious leaders Jesus replies,

…I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father has instructed me. And the one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him. (John 8:28-29)

He is regularly portrayed, especially in John's gospel, as choosing a life of eager loyalty to the Father. Jesus repeatedly states that he acts on God's initiative, in contrast to his own or to others, and that he does so in order to please God and bring Him glory or honor. We know that a devotion to pleasing others can be a way of engaging others in a manner that is less than personal. In Chapter Three we saw how it can be a kind of slavishness, that is, it can be a failure to act autonomously. However, it is also the case depending on the character of the one doing the pleasing, the one being pleased, and the character of that which is taken to be pleasing that such a devotion can be a vital part of what constitutes

44 In John's narrative Jesus teaches that we act on the initiative of, conform ourselves to, or serve those from whom we seek honor or glory. We shape ourselves to the wills of those whom we seek to please and from whom we want to be found pleasing. See: John 4:34; 5:19-20, 30-44; 6:38; 7:17-18, 28; 8:16, 26-55; 9:4; 10:17-18, 22-38; 11:42, 12:42-43, 49; 14:10, 24; and 17:6-8. This fits with Matthew 6:19-24 where he teaches that our hearts will be found where our treasure lies. Our actions are shaped to secure what we treasure most.

45 See Tim O'Brien's story “On the Rainy River” in The Things They Carried. O'Brien conforms himself to the expectations of his community – going against his own personal convictions - out of fear of being ostracized by that community.
an encounter between persons that is personal. Jesus is portrayed as one who delights in his Father and desires to please him, that is, there is something he wants for his Father. He wants his Father to experience pleasure. His Father finds pleasure in being loved freely, that is, in a manner that is personal. Implicit in Jesus’ efforts to please his Father is his desire to be found pleasing to his Father, that is, there is something he wants from his Father – he wants to be a source of pleasure to his Father. He does find it. He doesn’t falter in his confidence that God finds him pleasing.

The truism that we desire to be loved much by one whom we love much seems to hold for the narrative portrayal of Jesus’ relationship with God. Jesus, above, makes the connection between God’s presence with him and his pleasing God – “He has not left me alone for I always do what is pleasing to Him.” He links his dwelling with God in God’s love to being receptive, or attentive, to God in a certain way. He identifies listening to and doing God’s commands as critical features of that complex way of being with God that constitutes the activity of personally knowing God. Jesus, in Helm’s terms, considers his Father as that which holds the greatest import. Jesus has judged, and repeatedly judges, that there is no other person or thing to which he should give his full devotion. That he uniquely judges his Father to be worthy of his attention and action is made evident in the character of his identification with God. He gives God his full

46 Though we can seek to please, and be found pleasing, in a variety of harmful ways there are also situations in human relationships where it is fitting that we seek to please and find satisfaction in having been successful at pleasing. These instances may provide a small window into what Jesus is doing here. See C.S. Lewis’ The Weight of Glory, pp. 12-15.
attention and makes it his primary goal to act on his behalf. Pleasing God by fulfilling God’s purposes is that which provides him sustenance. He says, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work.” (John 4:34)

The biblical conception of obedience is not a legal one, that is, it is not portrayed merely as the following of a command. This is strikingly presented in the book of Job. There we find Job's friends seeking to follow God's commands merely to secure goods from God yet not caring to be in a relationship with God himself. At points they recommend to Job, who they perceive as unfaithful to God, to do what God says so God will get off his back. Their motivation to do what God says appears to be to appease God. The narrative does not consider their actions to constitute a fitting response to God. Appeasing God is not the same as obeying God. Actions can outwardly conform to God's commands yet lack something that makes them obedient. This kind of posture toward God constitutes a failure to enter into a relationship that is personal. Their moralistic approach is mechanical. Their actions seem to be guided by an axiom that can be stated as either “Do x, and get y” or, “Do x, so y won't happen.” The biblical conception of obedience cannot be separated from love. For the following of a command to constitute obedience that action has to be rooted in love. It must be a loving response to be obedience. Without the emotional and desiderative qualities of love the action of following a command is qualitatively different, that is, the act itself is constituted by a different content, than one in which love is

present. The moralistic approach requires no volitional and emotional encounter between persons. God is not responded to as an end, a person, to be lovingly engaged but primarily as a means – a thing like a tool - for securing other goods.

Job's friends follow the commands of God like a slave follows the commands of its master. The master is not looking for trust and the slave, appropriately, does not give it. The slave recognizes that the master is not worthy of his allegiance yet ultimately surrenders his autonomy because his actions are not determined in accordance with his own insight but with that of his master's. The master evokes consent by coercion, not love. Their relationship does not involve an engagement between the full personalities of each individual in that relationship. The slave is forced to do that which he would otherwise not do. In his compliance the slave holds back a portion of himself from the one to whom he conforms. He does not entrust himself, or make himself available, to the other. Moreover, the one demanding compliance is not interested in receiving the self of the one who complies. The other is an object or thing that is manipulated or managed to serve one's own ends. Given the character of his demand, he too is withholding his very self; he is not available to be influenced by the genuine self of the other. In the case of Job's friends they recommend conformity to God

48 See Peter Goldie, *The Emotions*, pp. 59f. See also Caroline J. Simon's *The Disciplined Heart* (pp. 29-31) for cases of where the moral character of an action is shaped by whether that act is accompanied by the appropriate emotion(s).

49 Alan Richardson writes that the Christian narrative portrays God as one that “yearns for the trust and obedience of his creatures, but only if they are given to him: coerced loyalty and obedience (as every parent or teacher knows) are not loyalty and obedience at all. Christian affirmations of respect for human personality are grounded upon belief in God’s regard for human freedom as an essential aspect of his love.” See his *Religion in Contemporary Debate*, p. 113.
because He can make life miserable for those who do not, or blessed for those who do, but not because they see that God desires and deserves their trust. We recognize this kind of engagement to be less than personal because using others primarily to satisfy our own ends constitutes a failure to treat them as a person.

Obedience in the biblical sense is a form of engagement that is personal. It is not merely a trait, characteristic, or activity of an individual – it is a response of trust that is fitting given the character of the one to whom it is given. Such a response is portrayed as a shared responsibility. Good human relationships illustrate this as well. H.H. Farmer remarks, “A child’s trust in his parents is their greatest gift to him, for it is evoked and sustained in him only by their continually presenting themselves, revealing themselves, as trustworthy.”\(^50\) Obedience in the biblical sense is a response that fits not only due to the character of the one obeying but also due to the character of the one who is being trusted. Personal insight is necessary for autonomy. Here that insight is into the character of the one being obeyed. Following another’s command can be an expression of autonomy if it is based on the follower’s own insight that that person is worthy of such trust. Farmer writes of a child’s obedience or trust as being a gift that is given from the parents to the child – their character provides the opportunity for the child to exercise its autonomy. Being of the right character is the parent’s job. It is that which makes the child’s conformity fitting.

Jesus’ obedience, in contrast to that of Job’s friends, constitutes a profound receptiveness to God that is personal. Given the character of his Father

\(^{50}\) Farmer, *The World and God*, p. 88.
he gladly identifies with God and God's concerns. This receptivity involves not only being attentive to a Father who has purposes that he discloses, or makes evident, to Jesus; it also involves making himself utterly available to cooperate with God for God's work. He sees this work as his own; he calls it his food. His identification reveals that he finds God as worthy of his ultimate commitment – it is not the dissolution of Jesus' identity or autonomy but the expression of it. God is the reality that is worthy of his devotion. He doesn't give his allegiance grudgingly or out of fear but freely. When speaking to his disciples of his impending death Jesus says, “You heard that I said to you, 'I go away, and I will come to you.' If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I go to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.” (John 14:28) Engaging with God in a personal manner, that is, being intimately identified with God, brings Jesus great joy. This connection between joy and being available to God is made even in relationship to Jesus' death. He is described as one, “…who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame.” (Hebrews 12:2) He wants his followers to understand that connection and share in that with him. He states that his availability to God should be an indicator to them of his love for God: “…but I do as the Father commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father.” (John 15:31) As the Father gives himself fully to Jesus that “all may honor the Son” so does Jesus give himself fully to his Father so that the world will know who Jesus honors. (John 5:19-27) Jesus' glad entrustment of his self to God is one of the central themes of the narrative.

Jesus' obedience is not incongruent with the uprightness, or rectitude,
necessary for engaging with his Father in a manner that is personal. It is a characteristic of a particular kind of relationship in which such a response is fitting given the character of the one obeyed. His obedience as a form of trust is a way of presencing his self, that is, of being intentionally present, to his Father. The presence of the individual is called forth or evoked because that presence is welcomed and sought for by the one who is obeyed. God, like the example of the parent, desires the glad trust of Jesus. The narrative portrays God as one whose loving character establishes him as an authority that evokes Jesus' glad consent. The mutual yielding and reception between Father and Son is a sign of their mutual trust and respect. Jesus gladly gives himself fully to his Father in such a way that he stands upright and is not diminished in his dependency. He sees it as his supreme good to make himself unreservedly available to his Father and he freely does so.

The New Testament account of the relationship between Jesus and God, presented here in terms of intimate identification, enables us to address a concern that was first identified in Chapter One through Ernest Becker. He states that the “only real problem of life” is our need to “win a degree of self-realization without surrender to complete spiritlessness or slavery.” Framing the problem in its cosmic dimension he asks, “How does one lean on God and give over

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51 Regarding this Alan Richardson writes, “When we speak of God as personal... we mean that our analogies of God’s actions upon our hearts must be drawn from the sphere of our deepest and most satisfying human personal relationships, in which a genuine accord of wills implies unity without coercion and surrender without subservience.” See his Religion in Contemporary Debate, p. 118; italics mine.

52 Becker, The Denial of Death, p. 82.
everything to Him and still stand on his own feet as a passionate human being?" He thinks this is no mere “rhetorical question” but a “real one” that goes right to the heart of the problem of “how to be a man.” In Chapter Three I sought to identify the conditions in which fidelity is compatible with moral autonomy. The New Testament addresses this issue in its image of the relationship between the Father and the Son. Jesus belongs to the Father in a way that does not diminish but affirms his identity as a person. For one who is portrayed as utterly dependent on his Father, he has been widely considered to be one of the most vibrant and fully alive individuals in the history of the West. The mutual fidelity that constitutes their love does not appear to obscure either of their identities. The New Testament provides a vision of “how to be a man” in its image of the person of Jesus and the character of his relationship with his Father. Of course, this claim that their mutual fidelity does not diminish the autonomy necessary for Jesus’ moral personhood or the full realization of his identity is not the kind of claim that can be demonstrated. Befitting of an exemplar his life gives witness to something that cannot be logically demonstrated but only shown. Ultimately, to evaluate it one must look at his life in light of one’s experiences and aspirations and judge for one’s self whether or not his fidelity is diminishing.

Another way the narrative portrays Jesus’ intimate personal concern for

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53 Ibid., p. 259.

54 Regarding the importance of showing for communicating content about the character of God and God’s love H.R. Mackintosh writes, “But not in mere words was the great revelation given. The life of Jesus, as it moved onward, was a ceaseless proclamation of the novel thought of God. For the first time it was shown how God loves... he wrote the fact in actions which could never be forgotten... By this death for sinners Jesus unveiled a Fatherhood of such dimensions....” See The Person of Jesus Christ, pp. 44-45; italics mine.
his Father, albeit indirectly, is through Jesus’ account of friendship. Jesus describes a pattern of engagement with him that constitutes friendship and indicates that it is similar to his relationship with God. Thus, it can serve as a window into that relationship. In John’s gospel Jesus tells his followers, “You are my friends if you do what I command you.”\textsuperscript{55} (15:14) He links personal knowledge of himself to such fidelity. This is quite striking. Partly, as we have seen, because we tend to think that it is slavish to follow commands. But also because of what it says about Jesus’ self-conception and his conception of others. Jesus is aware that people must exercise caution and wisdom regarding whom they obey, or align themselves with, yet presents himself as qualified for such a response from others. A significant pillar of his Judaic heritage, which he does not repudiate but affirms, maintains that giving one’s ultimate allegiance to a person, thing, or purpose other than God is idolatry.\textsuperscript{56} We can shape our lives to reach a variety of ends. These ends guide, or determine, the ways we must act in order to reach them. Jesus is emphatic about the dangers of allowing ends like money, the good opinion of others, a secure future, and many other things – things that are often actual goods when appropriately appreciated - to become our ultimate

\textsuperscript{55} Leslie Weatherhead writes that Jesus’ invitation to friendship is a call to “sacrifice, peril, adventure, and risk. Christianity is not a friendly society. Its symbol is… A cross! A cross is a bloody thing. But Jesus uses the word. And he uses it of all who would follow Him… He invites us to a friendship, but its demands are inexorable.” See The Transforming Friendship, Chapter Five. His comments are made in response to Jesus’ words that “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.” See Matthew 16:24-25 and Mark 8:34-35. The demands of this friendship include being made free to love as God loves and that love includes love for our enemies.

\textsuperscript{56} See either Luke Timothy Johnson’s Faith’s Freedom or E. La. B. Cherbonnier’s Hardness of Heart for a good introduction to idolatry.
guides. He perceives such allegiances as improper forms of worship. They involve treasuring, or devoting ourselves to, ends that are not intrinsically worthy of such devotion. Such things are “idols.” Giving primacy to these things is inherently self-diminishing in that it inhibits our ability to be in relationships that are personal with God and others. This is tied to Becker’s Concern about dependency and autonomy. The narrative makes clear that it is not a matter of whether we will choose to worship or treasure something but a matter of what we will choose to worship or treasure. At stake is whether the character of what we depend on, or give primacy to, will enable us to become more or less of our real selves, that is, whether it helps us to become more or less capable of personal relationships.

In one instance Jesus directly links the effort to secure the good opinion of others with an inability to know him. To one such group of people he asks, “How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God?” Ultimately, God alone is the

57 E. La. B. Cherbonnier writes, “For sin is simply another word for allegiance to a false god. It is interchangeable with the word “idolatry.” …Sin is rather any orientation of the heart that destroys agape.” See Hardness of Heart, pp. 42 and 62.

58 Who or what we treasure or stake ourselves on has significant effects on the kind of person we become. John Oman writes, in Grace and Personality, that “The beginning is right reverence, not right resolve, because, above every other test of us, what we are able to honour is, in our deepest hearts, what we are, and in our ultimate attainment, what we shall be. The supreme hindrance to the coming of God’s Kingdom is idolatry, not evil doing.” Part One, p. 28.

59 Other narratives have made similar observations. Consider Dostoevsky’s remark that, “It is impossible to be a man and not bow down to something... If he rejects God, he bows down to an idol - fashioned of wood or of gold or of thought.” See The Adolescent (A Raw Youth), Part Three, Chapter Two, Section III. It is important to note that in the biblical narrative it is also possible to worship God in improper ways – this too is idolatry.

60 John 5:44. Glory means something like good report, fame, appreciation, or to be found
one to whom we are to be responsive and entrust ourselves. Given his sensitivity to the danger of idolatry, Jesus' expectation that those who want to be his friends will give their ultimate allegiance to him underscores his perception of his unique relationship with God. Without this self-conception he would knowingly be presenting himself as another idol for others to wrongly worship. Jesus assumes he embodies those qualities that qualify him for the loving devotion of others. He believes that it is through obedience to him that one can become his friend. He assumes our obedience should be constrained by, or be an expression of, what constitutes our good or end. For Jesus that end is to be found in friendship with himself and his Father.

Jesus' conception of friendship both fits and illuminates the pattern of his relationship with God. He considers these patterns of interpersonal engagement to be similar. He makes this comparison explicit when he says,

As the Father has loved me so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.61

Jesus describes here the living character of personal knowledge. One dwells in love, he in God’s, his disciples in his own, through a particular kind of responsiveness or engagement. The kind of knowledge of his love that he deems valuable is not the intellectual apprehension of a fact but is that which is found in ongoing friendship with himself. His friends are to engage Jesus in the way Jesus engages his Father. Moreover, Jesus explicitly connects this identification with

61 John 15:11.

pleasing. See C.S. Lewis' *The Weight of Glory*, pp.11-14.
him to joy. He says, “I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in
you, and that your joy may be complete.” Given the comparison Jesus is
making we can reflect back upon his fidelity to the Father and recognize its
friendship-like quality and how it is animated by joy.

This account of friendship underscores the comments made earlier about
the distinctive character of obedience in the biblical narrative. Consider the
following remarks from Jesus:

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have
loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life
for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.
I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not
know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends,
because I have made known to you everything that I have heard
from my Father. (John 15:12-15)

Jesus does not treat them like a master treats a slave but like his Father treats
him. He emphasizes the character of his relationship to them as the basis for the
influence he seeks to wield in their lives. As the parents in Farmer’s example
seek to evoke trust from their child by being trustworthy, Jesus seeks to evoke a
response of love, both toward others and himself, by the love he has for them.
According to the narrative we are made for loving relationships both with God
and others. His commands are portrayed as ones that are responsive to our
identity as persons and will lead to its fulfillment. The response he seeks is not
merely some form of behavioral conformity to his commands as commands can

62 John 15:11. See also John 16:16-24 and 17:13 for the central place that joy has in Jesus’
conception of knowing him.

63 One indicator of this is found in Hebrews 12:2 where Jesus is described as one, “who for the
sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame.”
be followed without love. A slave or servant can do that. He wants more than that. He wants friendship. He wants them to gladly give themselves fully to him as he gladly gives himself fully to them.

As the Father makes everything known to the Son, the Son makes known to his friends everything he considers central to his existence. Self-disclosure has long been recognized to be one of the central features of friendship. In his essay “On Friendship” written in 44 B.C. Cicero speaks of friendship as requiring that “you behold and show an open heart.”\(^{64}\) The heart is the “invisible frontier” of which Farmer speaks and which cannot be entered except that that person “invites us to do so.”\(^{65}\) Jesus extends friendship to his disciples in presenting an open heart to them.\(^{66}\) John Macmurray puts it this way, “To be a friend is to be yourself for another person” and characterizes that as “committing yourself completely and revealing yourself completely without reserve… it means stark reality between persons without pretence or sentimentality.”\(^{67}\) It’s more than merely being friendly; we can be friendly yet retain our isolation. When I engage in self-disclosure I choose to move from a posture where I am not accessible to

\(^{64}\) Cicero, *De Amicitia*, xxvi. 97-98. Luke Timothy Johnson, in “Making Connections: The Material Expression of Friendship in the New Testament”, argues that the *topos* used in the New Testament indicate that the ancient ideal of friendship is one of its prominent themes though it is often never explicitly mentioned there. *Topos* is a general term used to refer to “a loose collection of associated thoughts clustered around a specific theme or ‘topic’ that express, often in proverbs and maxims…” common cultural assumptions or “shared wisdom.” He maintains that familiarity with the *topos* on friendship in Greco-Roman moral discourse “is critical to recognize the theme of friendship in the New Testament” and helps us to “make connections between ideas and practices that might otherwise seem obscure.” See *Interpretation*, April 2004; pp. 159 and 170.


\(^{66}\) He also demonstrates friendship toward them in that he willingly lays down his life for them.

\(^{67}\) Macmurray as quoted in Costello’s *John Macmurray: A Biography*, p. 163.
another person to one where I unveil myself and welcome that other into the recesses of my life. This invitation involves entrusting one's self to another - it invites the other to receive the self that you are making present to them. Jesus makes himself known to his disciples in this way.

Intimacy is a characteristic of a relationship and requires not only that your heart is open to the other but also that you behold the other's heart in similar fashion. Intimacy requires mutuality; it is a shared activity. The author and farmer Wendell Berry describes the fidelity between a farmer and his farm in terms of mutual responsiveness. He observes that they “are responsive partners in an intimate and mutual relationship.” Berry does not think that a farm exerts a personal agency, however it does have a character, or identity, that asserts itself that a farmer must be actively attentive to, or responsive to, in order to promote its well-being. He describes this relationship between the farmer and the land as a “sort of dance” in which “the partners are always at opposite sexual poles, and the lead keeps changing.” In describing fidelity as a dance Berry is searching for a metaphor that illuminates the dynamic, or mutual, character of fidelity. It is an activity that involves initiating and responding – it is not mere passivity.

When it comes to the activity of loving and knowing another person Berry's

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68 David F. Ford, in *The Shape of Living*, writes this: “If intimacy generates secrets... This need not come from any desire to be exclusive or from deliberate concealment. It is more intrinsic than that. It is simply that the ongoing occurrence of intimacy would have to be participated in to be understood... We thirst for deeper penetration into the depths of others and to have someone with whom we can share our own secrets and who can understand us more deeply.” See p. 107.

69 Berry, *The Unsettling of America*, p. 87; italics mine.

70 Ibid., p. 8.
image of a dance is even more fitting. The New Testament image of the relationship between Jesus and the Father is one of intimate and responsive partners in a mutual relationship. Each is deeply concerned about the concerns of the other. Moreover, in the effort of each to bring honor to the other they appear to try to outdo one another. As a friend who loves greatly will die for a friend if necessary, they each take their own life and put it at the disposal of the other. Friends don’t die for one another out of duty, but out of love and loyalty, that is, from a desire to honor. The emotional and desiderative character of the act makes all the difference to the moral quality of that act. Their fidelity to one another is portrayed not as a matter of fulfilling a duty, or obligation, but of love. Each is faithful to the other in order to help bring about a purpose central to the identity of the other, that is, in order to draw others into the loving relationship that they share as Father and Son.

_Mutual Identification Evident in Shared Goal of Reconciliation_

The New Testament narrative is a “love story” and the character of the love it portrays is depicted primarily through the loving relationship between God and Jesus and through the love they have for others. The normative character of the love with which Jesus’ followers are to love others is elucidated by these two categories of images. To see the fullness of the love that the Father and the Son have for one another also requires looking at this love as it is directed toward human persons. In the New Testament the character of the mutual fidelity between God and Jesus is made visible by its portrayal of their shared goal.

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71 In Paul’s letter to the Roman church he encourages the church to love in this fashion. He writes, “love one another with mutual affection, outdo one another in showing honor.” See 12:10.
Jesus and his Father work together to draw others into the loving relationship that they share and to build a celebratory community of mutual affection and joy.\textsuperscript{72} It is a goal they each possess and support one another to attain. The narrative arc of this story is simple and well known. For my purposes here I will present it in broad outline.

The character of the efforts the Father and Son undertake to draw others into the personal fellowship they share helps reveal the character of agape. And the character of those efforts can be more fully understood by knowing the character of those to whom this love is directed. Rembrandt in his painting of Jesus' crucifixion attempts to capture the biblical picture of the individual human person as one who is at odds with God. He seeks to accomplish this by painting himself into the picture as one who helps hoist up the cross upon which Jesus is nailed. It is a graphic acknowledgment that he finds within himself a desire to keep God from intruding into his life. It is his way of affirming his experience of the narrative's account of the depths to which humans will descend to remain in control of their own lives. The narrative calls this attitude “sin.” It constitutes a failure to act in terms of what is real, that is, it is a commitment to other ends than engaging a personal God in a manner that is personal.\textsuperscript{73} Milton sought to portray

\textsuperscript{72} Three parables in Luke 15 depict God's longing for a joyful reunion with those whom he loves who are presently alienated from him. These are: The Lost Coin, The Lost Sheep, and The Lost (or Prodigal) Son. Each of these stories images the joy God experiences when one who is alienated from him returns to a loving relationship with him.

\textsuperscript{73} Halliday writes, “the permanent element in religion is a certain attitude of soul, a finding of God and not self as the centre of life.” See \textit{Reconciliation and Reality}, p. 36.
it in his fiction with the words - “Better to reign in Hell than to serve in Heaven.”

And George MacDonald with the statement that “Hell’s motto is - 'I am my own.'”

The narrative portrays our sinfulness in terms of idolatry. We tend to love or reverence things that are not worthy of our ultimate allegiance instead of the God who is. Even though the things that we devote ourselves to may seem harmless the character of our devotion is indicative of a disorientation of the heart that is gravely serious. That seriousness is constituted by a willingness to refrain from engaging with God in a personal manner in order to pursue lesser ends. This disorientation also interferes with our capacity to engage with others in a personal manner – idolatry is a kind of dependency that diminishes rather than enhances this capacity. People have difficulty in entering into and sustaining loving relationships with others. Moreover, even if they yield to others their rights they tend to do so not as a matter of love but merely as a matter of duty. Our deepest and most prevalent moral failures are failures of personal fellowship. As Halliday points out this is evidenced in that -

The deepest sorrows of life are personal, and are relative to the attitude of persons to persons. They come from the sense of personal injury or through personal loneliness; thus their source is lack of fellowship.

However, even in the face of human failure it is important to note that the

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74 H.R. Mackintosh writes that the distinctive quality of this attitude “lies not chiefly in its antagonism to our higher life, or to the welfare of society, but in its antagonism to the will of the living God. That will was fully disclosed through the compassionate love of Jesus.” See The Christian Experience of Forgiveness, p. 54.

75 Halliday, Reconciliation and Reality, p. 160.

76 Ibid., p. 10.
narrative does not encourage us to “tell disparaging lies about ourselves to the effect that we are nothing but sin.” Its portrait of the human condition is complex and sober enough without claiming that. However, the story makes it clear that though we are created for loving, personal fellowship with God we are regularly in flight from the demands of personal engagement with God.

The character of agape is made evident by the work the Father and Son undertake to draw those who are alienated from them back into the loving relationship that constitutes their identity as Father and Son. They do not let the indifference or hostility that human persons show them and one another to inhibit their efforts to draw those persons back into loving relationship with them and with other human persons. This is quite unlike how we respond to those who are indifferent toward us, slight us, or cause us some measure of harm. Abraham Heschel points out that though we are alienated from God the narrative does not portray that alienation as the ultimate fact by which to measure the human predicament. He writes, “The predicament of man is a predicament of God Who has a stake in the human situation... The life of sin is more than a failure of man; it is a frustration to God.” God desires a living and emotional engagement, or encounter, with all persons and aims to promote loving relationships between persons. Human sinfulness frustrates God's intentions. However, God's intimate

77 Mackintosh, *The Christian Experience of Forgiveness*, p. 66. He writes, “To tell men that they are evil only may actually hide from them how evil they are.” Cherbonnier expresses a similar concern in *Hardness of Heart*; see pp. 117-119.

78 See Paul's letter to the Romans; especially 5:6-11. Paul implicitly contrasts our response to enmity to God's to highlight the character of God's love.

concern for human beings is the fact that stands over and above the fact of their alienation from God. In a sense it provides the occasion to witness the character of God. The essence of God's moral character, Heschel writes, is God's “willingness to be intimately involved in the history of man.” And the depth of this is imaged by that which God is willing to undergo to reestablish personal fellowship with himself. The central images the narrative employs to picture God's efforts are those of incarnation and crucifixion. Jesus, as God's Son, willingly becomes man and willingly accepts death at the hands of humans in an effort to draw them into the loving relationship that he shares with his Father.

Jesus, according to the narrative, eternally co-exists with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit in a loving relationship. John's gospel states that the universe was brought into being through Jesus. It is from within this relationship that the Father gives the Son to the world. Jesus has been given the mission from his Father to draw people into a loving relationship with God. As we saw earlier this aim is a mutual one. It is not merely the Father's aim but it is also Jesus'. They each align themselves in support of the other's efforts to accomplish this purpose that holds such great import to them both. Incarnation is the word used for Jesus' entering the created order as a human person. God's profound care for human persons, his commitment to helping others enter into personal relationship with him, is imaged in God's willingness to give that which he loves dearly – his Son – to achieve that end. Concerning the importance of this

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80 Ibid., p. 225.
81 John 1: 1-3.
narrative image for the portrayal of God’s love H.R. Mackintosh writes, “it is not that God cannot be known as Love apart from his Incarnation in Christ. It is rather that, apart from his Incarnation his love is not exhibited so amazingly.” In this act of sending the Father does not attempt to shield himself from the possibility that humans will respond to Jesus in a manner that impinges on the Father in painful ways. He desires others to know and honor his Son, not reject him. However, in order to encounter others personally the Father submits himself to the heart and will of those he seeks to encounter. In Farmer’s terms the Father extends an invitation to human persons to enter the frontier of his heart. The possibility of intimacy requires vulnerability; it requires the willingness to be impacted by another's life. God demonstrates that willingness in the giving of his Son.

Jesus, in his act of willingly becoming a man, also images God's personal concern for human persons. Nowhere is this decision presented as a difficult one to make though Paul does discuss its magnitude. It is presented both as something that he wants to do and as something he wants to do for his Father. In entering the world he too invites others to engage him in a manner that is personal. And as with the Father this requires a willingness to submit himself to

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82 H.R. Mackintosh, *The Person of Jesus Christ*, p. 64-65. Mackintosh affirms the central point of my Chapter Four. The character of God's love requires narrative imagery – a story or exemplar – to adequately depict its depth. He argues that the character of God as Father and Jesus as Son, including the character of their love for one another and for human persons, would be different in “tone” and “conception” without the images of the cross and incarnation.

83 See Philippians 2: 5-11. Concerning Jesus he writes that, “...though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.”
their responses. Though to us these actions of the Father and Son appear profoundly humble, likely because we find it difficult to imagine someone in a position of great power willingly giving it up, George MacDonald reminds us that it is just the sort of thing we would expect a great-hearted Father would do. It is the expression of who God is in himself as he faces the real needs of human persons, it is not a sacrifice or a burden for the Father and Son to love in this manner. Halliday writes,

The sacrifice to one whose love was so utter, whose courage so great, and whose insight into man's need so complete would not have been the bearing of the Cross which secured God and man and all together, but in refusing and being derelict with a derelict and ignoble world.\(^\text{84}\)

The character of God's love as it faces the character of our condition – our need to be in loving relationship with God and our antagonism or indifference toward that – lead God to the incarnation and the cross. I do \textit{not} deny, in what was just written, either that Jesus suffered in his death on the cross or that he was conflicted over the cost of faithfulness to his Father. It is clear from the Gethsemane story prior to his crucifixion that he agonized over his impending death.\(^\text{85}\) However, in facing the choice whether to escape suffering through infidelity or to remain faithful to the point of death he affirms faithfulness. Halliday, as I read him, is suggesting that when we talk about the cost of faithfulness we should not forget to consider what the cost of faithlessness would look like.

\(^{84}\) Halliday, \textit{Reconciliation and Reality}, pp. 204-205 and 185-186.

Refusing the cross, given Jesus' character, would have cost Jesus more – it would constitute a failure to express his love for his Father and for those they love.

The crucifixion of Jesus is one of the central images of the New Testament narrative. The first point I want to make is that Jesus' death on a cross is an example of the mutual identification between Jesus and God. It is not merely God's desire that Jesus submit to the decision of humans to put him to death, but one that Jesus also willingly embraces for himself. We saw earlier that the Father affirms the Son's authority to choose whether or not to lay down his life and that it is something that Jesus freely does for his Father. The second point is that the death of Jesus results from God's efforts to engage human persons in a personal manner and is instrumental in reconciling humans to God. God seeks to develop a relationship of mutual identification, one characterized by a reciprocal concern that is intimate or personal, between himself and each human person. Humans are to participate in a relationship with God like the one imaged between the Father and Jesus. We need to look further at how God's efforts to intimately identify with humans leads to Jesus' death.

To be in a mutual relationship with God that is personal requires that a

86 Apart from the New Testament other resources on Jesus' crucifixion that I have found helpful include: John Oman's *Grace and Personality*, H.H. Farmer's *The Healing Cross* and *The World and God*, W.F. Halliday's *Reconciliation and Reality*, and H.R. Mackintosh's *The Christian Experience of Forgiveness* and *The Person of Jesus Christ*.

87 See John 10:11-18.

88 In Christian theology there are many different theories about how Jesus' death helps to accomplish God's work of reconciling sinful persons to himself. These are often referred to as theories of atonement. It is outside the space of this project to explore these different theories.
human person know God's identity and take it to heart. The narrative portrays God as love. For one to know God and the full extent of God's love requires knowing the full extent of one's own misshapen identity. The cross is portrayed as the universal human response to God's call in Jesus for our unreserved glad fidelity to God. Jesus, as fully loving, presents himself as “the final moral obligation” and in so doing draws the sinfulness of humans, their commitment to an unconditional self-determination, into conflict with his own character. As fully loving he aims to foster personal relationships between God and others as exists between the Father and himself. Human persons in their desire to maintain their independence, to avoid the demands of personal engagement, put Jesus to the death. The cross is presented as a judgment on the unloving character of human persons. Yet it provides an opportunity for humans to know the loving character of God as it exposes the kind of person humans are but should not be. Human character is revealed by the character of the one who they put to death and the manner in which he loves human persons and seeks fellowship with them even in the face of their hostility. Humans are to be like him and to love like him.

God seeks to awaken humans to the depth of their need for God by exposing the ugly destructiveness of their desire to live independently of God. God, in his Son Jesus, submits himself to humans in this way in order that they may know God as gracious, loving Father. He seeks to unveil humans to themselves and allure them to him through the loving character of Jesus. Sin is

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89 H.R. Mackintosh, *The Person of Jesus Christ*, pp. 12-13. See also Halliday's *Reconciliation and Reality*, p. 207. The moral vision of the New Testament cannot be separated from the person of Jesus. He not only provides the vision of what humans should do and be but is also presented as the only person who can rightfully demand their loving allegiance.
revealed not as the breaking of an abstract moral law but in an indifference to
personal fellowship with God or in a refusal or rejection of it. Halliday writes that
humans are to be like the son in the Parable of the Prodigal Son who when he
“came to himself, he awoke to the sense of his unworthiness, and the agony that
was in the heart of the father became his own.” God’s communication through
the cross has begun to do its work when it awakens human persons to see and
feel how their quest for independence has injured God as well as many others.
And when in this awakening they accept responsibility for their failures and turn
to God to ask for forgiveness and help. Wendell Berry ably captures the spirit of
the New Testament narrative concerning the cross when he writes,

> It is a light that is merciless until they can accept its mercy; by it they are at once condemned and redeemed. It is Hell until it is Heaven. Seeing themselves in that light, if they are willing, they see how far they have failed the only justice of loving one another; it punishes them by their own judgment. And yet, in suffering that light’s awful clarity, in seeing themselves within it, they see its forgiveness and its beauty and are consoled. In it they are loved completely, even as they have been, and so are changed into what they could not have been but what, if they could have imagined it, they would have wished to be.

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90 See Norman Robinson, *Christian Justice*, pp. 55-59; and 69-72; Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets*, pp. 215-220; George MacDonald, “Justice,” in *Unspoken Sermons*; and H.H. Farmer, *The World and God*, pp. 188-189. From the biblical perspective one need not believe in the existence of God in order to be considered antagonistic toward God. As we saw in Chapter Three Thomas Nagel candidly describes what he calls his “cosmic authority problem” and intimates that God’s existence would impinge on his life in ways he does not welcome. Such an authority problem, or something quite like it, is something the biblical narrative considers to be a feature of the human condition.


92 Wendell Berry, *Three Short Novels: Nathan Coulter, Remembering, A World Lost*, p. 326. It is important to note that Berry does not specify what constitutes this “light”. H.R. Mackintosh writes that when we engage with the New Testament we may find the person of Jesus compelling because in him we “behold a goodness that shames us” and simultaneously invites us out of that shame. See *The Christian Experience of Forgiveness*, pp. 10, 47.
Though much more could be written about the New Testament image of love it is time to take what has been put down and show how it helps explain some significant features of the human condition. As we do this it is important to remember that what the narrative provides goes beyond explanatory power. We have already seen how it addresses Becker's Concern of what it is to be vibrant, fully-actualized human person. The narrative presents Jesus in his loving relationship with the Father as the model of human life - the human self is portrayed as one in which the capacities essential for personhood such as autonomy are not diminished through identification with God but instead are most fully realized. The narrative also may give a new depth or gravity to our experiences of harming others as well of our experiences of being harmed that may have only been hinted at in our past experience. If it does this it does so not merely by providing us with an explanation of facts already clearly understood but by providing us with a vision of life that illuminates our experiences and aspirations in ways we may not have considered before.\footnote{Though uniquely God's Son the narrative portrays Jesus as expecting that humans enter into relationship with him in the manner in which he engages the Father. The concern that the relationship between two divine persons of the Trinity is problematic as a model for human-divine relationships is not encountered in the biblical narrative. The divine is portrayed as nothing other than perfect spiritual personality and to be human is also to be a spiritual personality. God is not to be respected because of his infinite knowledge or power but because he is a perfect person worthy of our trust and reverence. These spiritual capacities are what make persons, both human and divine, capable of loving, personal relationships. As the person of Jesus lives his life in friendship with God, so he invites us into friendship with himself. Regarding this Bernard Cooke writes, "in a genuine friendship each person strives to give himself to the other, a true friend is an alter ego. So Christ who is bound to us in love shares with us his own divine identity... For Christ the most profound root of his personal identity is his relationship to the Father. Christ is the Son, who gives us a share in his own sonship by giving us his Father as our own Father." From Commonweal (1967), “The Presence of Jesus”, p. 266. See also W.F. Halliday's “Personality and God”, in Reconciliation and Reality, pp. 58-72 and Leslie Weatherhead's sixth chapter “The Qualifications of the Friend” in The Transforming Friendship.}
Before moving on to the next section it is important to note that the New Testament narrative itself does not purport to satisfy our deepest needs as human beings. It maintains that our deepest need is to be in a relationship of the kind that is imaged between Jesus and God. A narrative can give us a fuller picture of what that relationship should look like than can a discursive account of normative principles but engaging a narrative is not the same as engaging God. However important disciplined engagement with this narrative might be the narrative itself acknowledges that such an engagement can be a dangerous substitute for engaging God personally and participating in a loving relationship with God.94

*The Human Condition and the New Testament Image of Agape*

The account of intimate identification that is rooted in the New Testament portrayal of agape constitutes a kind of personal knowing that is capable of addressing the existential problem of meaning or significance that Leo Tolstoy identified in Chapter Two. On this account the human hunger for meaning, or significance, is one that finds its satisfaction not in theoretical or explanatory knowledge but in intimate, personal engagement with God and, through God, with others. Significance is found in being significant *for* Another, that is, in being loved by One who is worthy of our fullest love and in receiving that love through a loving response. Tolstoy’s religious testimony will be engaged to help support this view of the personal nature of meaning. His life gives witness to a hunger for

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94 One place where this is made strikingly clear is in John 5:39-40 where Jesus is reported as saying, “You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. Yet you refuse to come to me to have life.”
something that can meet the existential demands he finds within himself. He provides an account of why the explanatory knowledge of the sciences fails to meet these. In addition, I argue that Tolstoy embraces Christianity, at least in part, because to him it makes the best sense of the powerful existential demands he experiences. In doing so he employs a modest form of explanationism. The manner in which he gives witness to his deepest aspirations and to that which he has found to satisfy them models the character of discourse, or conversation, that best fits these issues of ultimate concern. He does not claim that he can demonstrate to others that his view is more reasonable than others but in sharing his experiences he invites others to investigate their own.

The approach here is modest in that it emphasizes the important role of personal judgment in the epistemological enterprise when it comes to issues of ultimate concern. When it comes to differences between persons concerning issues of ultimate concern, such as ascertaining the character of the good life or of life’s meaning, one cannot demonstrate to another which of two competing accounts is better than the other merely by appealing to explanatory power. This is so for several reasons. First, people may differ on the phenomena that they deem worthy of explanation. Second, if they agree on the phenomena worthy of explanation they may disagree about the veridicality of those phenomena. Third, even if they agree on the importance of the phenomena and their veridicality they may disagree about which explanation of that phenomena is best. We saw the difficulty of adjudicating between broad explanatory frameworks in Chapter Two

95 See my Chapter Two for an account of modest explanationism.
as we explored E.O. Wilsons and C.S. Lewis' different accounts of the character of moral experience. Fourth, it is possible that not all phenomena are equally available to all people at all times. For example, in examining Tolstoy one might not find his conclusions about Christianity compelling because even after consulting one’s own experiences or aspirations one is aware of no profound personal hunger for meaning. Or, it may be the case that one lacks a sense of moral failure and a need for forgiveness. Of course, as we saw with E.O. Wilson and John Searle in Chapter Two, these phenomena can be interpreted as vestiges of our ancient human ancestry that at one time promoted our survival but are no longer helpful or necessary. Even though abduction, or explanationism, is limited in these ways there is still a role for explanatory power. An individual should assess the rationality of their own view on the basis of its ability to best explain the phenomena that that person judges to be the most significant to explain.

Albert Borgmann argues that when our discourse centers around a matter of ultimate concern, like life’s meaning, we engage others “by inviting them” to consider and examine for themselves that which has moved us. In doing this

96 For example, Paul Moser, in *The Elusive God: Reorienting Religious Epistemology*, argues that we should expect evidence of a perfectly loving God to be purposively available to humans in a manner consistent with God's all-loving character and God's purposes in self-revelation. The most important kinds of evidence may be available only to those who engage in a kind of seeking that is consistent with the character of such a God. His argument builds on Jesus' words that “Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching [i.e., Jesus' teaching] is from God or whether I am speaking on my own.” See John 7:17.


98 Borgmann, *TCCL*, p. 178. For a thorough account see Ch. 21, pp. 169-182.
we also speak not only of our own experiences and aspirations but invite our readers or listeners to search their own. It is a non-coercive form of discourse. However, it remains contestable because it points to some feature of reality, one believed to address those aspirations, that is publicly accessible. Tolstoy is an example of one who offers such a witness in his essay, aptly titled, A Confession, and in his other religious writings. Though he does not explicitly present his testimony in terms of its explanatory value it does appear to be the case that he embraces a narrative account of agape because it enables him to make the best sense of certain of his own experiences. Relying on Tolstoy's testimony I will seek to show how the narrative account of agape, similar to that which has been developed in this paper, is embraced by Tolstoy to implicitly explain these existential demands that have also been common to many others as well.

_Tolstoy’s Quest for Meaning as a Hunger for Intimacy_

In his testimony regarding his deepest aspirations Tolstoy invites us to consider that not all phenomena present themselves to us as existentially equivalent. Some facets of our experience as persons demand our attention more than others. He describes at length how he was confronted by questions about his own existence in a manner that he could not escape. These questions, more than any others, asserted themselves and demanded a response. The central one had to do with the phenomenon of his own existence.

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99 Ibid.

100 Ibid., pp. 181 and 177.

101 Tolstoy, _A Confession and Other Religious Writings_, pp. 28-29, 35-36, and 134. From the essays “A Confession” and “Religion and Morality”.
Within himself he experienced an urgent demand to resolve the question: Why do I exist?  
102 Sometime he phrases this as – What is the meaning of my own life?  
103 He also states this same question in the following ways: What am I? Who am I? Why do I live (or exist)? And, What must I do?  
104 Concerning this experience he writes, “the most important thing” is “my own personal question, the question of what I am with all my desires.”  
105 He found that the sciences provide no answers to his question but instead provide “a countless number of precise answers to things I had not asked.”  
106 The scientific response provides a description of the material character of one’s life; it informs us that “you are a temporary, incidental accumulation of particles.”  
107 This answer fails to reply to the question he is asking.  
108 He hungers to know if his life has any meaning and not merely for an account of its physical characteristics.

As we saw in Chapter Two Tolstoy also dismisses as inadequate the response that the meaning he longs for can be found in the activity of studying “the infinite complexities and mutations of an infinite number of particles in the

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102 Ibid., p. 134; from the essay “Religion and Morality”.
103 Ibid., pp. 29-39; from the essay “A Confession”.
104 Ibid., p. 36-38.
105 Ibid., p. 36.
106 Ibid., p. 39.
107 Ibid. He writes that the answer the experimental sciences give is that “in the infinity of space and the infinity of time infinitely small particles mutate with infinite complexity. When you understand the laws of these mutations you will understand why you live.” See p. 36.
108 Ibid., pp. 39 and 40.
infinity of space and time.” Intellectual pursuits, whether scientific, philosophical, or theological, are not capable in themselves of securing the significance he desires. We can better understand the character of his aspirations, that is, the character of the demand for meaning that he experiences within himself, by looking at three prominent features of his experience that he associates with this question.

The three features of Tolstoy's experience that surround his question about his own existence include a consciousness of his own aloneness, his own moral responsibility and moral failing, and the insignificance of his own existence. He observes that as humans we are alone in the world in our ability to recognize ourselves as “sentenced to death, to oblivion in the infinity of space and time” and in “the tormenting awareness” of our moral responsibility. Only humans have the capacity to act badly and to know they could have acted better. We are also alone or separate from one another. He recognizes that “death will come... to those dear to me” and will eventually come to him and that nothing will remain of their love for one another. Death cements our insignificance not only because it “obliterates” one's self but also one's work. We do not endure and

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109 Ibid., p. 37. For more on Tolstoy's quest for meaning see the sections “Science and the Problem of Significance” and “Significant Truths and Explanatory Power” in my Chapter Two.

110 Ibid., p. 134; from the essay “Religion and Morality”.

111 Ibid. He is acutely aware that his moral failures are failures toward other persons. In Halliday's terms they are failures of personal fellowship.

112 Ibid., p. 31; from the essay “A Confession”. Halliday writes, in Reconciliation and Reality, that “Death is irreconcilable with love.” In our love for others there is both a sense of loyalty to the one loved and an unquenchable desire to enjoy their presence that speaks of a “demand in the soul for permanence.” Love longs for enduring personal communion. See pp. 198 and 10-12.
there is nothing we do that will endure. This is the case because there is no
person to remember either our existence or our actions; there is no one for whom
these would matter.\textsuperscript{114}

Tolstoy argues that “rational knowledge” gives us no grounds for believing
that we can overcome our aloneness or our insignificance. It is important to note
that his view of what constitutes rational knowledge appears fairly narrow.
Rational knowledge appears to be only that which has the empirically
demonstrable character of the experimental sciences or mathematics.\textsuperscript{115} He
reports that when he embraces the conclusions of science they evoke a sense of
homelessness, loneliness, and abandonment.\textsuperscript{116} Even our moral aspirations
themselves seem ill-fitting. These conclusions evoke profound despair.\textsuperscript{117} He
concludes that if rational knowledge is the only knowledge we can have, then life
is meaningless. Though these disciplines may provide a theoretical description of
the material world that is true that description by itself is not sufficient to provide
meaning. He argues that the dominant theoretical explanations of his day,
particularly scientific ones, entail that life is meaningless. Tolstoy, as we saw in
Chapter Two, argues that in the picture of nature as conceived by science there
is no place for significance or worth. At one point he states, “I did not even wish

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., pp. 33, 31, and 52.

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., p. 33.

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., pp. 35-40.

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., p. 39.

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., pp. 30-33, 44, 63-65, and 134; from the essays “A Confession” and “Religion and
Morality”.
to know the truth because I had guessed what it was. The truth was that life is meaningless.”

He indicates here that his hunger for meaning is a longing for something more than merely the correct or best explanation. There are explanations that appear intellectually satisfactory yet heighten his sense of aloneness and insignificance.

The existential “why” question Tolstoy asks about his own existence is different in character than other types of “why” questions that can be asked. His question appears to fit best in what Pascal calls the personal order or the order of the heart. He is engulfed by this question; it haunts him. Everything hinges on it. He seeks to answer it not “half-heartedly, or out of idle curiosity, but tormentedly, persistently, day and night, like a dying man seeking salvation.”

The anguish and urgency in his question - Why do I exist? can be made more apparent by rephrasing it as - Is there any meaning, significance, or purpose to my life as the particular person that I am? As a question about his particular identity it cannot be answered in general terms. The understanding Tolstoy is looking for takes the shape of a longing to be understood or known as the particular “I” he finds himself to be. He is not looking for a solution to a puzzle – a diagram of how an assortment of facts, including his existence, fit together. There are other types of why questions, for example – Why does the earth revolve around the sun? -

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118 Ibid., pp. 30 and 36; from the essay “A Confession”. Scientific theories do not entail that life is meaningless. However, when scientific thinking is coupled with philosophical naturalism or materialism it leaves no room for the kind of personhood Tolstoy believes is necessary for a meaningful existence.

119 Ibid., pp. 30 and 36.

120 Ibid., p. 34.
where that type of explanation is appropriate. Instead he longs to know if he, that
is, the particular person he finds himself to be, is significant. His perplexity, unlike
mere intellectual curiosity, seeks relief in a form of understanding that is
personal. His question might best be phrased _Am I significant?_ Or, _Is there
someone I matter to and to whom I belong?_ Tolstoy, like Sebastian Moore,
describes his hunger for significance in terms of being significant _for_ another or
meaningful _to_ another.¹²¹ That significance is not found in an explanation.

We are in a position to see why Tolstoy would say that someone like the
biologist E.O. Wilson misses the import of his question.¹²² Wilson observes that
millions seek “…to find the godhead, or to enter the wholeness of nature, or
otherwise to grasp on to something ineffable, beautiful, and eternal…” otherwise
they “…feel lost, adrift in a life without ultimate meaning.”¹²³ Because of this, he
continues, “People need a sacred narrative. They must have a sense of larger
purpose… They will refuse to yield to the despair of animal mortality.”¹²⁴ Wilson
thinks that the scientific story can provide this larger purpose. He writes:

> The true evolutionary epic, retold as poetry, is as intrinsically
> ennobling as any religious epic. Material reality as described by
> science already possesses more content and grandeur than all
> religious cosmologies combined.¹²⁵

¹²¹ Ibid., pp. 39, 54, 63-65, and 134; from the essays “A Confession” and “Religion and Morality”. See my comments on Moore in Chapter One.

¹²² For more on Tolstoy’s view of the limitations of science and their inability to answer questions beyond their scope without distorting the character of such questions see my section “Science and the Problem of Significance” in Chapter Two.

¹²³ E.O. Wilson, “The Biological Basis of Morality,” p. 68.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 70.

¹²⁵ Ibid.
Tolstoy would disagree. He does not merely need a sacred narrative nor will just any purpose do. Tolstoy testifies that reality must be of a personal character in order for meaning to be possible because the meaning he aspires to is found in loving personal fellowship with God and others. He is emphatic that ontologies like Wilson's lack that which could make his life meaningful. The impersonal grandeur of nature, beautiful as it may be, is such that it cannot take notice of his existence – to it he could not matter. Nor could his existence possibly matter to an eloquent scientific description. If Wilson's view is true, if material reality is all that there is, then life is meaningless precisely because there is no room for relationships that are personal – there is no room for love. It is unclear whether Bertrand Russell would agree with Tolstoy that the naturalistic evolutionary epic lacks the resources to make sense of, or address, our hunger for personal connection however, he is familiar with the longing. Russell writes, “…the loneliness of the human soul is unendurable; nothing can penetrate it except the highest intensity of the sort of love the religious teachers have preached.” Tolstoy thinks that it “eliminates any possible meaning” if he is nothing more than a “temporary, incidental accumulation of particles” or a “randomly united lump of something” that will eventually “disintegrate” and “cease” along with all its

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126 Tolstoy, A Confession and Other Writings, pp. 30, 35-37, 39-40; from the essay “A Confession”.

127 From The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell: 1872-1914, p. 220. He opens his autobiography with the comment that “the longing for love” is one of three “simple but overwhelmingly strong” passions that has “governed” his life. See p. 3. Russell appears to long for a love that is personal and there is evidence in Tolstoy’s work that Tolstoy thinks there is no room in a naturalistic framework for the kind of agency necessary for the intimate, personal identification characteristic of such love. See Tolstoy on “final” or “ultimate” causation on my pp. 267-268.
questions.\textsuperscript{128} Given his aspirations for loving, personal relationships such a conclusion is a source of profound despair and leaves no room for joy.\textsuperscript{129}

C.S. Lewis offers testimony similar to Tolstoy's that provides further support to the view that Tolstoy's hunger for meaning is a hunger for personal relationship with God. Lewis writes that he experiences within himself something much more than a desire to enter the wholeness of nature or to otherwise grasp on to something ineffable, beautiful, and eternal. He writes that the beauty of the universe as a material and impersonal reality is not enough to satisfy the desire he finds within himself. Concerning his experiences of beauty he writes, “Beauty has smiled but not to welcome us” and in our encounter with beauty we discover “we are but mere spectators.”\textsuperscript{130} This spectatorship stands in sharp contrast to a longing he finds within himself to be noticed. His experiences underscore for him that, “We have not been welcomed, accepted, or taken into the dance.”\textsuperscript{131} We do want to enter into beauty, as Wilson observes, yet we find it does not acknowledge us; it is indifferent to us. In a world that is inanimate through and through there is no one to whom we matter – in such a universe we are “treated as strangers.”\textsuperscript{132} More to the point, he writes, “Nobody marks us.”\textsuperscript{133} There is not

\textsuperscript{128} Tolstoy, \textit{A Confession and Other Writings}, pp. 39-40; from the essay “A Confession”.

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., pp. 63-65 and 44.

\textsuperscript{130} Lewis, \textit{The Weight of Glory}, p. 14 and pp. 3-19.

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., p. 14.

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., p. 15.

\textsuperscript{133} Ibid. The Hebrew narrative of Job, in the book of that name, also appears to testify to this desire. A major part of Job's suffering comes from his fear that God no longer wants to be with him. Job expresses to God that he longs to be longed for by God. (14:15)
a person to take note of us. Lewis describes his hunger as a desire to be delighted in by God, like a father takes delight in his son, and to be a part of God’s gladness. He refers to this ache to be found special in this way, along with the fear he experiences in admitting to this, as his “inconsolable secret.”

In expressing this publicly he writes that a part of him feels that he is “committing an indecency.” He is tempted to take revenge on it and call it names like “Nostalgic”, “Romantic”, and “Adolescent.” Similarly, Tolstoy initially felt the pressing existential demands within himself and the questions they forcefully asserted as “stupid, simple, and childish.”

Lewis, like Tolstoy, does not merely want to grasp beauty or the ineffable, he wants to be grasped by love.

Longing for Meaning or Fearing Non-Existence?

Some might argue that Tolstoy’s writings reflect not a hunger for loving relationships with God and others - a longing for personal relationships that endure beyond death - but instead a terrible fear of non-existence. There is considerable evidence from his work that Tolstoy is not concerned primarily with non-existence but hungers for a particular kind of meaning that is not possible if death is final. A death of this character would put to an end that which makes life meaningful and makes life worth living. We have already seen that Tolstoy is pained by the awareness that “death will come... to those dear to me” and will

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134 Ibid., p. 6. Lewis points out, lest we think that this desire is intrinsically selfish, that one of the humblest and most childlike of pleasures, not in a conceited child but in a good child, is its “great and undisguised pleasure in being praised.” See p. 12.

135 Ibid.

136 Ibid.

137 Tolstoy, A Confession and Other Religious Writings, p. 29; from the essay “A Confession”.
eventually come to him and that nothing will remain of their love for one another.\textsuperscript{138} It is \textit{not} the idea of not existing that is so painful but that he and his loved ones will not remain in loving relationship with one another. Personal relationships are integral to life's meaning for Tolstoy. He wants to participate in loving relationships, and wants these to endure, more than he fears death - death just makes clear a facet of this longing – and further evidence to support this is found in his remarks on God.

Tolstoy describes his heart as being “agonized by a tormenting feeling” that he could only describe as “a quest for God.”\textsuperscript{139} He describes this as an emotional experience as it did not arise from his stream of thoughts but from a feeling of “fear, abandonment, loneliness... and a sense of hope that someone would help me.”\textsuperscript{140} Earlier he describes the sense of homelessness he experiences when faced with the inadequate answers to his pressing questions that are provided by the experimental sciences, mathematics, and speculative philosophy.\textsuperscript{141} This passage serves as a hint, or prelude, to the description of his feelings of abandonment that I present below. There he describes being overcome with grief because there is no God to whom he can turn to be heard.

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., p. 31.

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., p. 63.

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid. Speaking generally about human beings, but obviously including himself, he states that religious feelings are evoked in a person by “a consciousness of his own insignificance, aloneness, and sinfulness” and the “tormenting awareness” of knowing that “having acted badly he could have acted better.” See the essay “Religion and Morality”, p. 134.

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., pp. 39-40. He states there that these disciplines provide answers that fail to reply to the questions he is asking.
and find mercy.\textsuperscript{142} He writes of his experience so tenderly it is important to quote him at length. He writes:

I kept coming to the same conclusion, that I could not have come into the world without any cause, reason, or meaning; that I could not be the fledgling fallen from the nest that I felt myself to be. If I lie on my back crying in the tall grass, like a fledgling, it is because I know that my mother brought me into the world, kept me warm, fed me, and loved me. But where is she, that mother? If I am abandoned, then who has abandoned me? I cannot hide myself from the fact that someone who loved me gave birth to me. Who is this someone? Again, God.\textsuperscript{143}

Tolstoy describes his hunger as having a personal character – he longs to be found and cared for by a loving God. He concludes that to know God, and to search for God, is “to live” and claims that this is what keeps him from taking his own life. He speaks of returning to that will that has “given birth to me and which asked something of me.”\textsuperscript{144} Meaning is attributed to a volitional encounter with God. He writes that “the force of life rose up within me” - with joy overcoming despair - as he recognizes that this God places demands upon him and that he is “to live according to this will.”\textsuperscript{145} Upon this recognition he compares himself to an oarsman in a boat who seeks for the shore, that shore being God, and that his freedom is to be used like oars to “row towards the shore and unite with God.”\textsuperscript{146}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[142] Ibid., p. 63.
\item[143] Ibid., p. 64.
\item[144] Ibid., p. 65.
\item[145] Ibid., pp. 65-67. In his essay “Religion and Morality” he writes, “the meaning of life lies in the fulfillment of the will of Him who gave you life, therefore strive as hard as can to know that will and to fulfill it.” See p. 143 and also pp. 136 and 143-147.
\item[146] Ibid., p. 66.
\end{footnotes}
To be loved like this overcomes both his sense of insignificance and aloneness.

There are two other reasons why I think Tolstoy’s writings reflect a hunger for personal engagement with a loving God and not a fear of non-existence. First, like Lewis he expresses an embarrassment at admitting his questions. Initially he calls them stupid and childish. To admit publicly to wanting to be loved requires a degree of vulnerability that admitting a fear of non-existence does not require. People do not seem to be embarrassed at admitting they do not want to die or that they would like to live forever. Becker, like Tolstoy and Lewis, also identifies the fear associated with the ache to be found special in some cosmic sense.\(^{147}\) He writes, “All that religious and psychoanalytic genius has to tell us converges on the terror of admitting what one is doing to win his self-esteem.”\(^{148}\) Moreover, among men even speaking of a longing for intimate personal relationships with other men can evoke ridicule. Some of Cicero’s contemporaries claim that the need for friends is a sign of weakness and support this in a variety of ways including suggesting that intimate friendship is something that only women need.\(^{149}\) Second, his desire for death in the face of life’s meaninglessness is not compatible with a fear of non-existence. If life is meaningless, he writes, then it is proper to conclude “Happy is he who was never born. Death is better than life.”\(^{150}\)

\(^{147}\) Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death*, pp. 3-6.

\(^{148}\) Ibid., p. 6; italics mine.

\(^{149}\) Cicero, *De Amicitia*, xiii. 46-47; ix. 29-31; and viii. 26. Cicero disagrees with his contemporaries. He believes that friendship is something that our very nature as persons requires just like food and drink. See also *De Amicitia* viii, ix, and xiii-xiv.

\(^{150}\) Tolstoy, *A Confession and Other Religious Writings*, p. 44; from the essay “A Confession”. Tolstoy’s testimony provides evidence to support Daniel Day Williams’ observation “that the
He terribly desires that his existence have meaning and if it does not he thinks it is not worth living. An indefinitely long existence by itself is not sufficient to provide meaning. To escape that “horror of the darkness” of a life without meaning he describes how he “wanted to kill” himself.\footnote{Ibid., p. 33.} His inability to commit suicide need not be attributed to a fear of non-existence. The desire for death is not compatible with a fear of non-existence, that is, it is not an intelligible emotional response for someone whose primary fear is not existing.\footnote{See my section “Fidelity, Autonomy, and Identity” in Chapter Three for more on the rational interconnection of emotions. To experience an emotion is to be committed to the import of its focus. When two or more emotions are rationally interconnected what makes the connection between the emotions intelligible is their shared focus. Without a shared focus we would not say the emotions are connected. Regarding Tolstoy’s desire for death and his alleged fear of non-existence it is difficult to see what could constitute their shared focus. There does not appear to be a connection between these emotions and in light of the plausible explanation that I provide this makes the position that Tolstoy is driven by a fear of non-existence less plausible.} Surely, it would be odd for one who finds non-existence to be terrible to wish for death and to advocate suicide so forcefully.\footnote{For more on his view of suicide see pages 33, 47-48, 54, and 63-65 from his essay “A Confession” in \textit{A Confession and Other Religious Writings}.}

Based on my argument it should be apparent that when Tolstoy despairs over the meaninglessness of life he is responding emotionally to a particular view of reality that – as he believes it to be true - leaves no room for relationships that are personal. It seems to me that this makes the best sense of the textual evidence that Tolstoy provides. On Wilson’s account there are no personal selves to know and love one another because there is no room for purposive activity initiated by an I or a self. There are only complex happenings. If we are fundamental human craving is to belong” and that we are more afraid of “not-belonging”, “not counting”, or “not being wanted” than of death. See \textit{The Spirit and the Forms of Love}, p. 146.

\footnote{See my section “Fidelity, Autonomy, and Identity” in Chapter Three for more on the rational interconnection of emotions. To experience an emotion is to be committed to the import of its focus. When two or more emotions are rationally interconnected what makes the connection between the emotions intelligible is their shared focus. Without a shared focus we would not say the emotions are connected. Regarding Tolstoy’s desire for death and his alleged fear of non-existence it is difficult to see what could constitute their shared focus. There does not appear to be a connection between these emotions and in light of the plausible explanation that I provide this makes the position that Tolstoy is driven by a fear of non-existence less plausible.}

\footnote{For more on his view of suicide see pages 33, 47-48, 54, and 63-65 from his essay “A Confession” in \textit{A Confession and Other Religious Writings}.}
just a complex pattern of physical events in an even more complicated pattern of physical events pushed forward by a bottom-up causality that began before we came into being and pushes right through us that leaves us with no room for personal agency where we initiate actions, then there is no room for connection with others that is personal. If our existence is truly personal, but you become convinced that there is no room in this world for love, because there are no personal selves, it would only be right to be lonely. Terribly so. Tolstoy's despair is a fitting emotional response to the hopelessness of this situation. That which is of import to Tolstoy and makes his despair intelligible is the inescapable demand for interpersonal connection that asserts itself within him, that is, a hunger and a hope for relationships that are personal and that death does not obliterate. It is the great emotional import that this holds for him that makes intelligible the greatness of his despair.  

With this in mind it is understandable why he said to people like Wilson – your answer proves that you fail to understand the import of the question that I am asking. If one has a longing for enduring relationships with God and others that are personal in character, to be told that the universe is impersonal through and through will not strike one as ennobling. It will evoke profound despair. Tolstoy testifies that such a conclusion leaves no room for joy. The heart of Tolstoy's longing for meaning is not merely to have some

\[154\] See footnote on the previous page about the rational interconnection of emotions.

\[155\] Tolstoy, *A Confession and Other Religious Writings*, pp. 35-37 and 39; from the essay “A Confession”.

\[156\] Ibid., pp. 64-66. For Tolstoy, as with some of the other thinkers engaged in this dissertation, joy is an emotion associated with relationships that are personal. Here he experiences joy when he grasps that God loves him and created him and experiences despair when he believes this to
intellectual grasp of an overarching explanation but to be grasped in love. The demand for meaning he finds within himself is the demand to matter to One to whom it would be worthy to matter. His question is searching for the personal response of Another.

We can also better understand the character of Tolstoy’s aspirations, that is, the personal character of the meaning he hungers for, by looking at his account of his moral failings. He is tormented by the awareness of being responsible for his actions and the awareness that in many situations he had acted badly and could have acted better.\textsuperscript{157} He describes these failings in terms of not responding appropriately to the demands of the loving Will that gave him birth.\textsuperscript{158} He writes that “the meaning of life” is not found “in the fulfillment of personal ambitions, or the ambitions of any aggregate of people, but solely in service to the Will that created him... for the purpose of achieving not his own aims, but the aims of that Will.”\textsuperscript{159} Tolstoy’s moral failures torment him as they are failures of personal fellowship with God. Morality is not about conforming oneself to an abstract moral law but rather about loving volitional fellowship with God. Moreover, it is plausible given the character of his testimony that he would agree that there is a kind of aloneness or alienation caused by one's failures to faithfully respond to the loving demands of God.

The account of intimate identification that is rooted in the New Testament be false.

\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., p. 134; from the essay “Religion and Morality”.

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., p. 64; from the essay “A Confession”.

\textsuperscript{159} Ibid., p. 136; from the essay “Religion and Morality”. See also pp. 143-146 from this essay.
A portrayal of agape constitutes a kind of personal knowing that is capable of addressing the existential problem of meaning or significance that Tolstoy faces. This relational conception of agape – as imaged in the person of Jesus as he relates to God and others - contains the conceptual resources to help Tolstoy make sense of his experience of aloneness, his moral responsibility and moral failing, and his desire for significance. However, it is important to note that employing an account like this one as an explanation is not that which satisfies his hunger for meaning and moral wholeness. Satisfaction is found in a faithful response to a loving volitional encounter with God. In addition, this account also provides an explanation for the interrelatedness of these three features. These experiences make sense in light of the view that the purpose of our existence is to participate in a community of mutual affection and joy that is drawn together by the Father and Son. It pictures humans as being intended for the highest form of personal fellowship or intimate friendship with God and, through God, with others. Meaning is primarily found in a loving volitional encounter with God. As hunger pangs indicate a need for food, Tolstoy’s pangs of loneliness and abandonment indicate this need for personal communion. This narrative depicts this as the central need built into humans by God. It is a need reflective of the loving character of God as imaged in the Father-Son relationship. The conviction that death is final, that it puts an end to all relationships, evokes profound loneliness and despair because death is incompatible with this need.¹⁶⁰ Such

¹⁶⁰ Tolstoy, *A Confession and Other Writings*, pp. 31, 33, 54, and 134; from the essays “A Confession” and “Religion and Morality”. 
death is “irreconcilable with love.”\textsuperscript{161} As Macmurray observes when we love someone we want to know them better and better and to enjoy them for who they are.\textsuperscript{162} However, if death is final, it puts an end to this kind of knowing that is intrinsic to love.

If the materialist picture of reality holds and death is final not only is Tolstoy alone in the sense that those he loves will no longer exist but he himself will no longer be known personally and will no longer matter to anyone. Under this view his life appears unbearably insignificant. From the perspective of the New Testament narrative there is an intelligible connection between his experience of aloneness and his desire for significance. Tolstoy’s hunger for significance is to be met in a loving relationship with God as imaged in the Father-Son relationship. The New Testament pictures humans as created to receive the kind of love the Father has for Jesus for themselves.\textsuperscript{163} In trying to capture this C.S. Lewis writes that we were created “to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a father in a son.”\textsuperscript{164} Moreover, as we have seen, knowing God personally requires God’s redemptive work because of our sinfulness. The aim of God’s effort in the incarnation and the cross is to make possible a joy filled reunion between God and human persons as is pictured in the parable of the Prodigal Son. Being identified with God as a son or daughter provides significance as it overcomes

\textsuperscript{161} See Halliday’s \textit{Reconciliation and Reality}, pp. 198 and 10-12.
\textsuperscript{162} See John Macmurray, \textit{Reason and Emotion}, pp. 42-43. It is quoted earlier in this chapter.
\textsuperscript{163} See John 17:23, 15:9, 16:27, and 17:26.
\textsuperscript{164} Lewis, \textit{The Weight of Glory}, p. 13.
aloneness through intimate, personal fellowship. If we are created to be in a relationship with God marked by mutual affection and joy, that is, if we are made to be intimately identified with God – and if this need is somehow in the structure or constitution of our very being as persons – then Tolstoy’s profound despair over his aloneness and insignificance in the face of an impersonal universe makes good sense. Our deepest needs are personal, that is, our deepest needs have to do with giving and receiving love that is personal.

The Reasonableness of Tolstoy’s Position

Some people object, as does Paul Edwards, that Tolstoy’s position in his religious writings is unreasonable. Given Tolstoy’s own description of faith as “irrational” and that “meaning lies in irrational knowledge” this might seem like a reasonable conclusion.\(^{165}\) Moreover, if such religious knowledge is irrational, then it cannot be used by him as a basis for the explanation of his experiences. In response, I think the textual evidence suggests that Tolstoy employs a modest form of explanationism concerning his religious beliefs. He appears to embrace Christianity, at least in part, because its narrative provides an explanation that makes the best sense to him of critical existential phenomena with which he is confronted. For example, he implicitly argues that meaning requires purposes and purposes require persons and persons and their purposes do not fit in a web of material causation and material phenomena. To act purposefully involves a form of agency or causation, one he calls “final” or “ultimate”, where an event is

\(^{165}\) Tolstoy, *A Confession and Other Writings*, pp. 50-51; from the essay “A Confession”. For more on the irrationality of faith see also pages 31, 47, 53-54, 63-65, 67-68, 71, and 77 from this essay. See also pages 138-140 from the essay “Religion and Morality” on how the religious mode of apprehending reality differs from science and philosophy.
initiated by a being capable of doing so in order to bring about a particular purpose or end. In contrast, the experimental sciences study material phenomena that are constituted by a form of causation where an event is caused by a series of physical events that preceded it – no purposeful action is necessary to initiate or cause any event in the natural world as science pictures it.\textsuperscript{166} He is aware of such purposeful activity from his own moral experience. He writes of being aware of being responsible for his own actions and also, in cases of having acted badly, knowing that he could have acted differently, that is, he could have acted better.\textsuperscript{167} What accounts for this ability? Given the acuity and curiosity of his mind he surely must have wondered what might ground his ability to act purposefully, if it is not more than mere delusion, since the scientific picture of nature (including humans) as a system operating only with physical causes leaves no room for this kind of agency.

Being able to act purposefully also gives him the grounds to ponder if he is created with a purpose or end in mind. He searches for something that would help him to answer the question – Who am I? Or, What is the meaning or purpose of my life? As I have argued, at the heart of these questions, is another question – Am I loved by God? His hunger for meaning takes the shape of feeling alone and abandoned and compels him to ask: “If I am abandoned, then who has abandoned me?”\textsuperscript{168} He acknowledges that there must be a “cause,\textsuperscript{166}\textsuperscript{167}\textsuperscript{168} Iibd., see pp. 37-38.
\textsuperscript{167} Ibid., p. 134; from the essay “Religion and Morality”.
\textsuperscript{168} Ibid., p. 64; from the essay “A Confession”.
reason, or meaning” that explains why he wants to be loved personally. The evolutionary story can provide a causal explanation for how his question might arise, but it cannot answer it, that is, it cannot tell him if he is loved. Moreover, it would be odd if Tolstoy's aspiration for a personal loving encounter with God did not lead him to question the adequacy of the materialistic account of how such a pressing question arose within himself. It was likely he asked something like: How did a material system of cause and effect create a material entity – namely myself - capable of conceiving of, and longing for, a personal form of engagement with other persons that requires a kind of causation completely foreign to it as a material system? It must have struck him as odd that a physical system would long for a personal existence. Of course, the ill-fit of this phenomenon with a materialistic explanation is not a demonstration of the truth of Christianity. However, his longing is part of a range of phenomena that he experiences and for which there is evidence that he wants an explanation that he thinks makes the best sense of these phenomena. He embraces Christianity, at least partly, because he finds it provides that explanation. I say partly because it is evident that it is not merely Christianity as an explanatory framework that he

169 Ibid.

170 Evidence to support this supposition is found in his essay “Religion and Morality” where he examines and critiques an evolutionary account of morality. He argues that the demands of Christian morality cannot be deduced from an evolutionary account. See A Confession and Other Religious Writings, pp. 146-150.

171 This could be called a problem of intentionality. How does a physical system constituted by complex patterns of physical events that cause other physical events ever lead to ideas about personal agency, moral failure, and personal loving relationships? Many thinkers find it difficult to see how physical events are about anything other than themselves whereas mental phenomena, such as ideas, appear to have content that is about something other than themselves.
finds compelling but also the person of Jesus.

It is evident in Tolstoy’s work that he finds the person of Jesus, who he is in himself and the love he manifests in his life, to fit his deepest experiences and aspirations.\textsuperscript{172} He realizes that there is no way to prove “that it is better for a man to give his life in service to others than to compel others to serve him” but that “it must be shown.”\textsuperscript{173} He thinks Jesus' life shows this. Given the content and tone of his work I think Tolstoy would argue that the person of Jesus is the best evidence we have of the existence of a personal God. I think he would agree with his contemporary H.R. Mackintosh who writes,

\begin{quote}
We need... a substantial and significant existence which confronts us as an irrefrangible element in history, and to which our noblest aspirations and hopes can be fastened. This reality, it is plain, must needs be a Person; for only a Person can show us the personal God.\textsuperscript{174}
\end{quote}

Mackintosh thinks that the person of Jesus is the Divine answer to the kind of longing of which Tolstoy himself gives witness. Should the word irrational, or

\textsuperscript{172} In referring to who Jesus is in himself I am referring to who he is as a person – the central values and purposes he is committed to – as evidenced in the manner in which he lives. In particular I am referring to his identification with truth and love not, as Halliday writes, “as abstract ideals, but in relation to social and personal life.” Moreover, Halliday argues that the divine nature of Jesus is not primarily a matter of cosmic knowledge and cosmic power. He writes, “Those things which are looked upon as human, His meek and lowly and pure heartedness, are infinitely more divine than mere knowledge or power.” Halliday also considers the personal character of Jesus’ fierce, yet tender, love to be central to his divinity. See \textit{Reconciliation and Reality}, pp. 63 and 60.

\textsuperscript{173} Tolstoy, \textit{A Confession and Other Religious Writings}, p. 146; from the essay “Religion and Morality”.

\textsuperscript{174} H.R. Mackintosh, \textit{The Person of Jesus Christ}, p. 46; italics mine. For more on the importance of exemplars see my Chapter Four “Narrative and Normativity”. Mackintosh’s thought here fits nicely with Pascal’s notion of the personal order of the heart. Pascal would argue that there are facets of personal reality that we can recognize and know, such as love, even though this knowledge is not capable of the kind of demonstration employed in the order of the intellect. Though it is not clear that Pascal argues this way it would fit his thinking to argue that it would take a person to show through its life the character of divine personal reality.
unreasonable, be used to describe Tolstoy's position? If the standard for rationality is set by the experimental sciences and mathematics, as Tolstoy seems to suggest at places, then religious and moral knowledge is irrational. However, there is evidence in Tolstoy's work that he employs a modest form of explanationism in his embrace of the Christian faith. Tolstoy, as does Pascal, seems to regard the Christian narrative as one that affords the best explanation of a range of existential phenomena that he considers supremely significant. Moreover, it appears that Jesus' life for Tolstoy, though not a theoretical demonstration of God's existence, is suggestive in itself of a reality worthy of engaging. With these things in mind there are grounds to conclude that Tolstoy is neither being unreasonable nor advocating irrationality.

**Conclusion**

In this dissertation I have presented an alternative account of autonomy to that view common in contemporary Western culture that holds that the autonomy necessary for mature moral agency or for the realization of one's unique personal identity is diminished by the influence of other persons. In contrast, I argued that the relational image of love, or agape, in the New Testament narrative presents a conception of personal identity in which autonomy is found in and through intimate, personal relationships with God and others. Our identity is ultimately personal, that is, we are not fully who we are apart from being in relationships with others that are personal. This account of the New Testament image of love

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175 For more on the unique value of Jesus' life as evidence of a loving, personal God see Alan Richardson's *Religion in Contemporary Debate* especially Chapter Six: "The Death of God: A Report Exaggerated, pp. 102-119."
reveals a portrait of the self as one in which the capacities essential for personhood such as autonomy are not diminished through identification with God but instead are most fully realized. I argued that this identification involves a personal form of caring, one that is distinctly intimate, that when mutual constitutes a personal form of knowing. This personal knowledge is constituted by a particular pattern of engagement between persons and is more than the intellectual apprehension of propositions that are true about another person. I argued that directly engaging the New Testament as a part of a philosophical project is justified, in part, because adequately describing this love requires a narrative. Only a story or exemplar can image in depth the volitional, desiderative, and emotional qualities of this love as well as its relational character. The narrative is also needed in order to present a portrait of the self as one in which the capacities essential for personhood such as autonomy are not diminished through intimate identification with God but instead are most fully realized. Jesus was presented as the primary example of how participating in an intimate, personal relationship with God, given God’s character, requires and nurtures the development of the autonomy necessary for the full realization of one’s person. In his unparalleled capacity to engage God and others in a personal manner, Jesus is presented as the portrait of how to live a vibrant life. His identity is not diminished or obscured, but instead finds its unique expression, in identification with the God he calls Father. I also argued that joy is an essential emotional and desiderative component of this love that shapes its moral character and is necessary for intimate, personal knowing. Lastly, I also argued
that this kind of personal knowing is capable of addressing the existential problem of meaning or significance that Tolstoy identifies. On this account the human hunger for meaning, or significance, is one that finds its satisfaction not in theoretical or explanatory knowledge but in intimate, personal engagement with God and, through God, with others. Significance is found in being significant for Another, that is, in being loved by One who is worthy of our fullest love.


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VITA

Peter E. Bergeron was born and raised in Glendora, California. Before attending Loyola University Chicago, he attended the University of Montana where he earned a Bachelor of Science in Wildlife Biology in 1988. He served as an Assistant Program Director and Chief Instructor at Summit Adventure, a non-profit wilderness education program, from 1987 to 1993. He attended Biola University in La Mirada, California from 1993 to 1995 where he received a Master of Arts in Philosophy and graduated with Highest Honors. While at Loyola he served as a Teaching Assistant to Dr. Paul Moser from 1998 through 1999. He taught as an adjunct faculty member at North Park University in 1997 and 1998 and at Loyola in 2000 and 2001. His primary areas of academic interest are philosophy of religion, love and personal relationships, friendship, emotion, personal identity, autonomy, and wildlife biology and conservation.