

Abilene Christian University

Digital Commons @ ACU

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Fall 9-2015

Deification, Friendship, and Self-Knowledge

Matthew Hale

Abilene Christian University, mbh12a@acu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/etd>



Part of the [Byzantine and Modern Greek Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), [Epistemology Commons](#), [Ethics in Religion Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hale, Matthew, "Deification, Friendship, and Self-Knowledge" (2015). Digital Commons @ ACU, *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. Paper 2.

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Electronic Theses and Dissertations at Digital Commons @ ACU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ ACU.

ABSTRACT

How does human friendship contribute to the process of deification? In this thesis, I will argue that a kind of “spiritual friendship” contributes to the process of deification by placing the human agent in a better position for acquiring self-knowledge, and avoiding false beliefs or misunderstandings about the self. This acquisition of self-knowledge is an important part of the deification process, which involves not just a moral and ontological transformation, but an epistemological one as well.

Deification, Friendship, and Self-Knowledge

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Graduate School of Theology

Abilene Christian University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements of the Degree

Master of Arts

Theology

By

Matthew Hale

September 2015

For the two experts on friendship in my home, Alison and Ox.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this project would have been impossible without a number of good people who have shaped, scoured, and prodded this thesis from its early days until now. Foremost among my blessed critics has been my advisor, Fred Aquino, whose careful, caring scrutiny has been crucial this year and throughout my graduate education. I am thankful for his time and effort, and dedication to my improvement these past few years. I am better for it. I am grateful as well for the interest and feedback of the other committee members, Jeff Childers and Eleonore Stump. I am especially appreciative of Eleonore Stump's kind help and direction when I first began to develop these ideas in spring 2014. I am appreciative as well to Paul Moser in this regard. I am also happy to thank my fellow students for their discussions and pushback, particularly John Kern and Rachel Helton Hart, who read drafts of this thesis and provided excellent feedback. Lastly, and most of all, I am thankful for my wife, Alison. Not only did she proofread my thesis (despite being dreadfully bored by it), but she has also lovingly supported me through my graduate education, especially over the past year. Her presence in my life is one of God's greater kindnesses to me. Anything of value in this project is due to the help of these wonderful people. Any mistakes are mine alone.

Soli Deo honor et gloria.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Question and Thesis Statement.....	1
1.2 Discussions of Friendship in the Tradition and in Recent Scholarship	3
1.3 Method	7
1.4 Chapters Outline	8
1.5 Contribution	9
II. DEIFICATION, SELF-KNOWLEDGE, AND THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT	10
2.1 Introduction.....	10
2.2 Self-Knowledge in Maximus the Confessor.....	11
2.3 SK as an Epistemic Good	19
2.3.1 SK as Understanding.....	20
2.3.2 Why SK Won't Fit into Most Contemporary Accounts of Self-Knowledge	24
2.3.3 But Can't SKU Be Some Kind of Knowledge?.....	25
2.3.4 Concluding Remarks Concerning SKU as an Epistemic Good	27
2.4 The Social Dimension of the Acquisition of SKU.....	28
2.5 Conclusion	32
III. FRIENDSHIP AND THE ACQUISITION OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE.....	34
3.1 Introduction.....	34
3.2 Spiritual Friendship.....	35

3.2.1 SF within the General Phenomenon of Friendship	35
3.2.2 Limiting Conditions for the Purview of this Project.....	41
3.2.3 A Condition Specific to SF	41
3.3 How in SF the Friend Helps S Acquire SKU	43
3.3.1 What Is Relevant Knowledge That <i>p</i> ?	44
3.3.2 The Epistemic Position of the Friend in SF	45
3.3.3 The Reliability and Trustworthiness of the Friend for Relevant Knowledge	48
3.3.3.1 Acquiring Relevant Knowledge: Perceiving the <i>λογοι</i>	49
3.3.3.2 Acquiring Relevant Knowledge: Mind Reading and Knowledge of Persons	51
3.3.3.3 Acquiring Relevant Knowledge: Inference and Moral Character	55
3.3.4 Testimony: Transmitting Relevant Knowledge	58
3.3.5 Acquiring SKU from Testimonial Knowledge	61
3.4 Potential Objections	61
3.5 Conclusion	64
IV. CONCLUSION.....	65
4.1 Summary	65
4.2 A Systematic Account of Self-Knowledge Acquisition in the Process of Deification.....	65
4.3 A Treatment of the Systematic Pitfalls in Our Epistemic Environment.....	66
4.4 Concluding Remarks.....	67
BIBLIOGRAPHY	68

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Just as water reflects the face, so one human heart reflects another.
(Proverbs 27:19 NRSV)

1.1 Question and Thesis Statement

How does human friendship contribute to the process of deification? This process does not solely involve the human individual; it has an intensely social aspect.¹ Therefore, a full account of the process of deification would include the social relations that constitute such a large part of human life, including friendship,² inasmuch as they contribute to the human agent's movement toward her proper end. By friendship, I mean (for now) a loving, close, non-sexual, non-familial relationship between humans, and within the context of the process of deification this relationship is between persons who desire union with God. This relationship would be akin to what Aristotle calls "character friendships",³ but is more closely related to what some in the Christian tradition call "spiritual friendship."⁴

1. A point made forcefully, but in a slightly different key, by Henri de Lubac in his seminal work, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, trans. Lancelot C. Sheppard and Sister Elizabeth Englund, OCD (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988).

2. An analysis of the social aspect of deification has been advanced in the work of John D. Zizioulas, especially *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's, 1985). His work, however, focuses chiefly on the social relations in the church, and does not extend to the role of social relations like friendship.

3. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VIII.

4. Cf., notably Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship*, trans. Dennis Billy (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria, 2008).

Although the operative notion of deification in this account will become clearer in the next chapter, I will indicate here that the account of deification I will be using will be drawn from Maximus the Confessor, whose developments represent an important flowering of the concept of deification in the Greek patristic tradition. Moreover, Maximus is followed in outline by most later Orthodox theologians. In this account, deification is the proper end of the human person, and is a union between God and the human person that maintains distinction between both, occurring in fullness only in the eschaton. The process of deification, however, begins in human life now and occurs gradually over time. For Maximus, the process of deification has three stages: *πρακτικη*, *θεωρια*, and *θεολογια*. In *πρακτικη*, the human person develops virtue, especially love and self-control. In *θεωρια*, she contemplates the *λογοι* (God's intentions for created things) in the created order, which participate in the *λογος*—thereby giving her mediated knowledge of God. In *θεολογια*, she acquires vision of God; only few ever get to this last step in this life. Through this process, the human person steadily moves toward her proper end, and steadily actualizes the potential likeness to God she was created with but lost in the fall. All of this occurs in cooperation with the gratuitous action of the Holy Spirit.

In this thesis, I will argue that this kind of “spiritual friendship” contributes to the process of deification by placing the human agent in a better position for acquiring self-knowledge, and avoiding false beliefs or misunderstandings about the self. This acquisition of self-knowledge is an important part of the deification process, which involves not just a moral and ontological transformation, but an epistemological one as well.

1.2 Discussions of Friendship in the Tradition and in Recent Scholarship

For some time, theological discourse has vacillated about the relevance of human friendship for the Christian life, let alone its relevance for deification. Though human friendship has had some proponents over the years, including Thomas Aquinas and Aelred of Rievaulx,⁵ many have been suspicious of it, considering it to be a distraction from devotion to God, or a hindrance to universal, impartial love.⁶ In the last few centuries, until quite recently, human friendship has been sentimentalized and benignly neglected, with many considering it uninteresting or unhelpful for theorizing on the Christian life.⁷

However, as Paul Wadell has argued, friendship is highly relevant, particularly for moral theorizing.⁸ Wadell sees moral formation as a communal enterprise, and friendship as one of the primary ways that we come into contact with the most important goods of the moral life. In fact, friendship is *necessary* for attaining the “goods that make us whole.”⁹ Wadell’s constructive argument is also accompanied by a defense of friendship against Søren Kierkegaard and Anders Nygren,¹⁰ arguing that Christian friendship is not merely preferential love that inhibits the universal love of *agape*; rather, friendship is the

5. And to some extent, though with unsurprising ambivalence, Augustine. See Donald X. Burt, *Friendship and Society: An Introduction to Augustine’s Practical Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

6. For an account of friendship’s treatment in the Christian tradition, as well as Greco-Roman precursors, see Liz Carmichael, *Friendship: Interpreting Christian Love* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004).

7. This is largely true in philosophy as well. Many current epistemological theories, for example, have been developed without any reference to friendship, or social realities at all. This has led to very strange problems in which basic commitments in friendship are pitted against theories of justification. For an enlightening discussion of this problem see Sarah Stroud, “Epistemic Partiality in Friendship,” *Ethics* 116 (April 2006): 498-524.

8. Paul J. Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1989).

9. *Ibid.*, 5.

10. *Ibid.*, 74-96.

means by which agape is learned and then extended to the world. Wadell then turns his attention to friendship with God, which, he argues, is how we learn to love God.¹¹ This love leads to likeness; a “likeness, not identity”¹² based on goodness and love. For Wadell, friendship with God facilitates growth in God-likeness. Wadell, however, does not explicitly connect *human* friendships to attaining God-likeness. That said, Wadell goes a long way in showing human friendship’s relevance for moral formation, an important element in the process of deification, though he deals very little with the epistemic domain.

Samuel Kimbriel gives more explicit attention to friendship’s contribution to deification,¹³ particularly as this relates to ways of inquiry.¹⁴ Kimbriel begins by arguing against what he sees as the pervasive mode of inquiry in modernity, which he calls “disengagement”. In this mode of inquiry, the self is “buffered” and protected, and the question of proper inquiry is primarily a question of procedure, rather than relationship.¹⁵ “Disengagement”, then, involves a habit of isolation that is inimical to friendship. Although this mode of inquiry appears self-evident and universal, Kimbriel argues that it is historically contingent, and on these grounds challenges it by turning to an alternative mode of inquiry. Kimbriel constructs such an alternative by turning to the practice of

11. Ibid., 138.

12. Ibid.

13. Samuel Kimbriel, *Friendship as Sacred Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2014).

14. Kimbriel does not specify what sort of inquiry he has in mind. His diagnosis of the problem of the modern personality is that it resides in a way of inquiry that leads to a buffering of the self from others. This could be applied widely, but the rest of his project, in form and content, suggests that the inquiry in mind is of a theological or philosophical sort—inquiry into matters of ultimate importance—rather than scientific inquiry, for example.

15. Ibid., 3.

friendship as it is developed in pre-modern sources, particularly those found in the “Johannine” theological tradition.¹⁶ Rather than inquiring through a habit of isolation, exemplified by Kimbriel’s reading of the Cartesian method, this alternative stance requires a pattern of love and friendship. Ways of knowing, rather than being reducible to a procedure, are instead ways of being in the world,¹⁷ and involve relationships that form us as knowers. This makes love significant for being a knower. In order for us to cultivate the love necessary to inquire properly, we must seek to enter into friendship with God—a cycle of desire for union and growing likeness to God, i.e., a process of deification.¹⁸ This friendship is then extended to others and the rest of the world. Thus friendship plays an important epistemic role in the process of deification, a process which Kimbriel develops primarily in Thomistic terms. In this way, Kimbriel argues that human friendship is relevant not just for the moral life, but also for the epistemic side of deification. However, though Kimbriel discusses the role of friendship in deification, his treatment of it is somewhat indirect, serving the purposes of his larger project concerning inquiry. Moreover, Kimbriel does not significantly develop an account of friendship’s relevance for self-knowledge, particularly as it relates to deification.

In my view, more explicit attention should be given to friendship’s contribution to *self-knowledge* inasmuch as it is an important aspect of deification. In this project, I intend to do this by arguing that friendship can help the human agent acquire a better, more truth-conducive understanding of her self. The friend functions analogously to a

16. Specifically, the Gospel of John, Augustine, and Aquinas.

17. *Ibid.*, 162.

18. *Ibid.*, 155, 170.

mirror—an observation made since Plato and Aristotle¹⁹—in that the friend can relate knowledge about the human agent to which she would not otherwise have easy access, which then contributes to her self-knowledge. Given certain necessary conditions of this form of spiritual friendship,²⁰ the friend is in a good position for relevant knowledge about the agent via spiritual perception, mind-reading, and induction. She can then relate this knowledge to the human agent. In this way, the friend helps correct inaccurate conceptions the human agent has of herself, and because the friend is in a good epistemic position for this relevant knowledge, she will be more likely to avoid misdirecting the human agent by relating false or otherwise harmful beliefs.

In order to provide an account of self-knowledge as an important aspect of deification, I will critically engage with select writings of Maximus the Confessor. For Maximus, noetic transformation is a very important part of deification, and this includes healing the human agent's conception of her self, i.e., acquiring self-knowledge. This is not unrelated to other aspects of the process of deification, such as cultivating the virtues²¹ and regulating the path to virtue. But having self-knowledge is also part of coming to understand the self, and the entire created order, primarily in reference to its origin and proper end, God.²² This sort of knowledge is a good in itself, but it is not a

19. Cf. Talbot Brewer, "Virtues We Can Share: Friendship and Aristotelian Ethical Theory," *Ethics* 115 (July 2005): 721-58; John M. Cooper, "Friendship and the Good in Aristotle," *Philosophical Review* 86, no. 3 (July 1977): 294-302; David P. Maher, "Contemplative Friendship in *Nicomachean Ethics*," *The Review of Metaphysics* 65 (June 2012): 765-95.

20. These necessary conditions will be provided and elaborated in chapter 3.

21. Especially love. Cf. Susan Wessel, "The Theology of *Agape* in Maximus the Confessor," *St. Vladimir's Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (2011): 338.

22. Ambiguum 7, 1077B; *Capita de Caritate*, IV.47.

narcissistic introspection; rather, it is in some sense coming to know the self as God knows the self.

Though my focus will be on human friendship, I do not imagine that friendship alone contributes to the human agent's acquisition of self-knowledge. Other ascetic and ecclesial practices are also crucially important, such as the sacraments, prayer, liturgy, the study of scripture, and spiritual direction. Human friendship has an important and distinct part to play, but it does not function alone. Behind my account is the assumption that the agent will be participating in these other practices, and that ultimately these practices contribute to the process of deification only through the grace and activity of the Holy Spirit.

1.3 Method

My starting point will be insights drawn from Maximus the Confessor's account of the process of deification. Maximus's account of deification is one of the more developed, influential, and sophisticated treatments of the topic.²³ From there, I intend to develop these insights, particularly on self-knowledge, using recent work in analytic epistemology, specifically on the topics of understanding, knowledge of persons, and epistemic injustice. My account of friendship will be drawn from resources in the Christian tradition, ancient and analytic philosophy, and some recent moral theology. The epistemic implications of this account of friendship will be developed in analytic epistemological terms.

23. My judgment on this point is influenced by the similar appraisal of especially Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Great Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford, 2004), 262-95.

1.4 Chapters Outline

My argument will run as follows: Chapter 2 will draw out some insights from Maximus concerning the importance of self-knowledge for deification, and what that self-knowledge is. From there, I will develop these insights in contemporary analytic terms and provide a definition of self-knowledge as it relates to deification. Lastly, I will consider the problem of epistemic injustice for the acquisition of self-knowledge, given that self-knowledge is acquired in a social environment. This problem will illustrate the need for reliable and spiritually advanced persons to help an agent properly know the self.

Chapter 3 will provide an account of such a helpful relationship, i.e., “spiritual friendship”. After providing some necessary conditions of this relationship, I will argue that the spiritual friend is in a good position to acquire relevant knowledge concerning the human agent, and that the friend is able to trustworthily relate this knowledge to the human agent. From there, the agent can incorporate this knowledge into her body of self-knowledge.

Chapter 4 will summarize and conclude my argument. I will consider two ways in which this project could be expanded. The first is a potential undertaking to create a systematic, analytic account of self-knowledge acquisition in the process of deification. This would not only include friendship, but other practices as well. The second is a wider evaluation of hindrances to self-knowledge acquisition, particularly those systemic barriers facing the marginalized person’s quest for self-knowledge.

1.5 Contribution

This thesis will contribute to contemporary scholarly discussions in three ways: first, there has been an interesting conversation over the more social aspects of deification in the last several decades with a primary focus on ecclesiology. However, more mundane social relations, such as friendship, have been largely ignored. This project should help to expand the discourse of the social aspect of deification to these relationships that play such a large role in our day-to-day lives.

Second, this project should shift the discussion of friendship onto the plane of deification. This should prove helpful to preventing friendship from being pigeonholed in theological discourse. By seeing friendship as it relates to deification, we may be able to expand current discussions of friendship to a number of different areas besides just ethics and morality, including self-knowledge, but also potentially knowledge of God, prayer, and ecclesiology.

Third, this project is part of the aforementioned wider goal of developing a systematic, analytic account of self-knowledge acquisition in the process of deification. Currently, there is no work that purports to give such an expansive account, and the acquisition of self-knowledge in the process of deification remains an underdeveloped area of inquiry in work on deification and self-knowledge. By showing the relevance of such a common human practice as friendship for self-knowledge acquisition, this thesis will have made some initial steps toward advancing this larger project.

CHAPTER II

DEIFICATION, SELF-KNOWLEDGE, AND THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will develop an epistemological account of self-knowledge as it relates to the process of deification. The specific foci will be on analytically defining this self-knowledge and on considering a particular problem given that the acquisition of this self-knowledge occurs in a social environment. The core of my analytic definition of self-knowledge will be extrapolated from my reading of Maximus the Confessor, who saw an important connection between deification and the healing of the human person's conception of the self.¹ However, he provides little in the way of analytic clarification, or treatment of the social aspect of the acquisition of self-knowledge. I intend to further develop his insights precisely in those directions, by arguing that deification involves the acquisition of a specific kind of self-knowledge akin to understanding, which is importantly shaped by one's social relations.

1. This is in spite of Maximus rarely explicitly using the term, "self-knowledge". However, it has been widely noted that Maximus is at least familiar with the Greek philosophical tradition, which does have a robust notion of self-knowledge (for a well articulated description, see Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2002), 22-38, 164-5, 185-8) that was then passed down to later Christian thinkers, including Basil and others, and in turn operates subtly in Maximus (see Paul M. Blowers, "Gentiles of the Soul: Maximus the Confessor on the Substructure and Transformation of the Human Passions," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4, no. 1 (1996): 74-75). This notion has much to do with self-examination, identity, and care of the self (see again, Hadot)—relating it strongly to ethics, perhaps as much as epistemology. There is innovation in Maximus, but given his intellectual climate, and his study of the Cappadocians (cf. Georgias Mantzarieds, "Self-Knowledge and Knowledge of God According to St Gregory the Theologian," *Phronema* 26, no. 2 (2011): 11-25; Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism* (New Haven: Yale, 1993), 58-59), the lack of much explicit exposition on self-knowledge is not fatal to this project.

In 2.2 I will develop a notion of self-knowledge from Maximus the Confessor's insights on the subject. For Maximus, self-knowledge is crucial, particularly as it pertains to the noetic transformation entailed in the process of deification. In 2.3, I will develop this notion of self-knowledge in contemporary epistemic terms by bringing to bear recent analytic work. I will argue that self-knowledge, as drawn from Maximus, is an epistemic good and can be helpfully categorized as understanding. In 2.4, I will take a closer look at the social epistemic environment for the acquisition of self-knowledge. Others play an important role in shaping our understanding of the self, and this raises troubling issues of social power and abuse. We need others to acquire self-knowledge, but this opens us up to destructive possibilities. I will conclude by asserting that friendship may be a relationship that helps us acquire self-knowledge with lessened risk.

2.2 Self-Knowledge in Maximus the Confessor

In my reading of Maximus, his notion of self-knowledge (as it relates to the process of deification) can be summarized as follows:

*(SK): a right mental conception of the self as it relates to its origin and proper end in God, both in the self's inner workings and its dealings with the external world.*²

SK is a mental conception in that it is an achievement primarily of the cognitive life. SK is notably different from other notions of self-knowledge in that it is a cognitive achievement with not just the self as its object, but the self in relation to another, God. That is, knowledge of one's mental states or desires alone would not constitute SK; they

2. This is similar to a formulation of Paul Blowers: "To know oneself is thus, for Maximus, to learn the frontiers of one's nature, and in so doing, to push out those frontiers in the direction of higher virtue" ("Gentiles", 75).

would need to be viewed in light of one's relatedness to God, as well as how this further bears on one's place in the external world.

At this point, we can say that SK is a way of arranging certain propositions concerning the self's relatedness to God.³ It is not a single proposition, but it does incorporate propositions. The question then becomes, according to Maximus, what kinds of propositions? There are two: the first would be propositions concerning an agent as a human person generally. The most prominent example would be *p* concerning the *imago dei*, something which all humans share and which would be required for a full knowledge of the human agent's self. Indeed, to lack awareness of the *imago dei* and its implications has terrible consequences.⁴ For Maximus, the *imago dei* confers both a special dignity on humans in the here and now as well as a divinely intended proper end for humans—a progressive movement into greater and greater likeness of God, and greater participation in the divine life. SK would then include *p* concerning the *imago dei*, such as one's own dignity, and the self in relation to one's *telos* as a human being. Insofar as I am a human and see myself in light of a more general human identity, propositions of this sort would contribute toward greater SK.

As for the second kind of proposition, our intuitions, as well as Maximus' cosmology,⁵ would demand a contribution from *p* concerning the human agent as a

3. A more nuanced categorization of SK will follow.

4. "After man had been brought into being by God, resplendent with the beauty of incorruptibility and immortality, he chose, instead of intellectual beauty, the relative deformity of the material nature surrounding him, and consequently *lost the memory of his soul's exalted dignity*—or rather he became wholly oblivious of God, who had beautified the soul with divine form [emphasis added]." Amb. VIII. 1104A, trans. Constatas, vol. I, 143.

5. For an interesting treatment of Maximus' cosmology, with a particular focus on difference and the individual (or "hypostasis"), see Melchisedec Törönen, *Union and Distinction in the Thought of St Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford, 2007), 13-43, 81-104.

specific individual, and not merely as part of a collective. I am individuated from other humans; further, I belong to a particular moment in time, and a particular place. I have a specific temperament and personality—I am a *hypostasis*, as Maximus might put it.⁶ We might make another distinction here: (1) there can be *p* concerning an agent in a continuous sense and (2) *p* concerning an agent in that specific moment. To illustrate the general distinction, (1) might be a statement like “Charlie is eccentric.” This is a statement meant to bear on how Charlie is over time; it is not just that once at a party Charlie ate thirty pickled green tomatoes that he brought from home instead of any of the snacks offered there. Rather, Charlie is just this kind of person and likely will remain this way. An example of (2) would be “Charlie is walking on Greenslope Drive.” Charlie is not always walking; he also sleeps and eats and talks. Nor is he eternally located on Greenslope Drive. But right now, he is walking on this specific street. Regarding *p* that would be incorporated in SK, (1) would largely have to do with God’s original intention for the agent—the λόγοι.⁷ Humanity might have a common end and thereby a divine intention, but each human person has a particular divine intention for her that is distinct from others though it is unified with the λόγος. This intention does not change, in spite of the agent’s failings or corruption. For SK, (2) would include *p* about the agent’s success or failure to live within the divine intention and progressing toward her proper end, in that specific time and place. This would involve, negatively, knowledge of the vices that still needed to be rooted out, for example, and how they are impacting one’s life at that time. Positively, this could be knowledge that one is moving toward her proper end and

6. Ibid., 52-59.

7. Ibid. 40. See also Paul Blowers, “Aligning and Reorienting the Passible Self: Maximus the Confessor’s Virtue Ethics,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 26 (2013): 336.

in what specific ways. This *p* is then incorporated into a wider organization of other *p*, ultimately oriented toward God.

How then is acquiring SK part of the process of deification? In Maximus' account, coming by SK can generally be seen as a part of a wider noetic transformation that occurs in the process of deification. This noetic transformation has two related aims of which SK is a part. First, acquiring SK is part of the healing of the noetic structure that has fragmented in the fall. This disintegration is described in several places in which Maximus discusses the story of Adam. Although deification is the intended goal for humanity from the beginning, Adam diverts from this intended path with disastrous consequences, including pain,⁸ the passions,⁹ and vice, which then lead to noetic disintegration.¹⁰ That is, misdirected desire leads Adam to improperly attach himself to the material world rather than God, away from unity in the divine, and toward a plurality of attachments and desires which compete with one another and therefore entail a destructive fragmentation. This includes unfortunate epistemic results as well: self-love, or "the passion of attachment to the body",¹¹ gives rise to the other passions which then create a cycle of pleasure and desire that removes one's focus from where it belongs, God, to material objects used for pleasure, resulting in ever-deepening ignorance of God

8. *Amb.* VIII. 1104B, trans. Conostas, vol. I, 145.

9. *Ad Thal.* CXI, CCSG 22:85, trans. Paul M. Blowers and Robert Louis Wilken, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's, 2003), 131; *Amb.* VIII. 1104A, trans. Conostas, vol. I, 143.

10. Frederick D. Aquino, "The Synthetic Unity of Virtue and Epistemic Goods in Maximus the Confessor," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 26, no. 3 (2013): 384.

11. *Capita de caritate*, II.8, trans. Palmer, Sherrard, Ware, vol. II, 66.

and the self.¹² Acquiring SK functions to reverse this fragmentation by bringing *p* together in the right way.

Second, SK's part in the transformation of the noetic structure also extends to the contemplation of the λόγοι. In so doing, the human person *perceives* the world, and herself, rightly, truthfully—as God does. Further, by discerning God's intentions in the world and in herself, and by contemplating these λόγοι, the human agent comes to know the λόγος of God in which the λόγοι participate. The agent thereby comes to knowledge of God the λόγος simultaneous to acquiring SK. This initiates a cycle of knowing God, which then allows the agent to know the self, which can then be contemplated to more intimately know God. Therefore, acquiring SK is tightly connected to knowledge of God, the highest epistemic good and an important part of the process of deification. God is known via contemplation of the self, and the self is known in reference to God.¹³

How then might a human person come by SK? By what means? For Maximus, this question can be answered in two ways. First, the epistemic agent must be formed through the ascetic struggle and the development of virtue in the first stage of the process of deification, *praktike*.¹⁴ In *praktike*, a person develops virtue through the ascetic struggle, with the epistemic outcomes that it becomes possible to perceive God in the

12. *Amb.* VIII. 1104A, trans. Contas, vol. I, 143; cf. also *Amb.* X. 1157A, trans. Contas, vol. I, 49; *Ad Thal.* Prologue. CCSG 7:31, 240-250. Trans. Wilken and Blowers, footnote 2, p. 131.

13. That is not to say, however, that SK is equally important to knowledge of God, only that the two are acquired together.

14. The relevance of acquiring self-knowledge for the process of deification, particularly at the stage of *praktike*, has been brought up by a number of scholars in the last couple of decades. Cf. Frederick D. Aquino, "Maximus the Confessor," in *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, ed. Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley (Oxford: Oxford, 2004), 119; Blowers, "Gentiles," 74-5; Törönen, *Union*, 77; Susan Wessel, "The Theology of *Agape* in Maximus the Confessor," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (2011): 337.

created order¹⁵ (*theoria*, the second stage), and eventually attain vision of God¹⁶ (*theologia*, the third stage). For Maximus, the development of virtue in *praktike* is geared not only to moral transformation, but noetic transformation as well, including coming to greater self-knowledge.¹⁷ The development of virtue reverses the epistemic disintegration that results from living with disorderly passions by undoing the epistemic blindness caused by the vices.¹⁸ In so doing, it “creat[es] psychological space to pursue epistemic goods”,¹⁹ including vision of God, spiritual knowledge, wisdom, and self-knowledge. The end result is the possibility of conceiving the self in light of both its cause and its proper end: God.²⁰

15. Cf. *Amb.* X. 1176B, 1188C-D, trans. Nicholas Conostas, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*, vol. I (Cambridge: Harvard, 2014), 283-85, 309.

16. See Lossky’s discussion of this in *The Vision of God* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s, 1983), 120-35. For Lossky, this vision is of the energies but not the essence of God (p. 134).

17. Though SK is not irrelevant to the second and third steps. Cf. *Capita theologica et oeconomica*, II. 8, trans. G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Killistos Ware, *The Pilokalia*, vol. II (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), 139: “If you are healed of the breach caused by the fall, you are severed first from the passions and then from impassioned thoughts. Next you are severed from nature and the inner principles of nature, then from conceptual images and knowledge relating to them. Lastly, when you have passed through the manifold principles relating to divine providence, you attain through unknowing the very principle of divine unity. Then the intellect *contemplates only its own immutability*, and rejoices with an unspeakable joy because it has received the peace of God which transcends all intellect and which ceaselessly keeps him who has granted it from falling [emphasis added].” This passage seems to point to a kind of contemplation of the self beyond both *praktike* or even *theoria*. See also Paul M. Blowers, “Aligning,” 340.

18. Aquino, “Synthetic Unity”, 384.

19. Ibid. Cf. also Aquino, “Maximus,” in *Spiritual Senses Handbook*, 113: “Virtuous practices clear away epistemic and emotional distractions, and thereby enable the person to refocus, perceive and embody the deeper realities of the world, *in the self* and in liturgical practices. ... Virtue, then, plays a fundamental role in training perception of the self, the world and the divine.”

20. Maximus strongly connects virtue with perceiving the self rightly in *Amb.* 10: “They said, finally, that the two remaining modes lead to virtue and affinity with God, since through mixture and position, man is molded and shaped into God, and from being a creature passively submits to becoming God, for the eye, as it were, of his intellect beholds the whole implicit trace of God’s goodness, and through reason he gives this image a clear and distinct form within himself.” *Amb.* X. 1133B, trans. Conostas, vol. I, 205.

Cf. also Ian McFarland, “Fleshing Out Christ: Maximus the Confessor’s Christology in Anthropological Perspective,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 49, no. 4 (2005): 433: “... The upshot of [Maximus’s view of Christ’s humanity] is that our humanity is not exhausted by the particularities of our

Once the agent has been formed through the ascetic struggle and “space” has been opened up in her life to come to certain epistemic goods, including SK, there are a few ways in which *p* can be acquired that would contribute to SK. First, one can come by this *p* via introspection. This is described in the *Fourth Century on Love*. Maximus describes the difficult practices of *askesis* eventually leading to a moment of perception of Christ in the self.²¹ In this passage, Maximus exhorts the reader to look for Christ within the heart, where Christ will be found insofar as one has been purified through *askesis*. Once the door has been opened through virtue and *askesis*, the pursuit of self-knowledge leads one to Christ, and in that spiritual vision of Christ comes such epistemic goods as spiritual knowledge and wisdom. Though this passage is more christologically oriented, like the self-knowledge described above, the self-knowledge here still involves right perception of the self in relation to God, this time in Christ who dwells in the self.

Introspection also involves detecting vice, and evaluating the orientation of one’s heart.²² This seems to entail a process of inferential reasoning based on what has been

individual existence in time and space.... To see humanity (and, through humanity, all creation) properly is to see it in God by virtue of seeing the essential unity of creation as that which has been freely and lovingly brought into being by God.”

21. “If, as St. Paul says, Christ dwells in our heart through faith (cf. Eph 3:17), and all the treasures of wisdom and spiritual knowledge are hidden in Him (cf. Col 2:3), then all the treasures of wisdom and spiritual knowledge are hidden in our hearts. They are revealed to the heart in proportion to our purification by means of the commandments. / This is the treasure hidden in the field of your heart (cf. Matt 13:14), which you have not yet found because of your laziness. Had you found it, you would have sold everything and bought that field. But now you have abandoned that field and give all your attention to the land nearby, where there is nothing but thorns and thistles. / It is for this reason that the Savior says, ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God’ (Matt 5:8): for He is hidden in the hearts of those who believe in Him. They shall see Him and the riches that are in Him when they have purified themselves through love and self-control; and the greater their purity, the more they will see.” *Capita de caritate*, IV. 70-72, trans. Palmer, Sherard, Ware, vol. II, p. 109.

22. This is noted by various writers. See Susan Wessel, “The Theology of *Agape*,” 337. “[Regarding Maximus’s discussion of envy in *Capita de Caritate* III. 91] It demonstrates that the continuing examination of the self and its psychological processes is necessary even for one who is well on the path toward perfection in love.” See also Blowers, “Gentiles,” 74-5. “As an ascetic exercise, this reorientation or wide use of the passible faculties entails a healthy self-knowledge and diligent contemplation. Truly to

perceived in one's interior life. Maximus describes such a process in *Ambiguum* 10, in which reason, signified by the high priest, "enters the soul like the purest light, exposing its impure desires, thoughts, and reprehensible deeds, and at the same time wisely proposes means of conversion and purification."²³ This is different from the process of introspection described in the *Fourth Century on Love*, in which what is revealed is Christ in the self. Here it is the state of vice and impurity that is exposed within the process of purification; from there, reason puts forward actions by which the self can be rid of these impurities. What comes to be perceived is how the self is *not* properly relating to God, which in turn helps the agent make corrections in order to properly relate to God.

While introspection is the most discussed path to acquiring *p* that can be incorporated in SK, there are other paths that are presumed. One is divine revelation via Scripture. Knowledge concerning one's proper dignity as a creature made in the *imago dei* is acquired at least partly by reading and interpreting Scripture; Maximus's exploration of that aspect of anthropology is nearly always discussed through exegesis of Genesis 1-3, for example.

Maximus's monastic context also suggests the important role of social relations for the acquisition of SK. Primarily, this relates to the spiritual director. While this relationship is not often discussed in Maximus, this was not because monastic communities in those days were unaware of the role of the spiritual director for coming to

know oneself and one's own powers . . . is tantamount to mastering those faculties in the service of virtue. . . . To know oneself is thus, for Maximus, to learn the frontiers of one's nature, and in so doing, to push out those frontiers in the direction of higher virtue."

23. *Amb.* X. 1125B, trans. Constatas, vol. I, 189; cf. also *Amb.* X. 1201B-C, trans. Constatas, vol. I, 335-37.

know the self.²⁴ Likewise, Maximus says little about other social relationships such as friendship²⁵ in his corpus, but that does not suggest that these are unimportant for acquiring SK—and I will argue there are compelling reasons to think they are important. Either way, Maximus does not seem to be envisioning an individualistic spiritual development in which one can know the self in relation to God in total isolation from other human beings.

Besides the definition of SK provided here, what insights can be taken from Maximus's account of the place of SK in the process of deification? First, that SK is an integral part of the noetic transformation entailed in the process of deification. Part of the healing of the *nous* that occurs includes making right the human agent's conception of the self in her relation to God. Further, coming to know the self is tightly related to coming to know God. Second, while Maximus does not emphasize social relations in his account, this lack of emphasis is not prohibitive, and therefore leaves room for development in that direction.

2.3 SK as an Epistemic Good

Now that we have drawn out some insights from Maximus, an important question is whether SK is an *epistemic good*? If we accept some rather tight restrictions on what can be called an epistemic good, an affirmative answer to the question would require SK to be knowledge that *p*, and what I have described above is more of a structuring of a variety of *p*. However, I do not see these restrictions as necessary, and will here operate

24. See, for instance, John Cassian's *Conferences*, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist, 1985).

25. Although, he does refer to friendship, and often in very close proximity to deification. See *Capita de Caritate* I.71, III.79, IV.21, IV.92-100; *Letter 2* [393B] in Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 85; *The Church's Mystagogy*, ch. 24 in *Maximus the Confessor: Selected Writings*, trans. George C. Berthold (New York: Paulist, 1985), 211; *Amb. X. 1109D*, trans. Constas vol. I, 159.

with a broader conception of what is interesting to the field of epistemology, and therefore what can be thought of as an epistemic good. Such a broad approach, such as that articulated by William Alston, would include a selection from what pertains to the cognitive life of a human agent, inasmuch as it is truth-conducive.²⁶ An epistemic good would include knowledge that *p*, but other goods as well, such as knowledge by acquaintance, justified beliefs, and understanding, among others—inasmuch as these relate to truth. In this broad conception of what can be considered epistemic, SK can be said to fit, at least *prima facie*, into the category of epistemic good, because it relates to the cognitive life and is conducive with truth. However, in the course of this exposition, it will become clear that SK is an epistemic good in a narrower, more specific sense, though it is not knowledge that *p*.

Of course, this doesn't get us very far in clarifying what kind of epistemic good SK is in analytic terms and how it might be characterized. If it is not knowledge that *p*, what is it? I will argue here that *understanding* is an epistemological category that can helpfully describe the kind of epistemic good SK is.

2.3.1 SK as Understanding

Whether or not we are attentive to the relatedness of the self to God, it is not uncommon to have concrete experiences in which we progress in self-knowledge or self-understanding. These experiences involve a kind of “aha!” moment in which all the various strands of the self, its experiences over time, are brought together in a coherent

26. “What we call ‘epistemology’ consists of some selection from the problems, issues, and subject matters dealt with by philosophers that have to do with the cognitive side of human life: the operation and condition of our cognitive faculties—perception, reasoning, belief-formation; the products thereof—beliefs, arguments, theories, explanations, knowledge; and the evaluation of all that. And so a very broad conception of epistemology would be *philosophical reflection on the cognitive side of human life*, thus putting the burden of discrimination on what counts as philosophical ...” William P. Alston, *Beyond “Justification”: Dimensions of Epistemic Evaluation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 2005), 3. As for truth-conductivity, see his discussion on pg. 40-45.

and meaningful way. In SK, these strands are brought together in their relatedness to God. SK therefore appears to be a kind of *understanding*, a grasp of how things fit together.²⁷ How then might we further characterize understanding?

Understanding includes the following components: it is a cognitive success²⁸ consisting in (1) a *grasp* of the relation of the parts of an object²⁹ and (2) how that object relates to the larger world,³⁰ which (3) admits gradations,³¹ and is (4) not necessarily reducible to a proposition.³² Below I will elaborate on these components, and explain them as they relate to and clarify the cognitive achievement of SK.

Understanding has both an (1) internal and (2) external component. To use the example of a car, to say that S understands cars requires not only that S grasps (1) how the various parts of the machine work, but also (2) what a car is for, and how to operate one on the road in relation to other objects. In SK there is a *grasp* of how the aspects of the self are ordered, given one's experiences over time. This would include the intellectual and appetitive, for example, and the proper ordering of desires. That S has some grasp of the ordering of the aspects of the self, both as they are and as they should be, is a necessary condition for understanding the self in SK. As for the external component of my definition, a further condition for understanding in SK is that S grasps

27. Wayne D. Riggs, "Understanding 'Virtue' and the Virtue of Understanding," in *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology*, ed. Michael DePaul and Linda Zagzebski (Oxford: Oxford, 2003), 217.

28. Catherine Elgin, "Understanding and the Facts," *Philosophical Studies* 132 (November, 2007): 33.

29. Riggs, "Understanding," 217.

30. *Ibid.*

31. *Ibid.*, 216; Elgin, "Understanding," 36-37.

32. Riggs, "Understanding," 218; Emma C. Gordon, "Is There Propositional Understanding?" *Logos & Episteme* 3, no. 2 (2012): 181-92.

how the self is related to the external world, including material objects, other persons, and, most importantly for our purposes, God. It is clear that in Maximus, SK includes not only the proper prioritization of one's internal life but also a prioritization of the external world in relation to God.

Understanding (3) admits degrees. In this way, it is unlike knowledge that *p* in that S either has knowledge that *p*, or she does not. A belief that *p* must be true and justified, or it is not knowledge that *p*. But not *every* belief that *p* incorporated into understanding needs to be true or justified in order to be understanding; if that were the case, it would be hard to say we understand much of anything. In Maximus's terms, this is partly because understanding is not reducible to belief. Understanding, rather, incorporates and may be based upon beliefs,³³ but it is not *necessarily* tied to the truth or falsity of any *individual* beliefs upon which it is based, or their justificatory status. In fact, it can include some false or unjustified beliefs and still be understanding.³⁴ However, it would be wrong to assert that understanding could be based solely, or primarily, on false or unjustified beliefs. We could say, however, a better degree of understanding would incorporate *more* true, justified beliefs. An improved understanding could also be a greater grasp of the *connection* between beliefs, a deeper consideration of causal relations, for example. It could also include a greater appreciation of the *value* of some parts of an object over others, or of a particular object over other objects.

The development of our scientific understanding of gravity over the last few centuries is a helpful example of degrees of understanding. Newton, for example, had an understanding of how gravity worked that was later largely disproved by Einstein's

33. Elgin, "Understanding," 39.

34. Cf. *Ibid.*, 37-38.

General Theory of Relativity, but that does not mean that Newton did not understand gravity. Rather, Einstein had a *better* understanding of gravity than Newton, who in turn had a much better understanding than Galileo, whose understanding was better than Aristotle's. Einstein not only drew from more true, justified beliefs, but he also drew superior connections between those beliefs and had greater appreciation of the value of some parts of the puzzle over others. The understanding involved in SK is also like this. It seems to include beliefs, i.e., the belief in the *imago dei*. But it also entails a deeper grasp of the connectedness between the self and God, and an appreciation of the greater value of the divine over material things. S therefore can attain greater degrees of understanding in SK. Set within Maximus's overall account of eternal progress into the life of God,³⁵ a continual development of SK would parallel continual progress into knowledge of God.

The last component is straightforward: (4) understanding is not necessarily reducible to propositions. To understand an object does not require that one be able to reduce that cognitive success to a statement that *p*. That seems to be important to uphold if we are to maintain the distinction between understanding and knowledge that *p*. There are statements that *p* that can reflect understanding, but the cognitive achievement of understanding is not simply the acquisition of a statement that *p*. The understanding involved in SK, then, is not the discovery of a certain ordering of words concerning the self and God. Although in normal circumstances, if S has this understanding she should

35. Paul M. Blowers, "Maximus the Confessor, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Concept of 'Perpetual Progress,'" *Vigiliae Christianae* 46 (1992): 151-71.

be able to express new statements that *p* about how the self relates to God. She should, to use Wittgenstein’s phrase, be able to “go on.”³⁶

To summarize my clarifications of SK in contemporary epistemic terms, SK is not knowledge that *p*.³⁷ At the heart of SK is *understanding*—specifically a grasp of one’s relatedness to God, and how the parts of the self ought to function in light of that. This understanding admits degrees, and is not reducible to statements that *p*. These clarifications of SK entail a further revision:

(SKU): *an understanding of the self, both in its inner workings and its dealings with the external world, as it relates to its origin and proper end in God.*

2.3.2 Why SK Will Not Fit into Most Contemporary Accounts of Self-Knowledge

SK fits well with the epistemological category of understanding, but I concede that it is a little non-intuitive. Why not attempt to fit it into one of the many contemporary accounts of self-knowledge? It may appear that these accounts are an obvious choice. That said, self-knowledge in contemporary accounts bears little resemblance to what has just been outlined in Maximus either in form or content. There are historical reasons for this: partly, the concerns of most current theorists on self-knowledge have been hamstrung for some time by Hume’s radical assertion that we have no access to the self

36. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, revised 4th ed., trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte, ed. P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 67-87.

37. It should be mentioned that SK, inasmuch as it is a form of understanding, is not outside the realm of knowledge for everyone; as Grimm has argued, understanding has some interesting parallels with knowledge that resist too sharp a distinction between the two, and may place understanding under the umbrella of knowledge. (Stephen R. Grimm, “Is Understanding a Species of Knowledge?” *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 57 (2006), 515-35; “The Value of Understanding,” *Philosophy Compass* 7, no. 2 (2012): 103-17.) This, however, is not the only argument for placing understanding in the realm of knowledge—I will consider another below.

but only to a bundle of perceptions.³⁸ Current interests now largely focus on a subject's access to her own mental states, sensations, beliefs, or the meaning of "I" statements.³⁹ If theorists manage to get this access off the ground, self-knowledge is further hampered by the ambivalence of many philosophers concerning the unity and continuity of the self,⁴⁰ so that whatever self-knowledge is acquired is a fleeting and thinned out epistemic good of limited value. Further, many accounts of self-knowledge are focused on knowledge that *p* regarding the self, and although SK may include knowledge that *p*, it is not reducible to that.

2.3.3 But Can't SKU Be Some Kind of Knowledge?

If SKU is not self-knowledge according to many contemporary accounts, can we think of it as knowledge at all? Perhaps, but to classify it as such does not provide as much explanatory power for our purposes. SKU is not knowledge that *p*; if it has any relation to knowledge, it is to one of the accounts of non-propositional knowledge. One such account is Eleonore Stump's account of Franciscan knowledge. Like Bertrand Russell's account of knowledge by description and knowledge by acquaintance,⁴¹ Stump

38. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Shelby-Bigge, revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford, 1978), 252. "But setting aside some metaphysicians of this kind, I may venture to affirm of the rest of mankind, that they are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement."

39. Cf. Quassim Cassam, ed., *Self-Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford, 1994); Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference* (Oxford: Oxford, 1982), 205-66; Sanford Goldberg, *Self-K* in the Routledge Companion to Epist. (305-15); Robert J. Howell, "Self-Knowledge and Self-Reference," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Studies* 72, no. 1 (January 2006): 44-70; Carol Rovane, "Self-Reference: The Radicalization of Locke," *The Journal of Philosophy* 90, no. 2 (1993): 73-97; Sydney S. Shoemaker. "Self-Reference and Self-Awareness," *The Journal of Philosophy* 65, no. 19 (October 3, 1968): 555-67; Crispin Wright, Barry C. Smith, and Cynthia Macdonald, eds., *Knowing Our Own Minds* (Oxford: Oxford, 1998).

40. Cf. Richard Sorabji, *Self: Ancient and Modern Insights about Individuality, Life, and Death* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2006), 1-94. Sorabji takes up a number of the issues raised here, including the existence and continuity of the self. Cf. also Barry Dainton and Tim Bayne, "Consciousness as a Guide to Personal Persistence," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 83, no. 4 (December 2005): 549-71; Galen Strawson, "The Self," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 4, no. 5-6 (1997): 405-28.

divides the realm of knowledge in two, though she does it through a creative typology between Sts. Dominic and Francis. On the one hand, there is the Dominican approach to knowledge, distinct for its penchant for abstraction, clear distinctions, and argumentation. On the other, there is the Franciscan approach, which is characterized by “acquaintance with stories and persons”.⁴² The Dominican approach is most akin to how knowledge is treated in much analytic epistemology. However, Stump argues that this approach, while wholly legitimate and important, by itself cannot encompass all philosophically interesting knowledge. In fact, it notably leaves out the philosophically interesting knowledge acquired via stories.⁴³ That is, Dominican knowledge does not include the kind of knowledge acquired in second-personal experiences (experiences in which S can say “you” to another person⁴⁴). The kind of philosophically interesting knowledge gained via second-personal experiences and second-personal accounts (or narratives) includes “knowledge of the ultimate foundation of reality, knowledge of morality, and knowledge of the good life”,⁴⁵ and, as might be expected, knowledge of other humans,⁴⁶ and even the self.⁴⁷

The appeal of Franciscan knowledge for SKU is that it includes knowledge gained through narrative, and there does seem to be something in narrative that is similar to how

41. Bertrand Russell, “Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 11(1910–11): 108–28.

42. Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness* (Oxford: Oxford, 2010), 41. Her typology can be found on pages 41–48.

43. *Ibid.*, 40.

44. *Ibid.*, 52. See especially Stump’s use of the Mary thought experiment, pgs. 51–53.

45. *Ibid.*, 47.

46. *Ibid.*, 61.

47. *Ibid.*, 56.

we understand the self.⁴⁸ However, Stump does not focus on Franciscan knowledge of the self; her account is largely concerned with knowledge of *other* persons. It is difficult to imagine a second-personal experience or account of the self, for instance. So we might say that SKU has some overlap with Franciscan knowledge, but ultimately the category of understanding has more potential when the subject and the object of knowledge are the same person.

2.3.4 Concluding Remarks Concerning SKU as an Epistemic Good

At this point, the notion of self-knowledge that has been extrapolated from Maximus has been clarified, tweaked, and cast into contemporary terms. While I have updated some things from Maximus's account, SKU remains consonant with what was laid out in Maximus in the relevant details. There is nothing about SKU, for example, that renders it irrelevant for *πρακτικη*, or the process of deification. But some questions remain concerning the actual acquisition of SKU. How do humans acquire such an epistemic good? More specifically, by what *processes* and in what *environments*? I will now consider these questions, which should elucidate the relevance of friendship for the acquisition of SKU.

2.4 The Social Dimension of the Acquisition of SKU

Without denying the role of introspection, the acquisition of SKU involves *social* processes and a *social* environment. That is, I cannot come to a full self-understanding all

48. This is similarly developed very suggestively, though not analytically, by Rowan Williams: "To know myself or understand myself is to be involved in a narrative exercise: I do not look for a timeless true self at the heart of all I do or say, but I do look for a *sequence of encounters I can narrate* [emphasis added] in which specific ways of seeing my history become available for me (and, presumably, specific versions of that history *ceased* to be available, versions that I now characterize as fantasy). I cannot sit down and decide I will embark on a search for my real self by thinking hard about what is essential to my mental life; I can only approach whatever the term 'real self' designates by sifting through remembered narratives in which I identify my problems or failures as arising from self-deception or self-protection, from some sort of flight from the real." *The Edge of Words: God and the Habits of Language* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 79.

by myself. As Rowan Williams observes, “to be a time-conditioned self is also to be a *social* self, a self formed in interaction. Who I believe myself to be is inseparable from what I have heard, the possibilities offered to me in relation and conversation ...”⁴⁹

Williams is right to note that I am dependent on others for my beliefs about, and therefore my understanding of, my self. We come to new beliefs (therefore knowledge) about ourselves partly from “what we have heard”, i.e., *testimony*. Although much of it is superficial, I rely on others to know many things: if I am writing well, if I am interacting with others in a kind and charitable way, if I have salsa on my shirt, if I am driving too slow, if there is something I am doing that is hindering my life of prayer, to give some examples. All this is given through testimony, and these utterances are then brought to bear on my self-understanding—revising, reshaping, or flat contradicting it.

It is only right that we come to self-understanding through others. We do, after all, depend heavily on others for many of our beliefs in general,⁵⁰ and therefore much of our knowledge *and* understanding. Why should this not be the case with SKU? After all, it hardly needs to be demonstrated that humans have considerable epistemic blind spots, even (or especially) concerning the self. Modern psychology has stated, perhaps overstated, that there is much that I do not even know about myself; some of it is hidden away, repressed, forgotten, or resting deep within the tumultuous depths of the id. The point is that there is much about myself that I do not know, and there are many complex factors that might contribute to this. The ubiquity of therapists, counselors, psychologists, and psychiatrists in our society may point to how widely held this insight is.

49. *Ibid.*, 82. Emphasis original.

50. This reliance on others is demonstrated in much recent work in epistemology. See notably Sanford C. Goldberg, *Relying on Others: An Essay in Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford, 2010).

Our reliance on others for knowledge, including the knowledge required to understand the self, places us not only within a social location, but also within a complex network of power relations. This has been observed by Miranda Fricker,⁵¹ who asserts that these power dynamics open the door for abuse and injustice. Her focus is primarily on the epistemic injustices, wrongs “done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower”,⁵² namely testimonial and hermeneutic injustice.⁵³ These harmful injustices not only erode one’s confidence as an epistemic agent, but also prevent one from becoming one’s true self. Though the injustices Fricker spells out do not directly have to do with self-knowledge, the basis on which she considers these injustices applies to the acquisition of SKU. The exercise and misuse of social power⁵⁴ can impact or even prevent our capacity to know—in this case, ourselves.

Of course, this is familiar to the experience of various marginalized groups who are stereotyped or systemically ignored, individuals who are abused (in whatever way), or children who are made to feel stupid because they struggle with a particular subject in school due to a learning disability. These exercises (or abuses) of social power cut off, so

51. Her account is emphatically a “socially situated” one. That is, “the participants are conceived not in abstraction from relations of social power (as they are in traditional epistemology, including most social epistemology) but as operating as social types who stand in relations of power to one another.” Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power & the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford, 2007), 3.

52. *Ibid.*, 1.

53. *Ibid.* “Testimonial injustice occurs when prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker’s word; hermeneutical injustice occurs at a prior stage, when a gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences. An example of the first might be that the police do not believe you because you are black; an example of the second might be that you suffer sexual harassment in a culture that still lacks that critical concept. We might say that testimonial injustice is caused by prejudice in the economy of credibility; and that hermeneutical injustice is caused by structural prejudice in the economy of collective hermeneutical resources.”

54. *Ibid.*, 13. Her definition of social power is as follows: “*a practically socially situated capacity to control others’ actions, where this capacity may be exercised (actively or passively) by particular social agents, or alternatively, it may operate purely structurally [emphasis original].*”

to speak, certain possible understandings of the self, to the extent that they are untrue; they prevent a person from truly understanding herself. What is grasped might be coherent and ordered, perhaps, but it is a misunderstanding nonetheless. It is the case that our social environment and the social processes by which we might acquire SKU are fraught with danger and open to possible abuses that are particularly damaging.

Not all people are trustworthy; it will not do to rely on some persons for the acquisition of SKU. There are a number of reasons why a person may not be trustworthy in this role. Firstly, a person may be morally vicious and abusive. He may often belittle other persons and feel some kind of pleasure in warping another person's view of herself. Perhaps it makes the abuser feel a sense of superiority or power that he does not believe he has access to otherwise. Perhaps the abuser is fearful of the abused and feels it is necessary to prevent her from seeing her potential. Whatever the reason, at the root it is a kind of moral vice that manifests itself in a hundred other ways. These persons, though unpleasant, are not uncommon in households, churches, universities, and legislative bodies around the world. We will call this kind of untrustworthiness *epistemic abusiveness*.

Secondly, a person may be untrustworthy because her faculties are limited in some way, either in capacity or access. Regarding capacity, a young child whose social faculties are not fully developed, or a person whose social faculties are permanently impaired, may not be adept at coming to know things about me and putting them together in a meaningful way. A four-year-old might tell me that I am "mean" because I am making him go to bed when he is not sleepy. But it is not reasonable to put much stock

into that particular locution because the child's ability to know things about my character is not sufficiently developed and therefore he is not trustworthy in that capacity.

Regarding access, a person might be untrustworthy because she does not have access to certain knowledge about me. Flattery is sometimes an example of this. Let us imagine that my wife and I have dinner with another couple that we just met. After relating the story of our engagement, one of the members of the other couple tells me that I am a "hopeless romantic"—which causes my wife to laugh because it is not true. Based upon the story, this person is not unjustified in making this assessment. But she does not have access to other stories and events that would work as defeaters for this belief concerning my general character. Knowing that she has such limited epistemic access, it would be unwarranted to entrust myself to her statement. She is speaking with only limited information. Let us call this kind of untrustworthiness, whether due to capacity or access, *presumptuousness*. Although this sort seems less pernicious than *abusiveness*, it is more commonplace and is not always so easy to dismiss as the examples above might suggest. In that way, it remains a potential pitfall for coming to SKU. After all, how difficult is it to refuse to accept flattery when it is subtle and has the semblance—if not the substance—of truth?

Thirdly, a person might be untrustworthy because she does not have the capacity to perceive my self properly. To illustrate the general point, my father grew up in northern Louisiana in the 1960s and struggled with reading due to dyslexia. Because of the lack of knowledge about dyslexia in that time and place, his teachers did not appreciate the cause of his learning difficulties and assumed that he was unintelligent and acted accordingly. In turn, this led to my father believing that he was unintelligent, which

was not true. Because his teachers did not have the capacity to perceive that his problems were rooted in dyslexia, their conduct impeded my father from understanding an important part of his self: that he was intelligent and enjoyed learning. This is likewise true for SKU; well-meaning persons who are spiritually immature or improperly trained to perceive the self in its relatedness to God are untrustworthy because they simply cannot see all the relevant pieces. We might call this form of untrustworthiness *imperceptiveness*.

These common forms of untrustworthiness put us into a bit of a conundrum: I need other persons to acquire SKU, but this necessary reliance on others opens me up to persons who may not only be unhelpful but actually impede the acquisition of SKU. I need others, but this exposes me to substantial risk. Therefore, we must assert that in order to acquire SKU, we don't just need other persons, but persons of a particular sort. We need persons who (1) are virtuous, not abusive or malicious; (2) have spent significant time with us so as to see us in light of many experiences; and (3) have properly trained faculties to perceive what is relevant for the acquisition of SKU.

2.5 Conclusion

Though other relationships might fit these parameters, it seems that friendship of a particular sort may be very helpful. It is with our friends that we feel most comfortable revealing ourselves, and it is a condition of friendship that friends spend much time together in a variety of circumstances. Not all friends have properly trained faculties, but this requirement does not exclude persons of this sort from friendship. Rather it places it within a particular species. This will be further developed in the next chapter.

In this chapter, I have developed a notion of self-knowledge, SKU, which is relevant for deification and has been categorized in contemporary epistemic terms. I have raised some issues for the acquisition of SKU, given our social environment and the potential for abuse we face, and made the suggestion that friendship is a relationship in which we might acquire SKU with lessened risk. This claim will need to be developed: what kind of friendship are we talking about? What are the processes by which this kind of friendship helps us acquire SKU? These questions will now be taken up.

CHAPTER III

FRIENDSHIP AND THE ACQUISITION OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will argue that a specific type of friendship—i.e., “spiritual friendship”—puts the human agent in a better position to (1) avoid the sort of epistemic pitfalls outlined in the last chapter, and (2) acquire self-knowledge that is relevant for deification (SKU). In these capacities, “spiritual friendship” helps the human agent to move toward the wider goal of deification.

“Spiritual friendship” is a term found in the Christian tradition that has been variously defined over the centuries;¹ I am defining it (at this point) as an intimate, non-familial, non-sexual relationship between human persons who desire union with God and have made some progress in the process of deification. I will not attempt to produce a synthesis of the tradition’s use of the term, “spiritual friendship”, but I will try to clarify and develop the common insightful intuition in the tradition that this form of friendship is helpful for the spiritual life.

In 3.2 I will provide a more detailed account of “spiritual friendship”. I will lay out some necessary conditions that will serve to locate it within the general phenomenon

1. A good and thorough historical account of this strand of the tradition is provided by Liz Carmichael, *Friendship: Interpreting Christian Love* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004). The most notable treatments of friendship in the tradition include Augustine’s (see Donald X. Burt, *Friendship and Society: An Introduction to Augustine’s Practical Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999)), Aelred of Rievaulx’s *Spiritual Friendship*, trans. Dennis Billy (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria, 2008), and Thomas Aquinas’s (see Daniel Schwartz, *Aquinas on Friendship* (Oxford: Oxford, 2007)). A recent, fascinating, and sometimes eccentric treatment can be found in Pavel Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, trans. Boris Jakim (Princeton: Princeton, 1997), 294-330.

of friendship, limit our purview, and give some direction for how it might place the friend in a better position for helping an agent acquire SKU. The object is not to provide an exhaustive account of friendship but rather to provide a notion of a kind of friendship that is recognizable and plausible and would function to place the friend in a better epistemic position for helping an agent acquire SKU. In 3.3, I will consider just how the friend *helps* an agent acquire SKU, given the conditions in 3.2. I will argue that this relationship places the friend in an especially good position for her to know relevant *p* about the agent and the agent's relatedness to God that can then be related via testimony to the agent. From there, because the agent trusts her friend, the agent will then integrate what is related via testimony into her SKU. In 3.4, I will consider three potential objections to this account.

3.2 Spiritual Friendship

What is “spiritual friendship” (SF)? Here I will provide some necessary but probably not sufficient conditions of SF in order to accomplish three tasks: (1) to situate SF within the general phenomenon of friendship, (2) to limit the purview of SF to manageable proportions, and (3) to consider aspects of SF that are distinct from general friendship, and which place the friend in a better position to help the human agent. The three sections below, 3.2.1-3.2.3, will address each of these tasks in turn. Once these ends have been accomplished, the implications of these conditions for the epistemic position of the friend in SF will be considered and clarified in 3.3.

3.2.1 SF within the General Phenomenon of Friendship

“Friendship” (F), generally speaking, will be defined initially as a very valuable, non-sexual, non-familial relationship of the deepest kind—what Aristotle referred to as

“character friendship”.² The chief difference here between F and SF, which will be examined more closely below, is that persons who are not pursuing the deified life can still have F, and this is not the case for SF. It should also be made clear that F is not synonymous with “acquaintance”, a sort of casual, amicable, but shallow relationship. So SF is a specific kind of an already specific kind of relationship. Because SF is a species within the wider phenomenon of F, the necessary conditions of SF therefore include necessary conditions in common with F, and any further conditions, while they may specify SF within the genus of F, will not conflict with these more general ones. The six necessary conditions of F, which will then extend to SF, are (i) likeness, (ii) reciprocity, (iii) preference, (iv) equality, (v) distinction, and (vi) shared experience. These conditions should be recognizable in our day-to-day experience of friendship, and they are observed in classic treatments on friendship such as Aristotle’s, as well as more recent work in moral theology, specifically that of Gilbert Meilander. I will also incorporate some critiques found in both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. I will try to address some of these observations and concerns where they are relevant as I elaborate on these conditions below.

(i) SF requires *likeness*, or a certain degree of commonality. In friendship, we share common values, experiences, activities, and virtue. That is not to say there must be identicalness between friends. Friends differ. But even among friendships between very different persons, persons who differ on things that are most central to them, there is at least the commonly held value of relationships with persons different from themselves.

However, it seems intuitively right, and has been observed before, that the more central

2. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1998), books VIII and IX in particular. See also John M. Cooper, “Friendship and the Good in Aristotle,” *Philosophical Review* 86, no. 3 (July 1977): 294-302.

the values that are held in common, and the more central the things willed, the closer the friendship will be.³ SF involves two persons who are seeking the deified life and have a desire for union with God as a central value in common. Since this is the highest and most central value, SF has the potential to be the highest and most intimate form of friendship.

Likeness in personal experiences is also important. Friendships with persons who have very different life experiences are not impossible, but certain obstacles exist. It would be difficult to build a friendship with a space alien who, although sentient and capable of communication, lived in gel form and spent her entire life protectively encased in aluminum. I am optimistic that friendships can at least be built on the common experience of being a human, but it seems like the greater the common experience, the smoother the friendship-building process will go.

But what about virtue? Some likeness is necessary there as well.⁴ Lucy must be virtuous in order to be of help to Sally, and Sally must be virtuous—to some degree—to see that help in the process of deification is desirable. But likeness in virtue seems to be important as well for even having a friendship in the general sense. Aristotle comments that only the virtuous can be friends.⁵ While we can think of scoundrels who are as thick as thieves, it does seem odd to assert that vicious persons would be valuable or desirable friends. If I desire to be a good friend, becoming virtuous is a good start. If I desire a

3. See Aquinas especially on this point: *ST I-II* q. 27 a. 3c; *III Sent. D. 29* un. a. 6c.

4. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean*, 141. “That then is perfect Friendship which subsists between those who are good and whose similarity consists in their goodness ...”

5. *Ibid.*, 143. “So then it appears that from the motives of pleasure or profit bad men may be friends to one another, or good men to bad men, or men of neutral character to one of any character whatever: but disinterestedly, for the sake of one another, plainly *the good alone can be friends*; because bad men have no pleasure even in themselves unless in so far as some advantage arises [emphasis added].”

good friend, I will probably avoid the petty, jealous, dishonest, or foolish. I *might* be amused by the company of a man I know to be morally depraved from time to time, but I cannot imagine that we would be able to have a meaningful friendship unless he acquired some virtue. After all, who would desire a deep friendship with someone incapable of loyalty, courage, or honesty? I will not go so far to say that virtue is a necessary condition of F, but it does seem to be an important part of it, and it seems probable that there is a positive correlation between virtue and the possibility of intimacy.

(ii) SF requires *reciprocity*,⁶ both in sentiment and action. There is a mutual affection between friends, and there is mutual beneficent action. To fail to reciprocate either sentiment or action is typically regarded as a failure in friendship, or at least a setback in the relationship that must be rectified in order to move forward. Regarding sentiment, I would not consider a person a friend who did not care for me, even if she acted on my behalf. I might appreciate her action, and consider her to be admirable, but not a friend. Her motivation may arise solely from duty but not care for me. We appreciate our doctors, police, sanitation workers, and public defenders when they act on our behalf, but they are not necessarily our friends.

As for action, we require that affection translate into beneficent acts. A person may protest her care for me, but if she walks past me when I have been beaten up and cast into a ditch, I could hardly call her my friend. At least I would consider this a serious betrayal of our friendship.

6. Cf. Gilbert Meilander, *Friendship: A Study in Theological Ethics* (London: University of Notre Dame, 1981), 36-52.

(iii) Friendship requires *preference*.⁷ This may cause us to bristle.⁸ After all, we think little of politicians who give jobs to their incompetent chums. But preferential treatment is not always, or usually, sinister. The fact that I wish to have lunch with my friend David, and not just anyone else in the world, is a matter of preference. The fact that I spend my time, my sentiments, and my beneficent action on a particular person, and not everyone or anyone else, is preferential. In that sense, friendship is exclusive, but that does not make it a sin. I am not a friend to anyone and everyone. I couldn't be, or the term "friend" would be meaningless.

(iv) Friendship also necessitates some relative *equality*.⁹ I say "relative" because I am not sure what it would mean for two persons to be *perfect* equals. Perhaps it is enough to say that friendship is not a relationship in which the power of one is subordinated to the other. Two persons may have faculties that do not function equally well, or experiences that make one person more informed about a particular subject than the other. In fact, it is hard to imagine any relationship in which these inequalities were not commonplace. This inequality is not *necessarily* a problem for the relative equality required for friendship, so long as it does not transform into subordination. Of course, subordination in relationships is not necessarily oppressive. One can have a good relationship in which there is an unequal power dynamic, such as with an employer, parent, or spiritual director. But these kinds of relationships are not friendships, per se. It

7. Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean*, 145. "To be a friend to many people, in the way of perfect Friendship, is not possible; just as you cannot love many at once ..."

8. Dealing with this apparent problem is at the heart of Meilander's account of friendship. See *Friendship*, 3.

9. Aristotle, *Nicomachean*, 145. "... equality is said to be a tie of Friendship."

may be possible for them to become friendships, but this transformation will require a shift in the power dynamic.

(v) As a corollary to this, it is important that friendships are relationships in which two persons maintain a *distinction* between one another. Relative equality in the power dynamic is necessary, but total equivalence in all things is not. Friends do not have to agree on everything, be interested in all the same things, value all the same things, or spend all of their time together. There must be common ground, but at the end of the day good friendship will not dissolve the distinctiveness between persons. We might know of relationships in which this occurs, but they are considered undesirable and unhealthy. I might also ask what conversations consist of between persons who are no longer adequately distinct. In a sense, isn't this just talking to oneself? This relationship may be a form of narcissism but not friendship.¹⁰

(vi) Friends must have *shared experiences over time*.¹¹ In other words, friends must spend face-to-face time with one another in a number of different environments over the course of years. How much time spent face-to-face? How many years? These are difficult to pin down with any specificity; to do so would unhelpfully burden the argument. The point is that friends see one another in many diverse scenarios regularly

10. This comes from Nietzsche's critique of friendship, primarily in the works he wrote between 1878 and 1882, i.e., *Human, All too Human*, *The Dawn*, and *The Gay Science*. See Robert C. Miner, "Nietzsche on Friendship," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 40 (2010): 47-69.

See also Kierkegaard's criticisms in the *Works of Love*, trans. Howard and Edna Hong (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), which are rooted primarily in friendship's preferential nature, and the possibility that friendship may just be a kind of self love. However, Kierkegaard may not be as negative as he has sometimes been interpreted to be. Cf. John Lippitt, "Cracking the Mirror: on Kierkegaard's Concerns about Friendship," *The International Journal of the Philosophy of Religion* 61 (2007): 131-50; Lippitt, "Kierkegaard and the Problem of Special Relationships: Ferreira, Krishek and the 'God Filter,'" *The International Journal of the Philosophy of Religion* 72 (2012): 177-92.

11. Aristotle, *Nicomachean*, 142. "Besides, all requisite qualifications being presupposed, there is further required time and intimacy: for, as the proverb says, men cannot know one another 'till they have eaten the requisite quantity of salt together' ..."

and continuously. In this way, Lucy comes by more and varied data, so to speak, concerning Sally.

3.2.2 Limiting Conditions for the Purview of this Project

There are two further limiting conditions to consider: SF is a relationship between two (vii) *human persons* that are (viii) *not family members, including spouses*. Of course, I do not mean that friendships (generally conceived) *cannot* exist outside these conditions. I do not wish to exclude two of my very good friends, my wife and our dog, from the realm of friendship altogether. However, I wish to place these conditions on SF in order to limit the purview. The issues of friendship, testimony, and self-knowledge are complex enough without considering non-celibate friendships (like those between spouses), friendships with animals that communicate in their own way but not as we do, or friendship with God,¹² an interesting but extremely complex topic. These friendships may indeed help Sally come by knowledge that leads to SKU, but to incorporate these relationships into my account would require far more attention than I can give them. Therefore, the category of SF will include only non-sexual relationships between humans who are not family members.

3.2.3 A Condition Specific to SF

So far, I have provided some necessary conditions that have narrowed the field down to a particular kind of close friendship, but there is a further condition that is required for SF if Lucy is going to be of help to Sally. That is, (ix) Lucy must be *spiritually advanced* enough to properly perceive Sally in her relatedness to her origin

12. On Aquinas's view of friendship with God, see Schwartz, *Aquinas*, 42. For a more recent treatment of the topic of friendship with God, see Paul K. Moser, "The Virtue of Friendship with God" in *Religious Faith and Intellectual Virtue*, ed. Laura Frances Callahan and Timothy O'Connor (Oxford: Oxford, 2014), 140-55.

and proper end in God. More specifically, *spiritual advancement* means that Lucy desires and is actively moving toward union with God, and has made some progress toward that end. Because of that, Lucy is able to perceive Sally in a way that is crucial to Lucy being helpful for Sally obtaining SKU.

This condition is ultimately what makes SF distinctive from other kinds of F. It should be clear that this condition does not exclude SF from F. There is no reason why spiritually advanced persons should not have friends. Further, there is no obvious conflict given the condition of *spiritual advancement* and the other conditions. The possible exception may be that *spiritual advancement* may conflict with *relative equality*. But this would only be a problem if the spiritually advanced friend, Lucy, used this inequality to subordinate Sally, which is not inevitable. Indeed, if Lucy is truly spiritually advanced, it seems that she would not push for this kind of power dynamic when she is not Sally's spiritual director.

This, however, raises a further question: If the two are relatively equal, at least inasmuch as Lucy does not subordinate Sally, then what does Lucy have to offer Sally that Sally cannot get herself? I could sidestep this problem by again asserting that Lucy and Sally do not have to be equally spiritually developed. In that way, Lucy can offer Sally insights born from Lucy's progress in the spiritual life that Sally has not advanced far enough to attain. But let us say that Lucy and Sally are roughly equal in their spiritual progress—does this erase Sally's need for Lucy's help? I do not think so. Although Sally may be able to see many things very clearly on her own and have great capacity for introspection, there will always remain a great deal that is hidden from her about herself, including sometimes her desires, complex emotions, intentions, and even character traits.

These can often be difficult to have epistemic access to as the subject, and can sometimes be more easily accessed by another person. For this reason, Lucy functions as a sort of mirror for Sally, allowing Sally to see in herself what she couldn't otherwise.

But this only raises another question: what does a friend do for Sally that her spiritual director cannot? I concede that there is much overlap in the relevant knowledge that p that can be transmitted to Sally by Lucy or her spiritual director. The difference primarily has to do with condition of *shared experiences over time*. The spiritual director only sees Sally in a particular setting and environment. Sally can relate her thoughts and feelings, but the spiritual director does not see them in action. This lack of diverse experiences shared with Sally over many years, in many settings, will make it more difficult (though not impossible) for the spiritual director to detect hidden desires, emotions, and even character traits. Because Lucy has access to these things, she will be more adept at mind-reading and making inferences about Sally's character—particularly on things that Sally herself is not aware of. This will be spelled out in more detail below.

3.3 How in SF the Friend Helps S Acquire SKU

Now that the necessary conditions of SF have been provided, we must consider how exactly such a relationship might function to help Sally acquire SKU while avoiding certain epistemic pitfalls. First, we must consider what “help” might even entail. In my account, Lucy provides relevant knowledge that p that Sally does not have access to, which helps her understand herself better in light of God. But what sort of knowledge that p is *relevant*? Next, we must consider how SF places Lucy in a position to obtain relevant p concerning Sally, how Lucy actually acquires this relevant knowledge that p , and then

how she relates it to Sally. Finally, I will consider how Sally incorporates what is transmitted into her prior SKU.

3.3.1 What Is Relevant Knowledge That *p*?

My account of how Lucy helps Sally acquire SKU is largely concerned with testimony. Lucy contributes testimonial knowledge that Sally does not have access to herself, which she can then incorporate into her wider body of self-understanding (SKU). But if we are to evaluate how Lucy might transmit relevant testimonial knowledge to Sally, we should clarify what this relevant knowledge might be both in form and content.

Broadly, relevant knowledge that *p* would be knowledge (1) concerning Sally's relatedness to her origin and proper end in God and (2) to which Sally does not have easy access. That is, Sally may not always have knowledge of what it is she desires, for example, or she may have mental access to a desire, but not understand what it means in terms of her proper relatedness to God. Lucy can provide relevant knowledge that *p* concerning both Sally's mental state, which she may not know or fully understand, and what this means in terms of Sally's relatedness to God.

In terms of content, this may more specifically include knowledge concerning Sally's intentions, desires, emotions, and moral character. While Sally is obviously not barred from epistemic access to these things, it is not a stretch to imagine that very few of us are fully aware of all of these things at any given time. Lucy therefore both reflects Sally's mind back to her, as well as helps Sally regulate the path to deification; that is, Lucy can let Sally know if she is moving in the right direction.

A few examples of relevant knowledge that *p* that Lucy might have (which could then be transmitted) would include the following sentences:

1. Sally serves the poor, but it is only to make herself look good.
2. Sally truly wants to be prayerful, but she also wants other things that keep her from that goal.
3. Sally was deeply moved when she saw the suffering of a stranger.
4. Sally is humble.
5. Sally's compassion reflects God's compassion.

This kind of knowledge that p held by Lucy bears on how and in what ways Sally concretely relates to God in two ways. First, in a continuous sense—things about Sally that persist over time: this would include knowledge concerning Sally's character traits (4 and 5). Second, in a sense specific to a time and place: this would include Sally's intentions (1), her desires (2), her emotional states (3), and whether or not Sally's character traits are in accord with God's in a particular moment (5).

Now that we have some grasp of what kind of knowledge would be helpful for Sally to acquire via Lucy in SF, I will argue that Lucy is in a good position to transmit this kind of knowledge concerning Sally.

3.3.2 The Epistemic Position of the Friend in SF

There is both a negative and positive aspect to Lucy's epistemic position regarding relevant knowledge that p in aid of Sally's acquiring SKU. Negatively, given the conditions above, SF should eliminate or at least make satisfactorily improbable the forms of untrustworthiness outlined in chapter 2. Given the conditions of *likeness* and *spiritual advancement*, Lucy will be virtuous and spiritually advanced, making her far less likely to *epistemically abuse* Sally—Lucy will not insult or belittle her. Given the condition of *shared experience*, Lucy will also be less susceptible to *presumptuousness* because she will have spent significant amounts of time with Sally in a number of different scenarios. She may still presume to speak beyond what she knows, but her knowledge of Sally will do a great deal to shrink that possibility. Given the condition of

spiritual advancement, Lucy is likely to be in the habit of contemplating creatures in reference to God. Lucy will then be far more likely to avoid the pitfall of *imperceptiveness*. Negatively speaking, Lucy's epistemic position makes the forms of untrustworthiness outlined in chapter two less probable than many other kinds of relationships.

However, the negative aspect does not get us quite to an epistemic position in which Lucy helps Sally actually acquire SKU; it only explains how Lucy helps Sally avoid the pitfalls. After all, a stranger who does not even know that Sally exists seems to be in a very good position for avoiding the kinds of untrustworthiness mentioned. What does SF contribute positively to Lucy's epistemic position? Two things stand out: a trust between Lucy and Sally that allows Sally to be open to being perceived and a developed capacity in Lucy for obtaining relevant knowledge that *p* due to *shared experience*.

Trust is clearly an important ingredient to SF. I will define *trust* (T) as that attitude which allows S1 (Sally) to willingly place responsibility (R) on S2 (Lucy) without the fear of such an ultimately negative outcome that would prevent S1 from doing so. This basic definition is highly interpersonal, which may not seem necessary. Even so, when we speak of having trust in an animate object like a car ("I trust that my car will get me to the store"), or some impersonal structure like the judicial system, we speak of it the way that we do a person and our attitude is quite similar—perhaps because behind these two examples are human persons. Some humans made my car, and several humans make up the judicial system. When I feel my car has failed me, usually my feelings of anger are eventually directed not at the car, but toward a person or persons—the manufacturers of my car or the most recent mechanic to work on it. Similarly, when I

feel that I have misplaced my trust in the judicial system, I am eventually upset with a person or persons and not *just* a system. This suggests to me that even though the term, S2, is sometimes a non-personal entity, our T is ultimately directed not to the non-personal entity but to some human person or persons behind it. This is why we feel disappointment when we find our T has been misplaced. This would be very strange if our T was truly in something non-personal.

How then does SF result in Sally having T regarding Lucy? If we consider the first six conditions of SF, there are some compelling reasons for Sally to place her T in Lucy. (i) When *likeness* exists between persons there is also some degree of predictability. I know myself to some extent, and my friend is like me. I can predict my own actions within a reasonable degree of accuracy, and because my friend is like me I can do this with her as well—though with a larger possibility of error. I am therefore more likely to know when it is good to place T in my friend. If I love literature, and so does my friend, then it is easier for me to entrust myself to her knowledge of literature because I personally know the depth and limits of this knowledge. (ii) *Reciprocity* entails a kind of contract of obligation between friends. I love my friend, and I do good acts on her behalf; I can therefore expect her to return this affection and action. This makes it more likely that I will place R on her without fear. (iii) *Preference* leads me to believe that if my friend is in such a situation that she must choose between my good and the good of another, she will choose my good. This makes it less likely that an ultimately negative outcome will come about from my placing R on my friend. (iv) *Equality* reduces the possibility that my friend will misuse R in order to subordinate me. If I share a secret with her, she will not blackmail me. (v) Likewise, the maintenance of *distinction* between

two friends makes it less likely that my friend will use R to forcibly conform me to her.

(vi) *Shared experiences over time* allows me to see the friend in enough situations to know when and in what circumstances it is wise to place R upon her. My friend may be financially savvy but terrible with children. I can trust her to advise me about finances but not to babysit. I know this because of our shared experiences over time. Each of these conditions alone may not lead to significant T, but taken together they provide a powerful impetus for Sally to have T in Lucy.

How does this T open Sally up to being perceived by Lucy? If R is the burden Sally places on Lucy to help Sally understand herself in reference to God, then Sally will not have fear of an ultimately negative outcome (such as might be feared from those untrustworthy persons discussed above) and will be able to be vulnerable and transparent with Lucy. That is, Sally will not engage in self-protective behaviors like what we might colloquially call “putting on airs”, for example. She will feel comfortable revealing her true self. If Sally has T in Lucy, she will provide Lucy with a far better opportunity to know Sally as she truly is in reference to God.

3.3.3 The Reliability and Trustworthiness of the Friend for Relevant Knowledge

Given the conditions of SF, it seems reasonable that they would lead to Sally having T in Lucy, which would then allow her to open herself up to being known in some way by her friend. By itself, this would not guarantee that Lucy would come to relevant knowledge of Sally, only that the opportunity was available. But if Lucy does not have the ability to evaluate Sally’s relatedness to God, for instance, Sally’s openness to her friend will lead to nothing. However, given the condition of *spiritual advancement* of SF, Lucy is capable of discerning Sally’s relatedness to her origin and proper end in God.

Because this is the case, Lucy has cultivated faculties that place her in a better position to perceive what is made available to her by Sally's having T in Lucy. We might compare this to a skilled art critic who is able to point out subtle features of a painting that were there all along but too obscure to notice without a trained faculty for art appreciation. The artist must paint these features in order for them to be perceived, but their intricacy also requires a skilled faculty on the part of the critic. It seems that something analogous is the case in SF. Sally's orientation to God is there to be perceived, but the Christian monastic tradition can well attest that spiritual matters—particularly when they relate to another person—are subtle, and it requires considerable skill to perceive and attend to them. SF assumes that Lucy's faculty is properly cultivated, thereby placing her in a better position to perceive Sally in that way.

If Sally is cognizant that her friend's perceptual faculties are cultivated in this way, this will also contribute to Sally's having T regarding Lucy. Given the condition of *spiritual advancement*, Sally has placed R on a person whose perceptual faculty makes it more probable that an ultimately positive outcome will result. That is, if Sally opens herself up to her friend, her friend is less likely to fall into one form of untrustworthiness outlined in chapter two, *imperceptiveness*. Because her faculties are cultivated, she will not fail to perceive what is there, or perceive what is not there. Lucy will therefore be more reliable in her ability to help Sally acquire SKU, and this makes Lucy more trustworthy.

3.3.3.1 Acquiring Relevant Knowledge: Perceiving the *λογoi*

If Sally has T in Lucy so that she is vulnerable and open with Lucy, how then does Lucy *actually acquire* relevant knowledge that *p*? From here I will consider some

ways in which, given the conditions of SF, Lucy can plausibly acquire this knowledge. The first will be developed from an insight of Maximus the Confessor: persons that are spiritually advanced and thus properly epistemically formed are thereby capable of perceiving things as they truly are, i.e., in reference to God.

For Maximus, the development of virtue in the first step of the process of deification (πρακτικη) heals the human person's epistemic blindness and opens up the possibility of contemplating the λογοι in the created order, i.e., God's original intentions for created things, in the second step (θεωρια). The human person is then able to perceive created things in reference to God rather than in reference to her own previously disordered desires that have now been properly ordered through the development of virtue. These many λογοι are manifestations of the λογος; they are diverse and particular and distinct from one another, yet find unity in the λογος.¹³ These manifestations would include other human persons. Lucy is both able to see Sally properly and the world properly, and therefore she can see the path to deification. Because Lucy sees these things properly, she can help Sally as she moves toward her proper end. Lucy knows the true state of things, and the way forward.

Perceiving the λογοι in the world and in Sally would confer to Lucy certain qualia that could contribute to knowledge that *p* that are quite relevant for Sally's understanding of her relatedness to God as her origin and proper end. If Lucy transmitted to Sally this knowledge via testimony, this would contribute to Sally obtaining SKU.

13. *Amb.* VII [1077C], trans. Constanas, vol. I, 95.

3.3.3.2 *Acquiring Relevant Knowledge: Mind Reading and Knowledge of Persons*

Another way the friend might come by relevant knowledge is suggested by Eleonore Stump's aforementioned account of Franciscan knowledge, specifically of persons.¹⁴ She suggests that a human person might plausibly come to know the emotions and intentions of another by means analogous to perception. Paired with Lucy's perceptual knowledge concerning the $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\iota$, this knowledge could indicate if and how Sally was moving toward her proper end, at least in particular situations and actions.

Franciscan knowledge of persons has the following characteristics. Firstly, it should be stated that within Stump's account, Franciscan knowledge of persons is a smaller species within the larger genus of Franciscan knowledge. In contrast to many analytic accounts of knowledge, in which knowledge is just true, justified belief (not accidentally arrived at), Stump's Franciscan knowledge cannot be reduced to propositions, knowledge *that* statements.¹⁵ Franciscan knowledge is a very expansive category, swallowing up and going further than Russell's knowledge by acquaintance;¹⁶ as such, Stump does not attempt to say what all examples of Franciscan knowledge have in common. Here it suffices to say that Franciscan knowledge incorporates philosophically interesting knowledge of persons.

Knowledge of persons distinguishes itself from other forms of Franciscan knowledge by having other persons as its object. There are a number of different ways in which a person might be the object of knowledge of persons, and a number of different situations. Some examples include facial recognition via perception, other non-inferential

14. Cf. Stump, *Wandering*, 40-48.

15. *Ibid.*, 51.

16. *Ibid.*, 61.

forms of recognition, deepened knowledge in light of a new experience, and an awareness of the presence of a person.¹⁷ Although these are all quite different, they are all similar in that they are acquired by second-personal experiences.¹⁸

What is a second-personal experience? Stump lays out the following conditions:

One person Paula has a second-person experience of another person Jerome only if

- (1) Paula is aware of Jerome as a person (call the relation Paula has to Jerome in this condition “personal interaction”),
- (2) Paula’s personal interaction with Jerome is of a direct and immediate sort, and
- (3) Jerome is conscious.¹⁹

Stump further clarifies these conditions by adding that a second-personal experience does not require physical closeness.²⁰ Rather, second-personal experiences are distinct from first-personal and third-personal experiences in that they require continuous, conscious presence between two persons, in some way.²¹ Given the object of knowledge being considered, and the conditions laid out, it seems both intuitively appealing and philosophically defensible to argue that knowledge of persons would emerge from these kinds of experiences, which would be necessarily common in SF.

Stump goes further than this and links her philosophical account of knowledge of persons to some recent work in cognitive science on the mirror neuron system.

Succinctly, the mirror neuron system is a group of neurons in the brain that allow human

17. *Ibid.*, 53-56.

18. *Ibid.*, 61.

19. *Ibid.*, 75-76.

20. *Ibid.*, 76.

21. *Ibid.*, 77.

beings to share their attention on a particular object, or on one another.²² This occurs when we do an action and then see someone else do it, and thereby experience that action “from the inside” of the other person.²³

This research is highly suggestive, and it seems to point to a normally functioning human ability to engage in “mind-reading”: that is, I am capable of *directly* acquiring knowledge of someone else’s intentions and emotions. I have a cognitive capacity to know the mental state of another without her telling me. For Stump, this mind-reading *is* knowledge of persons.²⁴ This equivocation is made largely on the basis of cognitive scientific research that suggests that mind-reading is *not* knowledge *that*.²⁵ Rather, it is analogous to perception in that it is direct, intuitive, and difficult to fully render in a knowledge *that* statement.²⁶ In some sense, the mirror neuron system allows us to directly apprehend the intentions of another analogously to how we might see a tree or hear a piece of music.

But is Franciscan knowledge of persons just perceptual? At the very least, there are some phenomenological similarities, as stated above. Although Stump uses perceptual language for mind-reading, she does not go so far as to equate mind-reading with perception. However, she does take the analogy quite far, and includes reliability as

22. Ibid., 68.

23. Ibid.

24. That is not to say that mind-reading is at the basis for all knowledge of persons, however. Stump concedes that much of our knowledge of other persons may be acquired through other means. Ibid., 73.

25. Ibid., 69.

26. Ibid., 71.

another similarity between mind-reading and perception. Perception is reliable, but not infallible. Mind-reading is similar.²⁷

How is Lucy's knowledge of persons of Sally related to relevant knowledge in my account? This question may appear to be problematic to my utilization of Stump's scheme, as relevant knowledge is presumably propositional if it is to be transmitted via testimony, and knowledge of persons is by definition not reducible to a proposition. That is, Lucy may come to know Sally's mental state, but if that knowledge is not propositional, how can she relate such knowledge to her? Simply stated, Lucy cannot relate *this* kind of knowledge. However, Stump contends that this knowledge of persons can contribute to and form a foundation for propositional knowledge. Stump uses the following example: "John knows *that* Mary is going to give him a flower because he first knows Mary, her action, her emotion, her intention—but these are things which he knows by, as it were, seeing them, and not by cognizing them in the knowledge *that* way."²⁸ We could see in this way how evaluations of action, intention, and emotion could be rooted in a knowledge of persons and then translated into relevant knowledge *that* and transmitted via testimony.

We then have a plausible account of how knowledge of the emotions and intentions of another could be acquired directly by the friend. But why wouldn't just anyone be able to mind-read anyone else? Why is this account particularly advantageous to the spiritual friend? Given the rootedness of the acquisition of knowledge of persons in second-personal experience, it follows that persons that have shared many second-personal experiences would be more likely to acquire knowledge of persons of one

27. Ibid., 73-75.

28. Ibid., 71.

another. Friendship necessarily involves many second-personal experiences, given the condition of *shared experience*.

If Stump's account is right, and I believe that it is, then normally functioning humans have a capacity to *directly* acquire knowledge of another's emotions and intentions. Because it is direct, Lucy can acquire this knowledge of Sally without Sally explicitly telling it to her. This means that Lucy could pick up on intentions or emotions that Sally is not even herself aware of, which then provides an opening for Lucy to transmit relevant knowledge concerning Sally's emotions or intentions that could contribute to her SKU, to which Sally would not otherwise have access.

3.3.3.3 Acquiring Relevant Knowledge: Inference and Moral Character

Although Lucy may be able to acquire a great deal of relevant knowledge concerning Sally, there do seem to be some considerable gaps. Lucy may be able to perceive, so to speak, whether a particular action arises from a humble intention, but that does not tell her if Sally actually *is* humble, for example. From the account so far, there is no indication that Lucy can know whether or not Sally has the sort of character traits that indicate whether or not she is oriented properly toward God. To fail to address this would be problematic on at least two counts.

First, it makes it seem as if Sally's character traits are generally inaccessible to any other person. But our interactions with other persons certainly do not reflect that kind of assumption. We may emphasize the need to withhold judgment, perhaps, but we do come to believe that certain people have certain character traits and we act accordingly. I make daily judgments based on these beliefs, such as whether or not a person can be entrusted with sensitive information, or whether a person is careful enough to drive my

car. To say that we are always, or even mostly, epistemically or morally wrong when we form these beliefs verges on moral skepticism.

Second, to neglect Lucy's epistemic access to Sally's character traits seems to fly in the face of our intuitions about friendship and knowing another person. Consider the following question: if I am curious about Sally's character traits, should I ask her friend, Lucy, or Charlie, who has met her only once? Intuitively, we would answer Lucy, because she knows Sally better. If Sally is a liar, Lucy will know. If she is magnanimous, Lucy will know. Friends seem to have epistemic access to one another's character traits, and we tend to operate on that assumption.

Though these intuitions concerning our epistemic access to a friend's moral character traits get us to a certain point, they do not justify Lucy's beliefs concerning Sally's character traits. Now, one might contend that perception gets us the whole way.²⁹ Why not just take Stump's account one step further, and assert that character traits, like emotions and intentions, can likewise be perceived (at least analogously)? This may be a tempting option, but I do not think it is a good one. Character traits are not like emotions and intentions. They are more complex, they persist over long periods of time, they are more reflective of the whole person, and they involve the weaving together of many more threads, so to speak. Further, I do not see a philosophical or scientific justification for pushing that account of mind-reading into the realm of character traits.

29. There have been arguments made that humans have a moral perception, in that we can actually *perceive* the moral character of a *particular action*. This, however, does not seem to extend to moral character traits of a human person. See, for example, Robert Audi, "Moral Perception and Moral Knowledge," *The Aristotelian Society* 84 (2010): 79-97.

Rather, it is safer to assert that Lucy comes to know Sally's character traits through a process of inductive inference. This is reflected in a typical sort of conversation about a person's character traits:

Charlie: Lucy, do you think Sally is a kind person? You are her friend, that's why I am asking you.

Lucy: Yes, she is.

Charlie: Why do you say that?

Lucy: Sally is always doing thoughtful things for others. Sally sends cards to people who are sick, she visits old widows, she is always willing to help me understand difficult problems in epistemology, and she always acts warm and welcoming to anyone she meets. I've been around Sally a lot, and she is always this way.

This conversation is notable for a few reasons. First, the answer Lucy gives to the question is not perceptual. That is, she does not say, "I see Sally as kind." If she did, we might assume that she is talking like a relativist, but we will not think she is using this perceptual language literally. Instead, Lucy provides instances in which she has perceived actions done by Sally. She affirms that this sort of action is normal for Sally, not an aberration. Of course, Lucy does not say, "From these particulars I will now inductively infer a general belief that Sally possesses the character trait of kindness because there is a sufficient number of particulars to render that conclusion satisfyingly probable." But, this is tacitly assumed. That is, Lucy will take the various experiences she has had with Sally in which she acted kindly, and Lucy will induct that Sally possesses the character trait of kindness, because a kind person is far more likely to act as Sally has than an unkind person. Lucy does not need to express all this—this process of induction is so common that it is nearly intuitive—but if she is challenged, she is likely to fall back on this kind of reasoning. Either way, in conversations of this sort, Lucy's answer is usually acceptable unless Charlie can think of instances that either show her claims are false, or complicate them by adding instances in which Sally was cruel, therefore showing that Sally is a

conflicted sort of person at best and not simply kind. But Charlie will not quibble with the method of inductively inferring Sally's character trait as such unless he is a particular breed of analytic philosopher.

The advantage of a relationship like SF for Lucy inductively inferring Sally's character traits is apparent. If an induction is stronger when there are more data available, then the large number of experiences friends have with one another constitutes a larger body of data and therefore a stronger induction. Further, given the state of Lucy's spiritual advancement, it is more likely in SF that Lucy will be able to correctly identify good character traits in others (being aware of them herself), and given her capacity to perceive the *λογoi* in Sally, she will be able to know whether or not Sally's character traits reflect a proper orientation to God. Thus inductive inference from common experiences between friends is an important way in which Lucy acquires relevant knowledge concerning Sally.

There are good reasons, both theological and philosophical, for determining that SF would make it possible for Lucy to reliably acquire relevant knowledge concerning Sally's orientation to God. The account outlined above does not pretend to be comprehensive; there may be a number of ways in which the friend could acquire relevant knowledge. However, this is a plausible and defensible enough account for the purposes of this argument. The question we face now is how this relevant knowledge might be transmitted by Lucy to Sally.

3.3.4 Testimony: Transmitting Relevant Knowledge

Of course, it is not enough simply for Lucy to have relevant knowledge concerning Sally's orientation to God if Sally is to fit that knowledge within her wider

SKU. Somehow Sally must also acquire that relevant knowledge. The most obvious means by which Sally might acquire the relevant knowledge Lucy has is through Lucy's testimony.

Naturally, this assumes that (1) testimony from Lucy to Sally is a valid means for Sally to acquire knowledge, (2) testimony is not reducible to other forms of acquiring knowledge, such as inference, and (3) justification for knowledge via testimony is external to the receiver of the testimony, all of which have been laid out and defended in considerable detail by others.³⁰ For this reason, I will not defend my dependence on testimony as a means of knowledge for my account, but will defer to the remarkable work of others on this topic.

But of course there are complications. After all, we do not simply accept just anyone's testimony in any situation. Consider three scenarios: (1) A man wearing big red shoes and painted face tells me that my pants are on fire. Let us say that he is right, but I cannot yet see the fire, or feel the heat, or smell the smoke. In this case, I probably will not accept it just because he said it because he is a clown and we do not normally accept the testimony of clowns because they are purposefully absurd. (2) I am on a plane and I hear a woman screaming, but she is behind the partition so that I cannot see what is happening. She happens to be screaming because someone has opened the overhead luggage compartment and the woman's poorly placed laptop has fallen onto her own head. Someone with an equally obscured view may tell me that the woman has been hit by falling luggage. But I may not believe him because I have no reason to think he is in a

30. Cf. Paul Faulkner, *Knowledge on Trust* (Oxford: Oxford, 2011); also Faulkner, "On Telling and Trusting," *Mind* 116 (October 2007): 875-902; Goldberg, *Relying*; Benjamin McMyler, *Testimony, Trust, and Authority* (Oxford: Oxford, 2011); Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (Oxford: Oxford, 1993).

position to know that. (3) An otherwise honest elderly man comes up to me and tells me that he has “got my nose.” But I will not for that reason tackle him and demand he give it back at once. I will recognize this as a (very strange) joke, and I will not believe that what he has said is true.

These cases illustrate that there is more going on in testimony than simply person A issuing a propositional locution that person B receives. The issue here is trust. In the first example, we may (or may not) like clowns, but we do not trust them as reliable transmitters of knowledge (or humor). But even when persons are more or less a blank-slate, just a person on the street, our acceptance of their testimony is often dependent on whether or not we have defeaters for believing they are in a position to know p , as in the second example. The man in the plane was not, so I do not accept his testimony. In the last case, we may know that the elderly man is honest, but the nature of his locution is not meant to transmit knowledge, so we do not accept it as such. We trust the man, but not the form of locution, i.e., a joke.

Is there, then, good reason to think that, given the conditions laid out for SF, Sally would trust the testimony given her by her friend, Lucy? If not, then Lucy’s acquisition of relevant knowledge is for nothing and contributes nothing to Sally’s SKU. But there is good reason to think that it does. As discussed above, Lucy is trustworthy—unlike the clown. Further, she is in a good position to acquire relevant knowledge also, as discussed above. Lastly, we can assume that the form of locution is itself trustworthy. When Lucy transmits relevant knowledge about Sally’s relatedness to God, her emotions, intentions, or moral character, she is not telling a joke or being sarcastic. In this way, it appears that

Sally is very likely to accept the testimony of her friend and thereby acquire relevant knowledge to which she does not have access by herself.

3.3.5 Acquiring SKU from Testimonial Knowledge

However, this does not yet get us to SKU. It is not enough merely to know that p concerning one's own emotions, intentions, or moral character traits. I must also incorporate that knowledge into a large body of understanding, SKU. In the previous chapter, I provided some thoughts on how this might occur, so I will not detain us here for long. As stated before, this kind of understanding is not so different from the kind we might have in the scientific explanations of gravity. The addition of new propositions may serve to alter understanding in a number of ways. I might see myself as kind, for example, but if one of my friends offers testimonial knowledge that I had unkind intentions in a number of instances, this may serve to revise or overturn my self-understanding. The chief difference is that the object of most scientific understanding does not itself shift and change over time, at least when we are talking about physical laws. String theory is not wrong one day and right the next. The self, however, does change. Given our temporal and changeable nature, this process of revision would have to be ongoing and occur fairly often. My self-understanding will always require some revision and occasionally a complete revolution. It is these kinds of revolutions that can lead to paradigmatic moments of repentance or renewed dedication to God, and they are often initiated through insight offered by friends.

3.4 Potential Objections

This concludes my account of how a human person can acquire SKU with lessened epistemic risk via the friend in SF. There are a few objections, however, that can

be raised at this point. (1) Is SF a realistic kind of relationship? Is the bar too high for these relationships to exist? If not, do they exist in abundance enough to be truly helpful? (2) If the friend is not infallible but merely reliable, then it is still possible for her to be wrong about a serious matter. If Sally is more vulnerable with her friend, Lucy, and Lucy speaks with her often about serious matters, then it is inevitable that Lucy will eventually be wrong about a serious matter. Doesn't this just invite a more serious kind of epistemic pitfall? (3) There is suspicion these days of epistemic authority,³¹ particularly in the context of spiritual direction.³² Who is to say that this account of friendship is not just a way of sneaking spiritual authority into the context of friendship? After all, isn't this kind of friendship exactly what persons with power and privilege would like to have with the marginalized, so that the privileged might distort their self-understanding and oppress them?

Regarding the first objection, if there are spiritually advanced persons, this sort of relationship is possible. It would seem odd to say that spiritually advanced persons, who are being shaped into greater likeness of a God who is by nature a communion of persons,³³ would not have close relationships and friendships.³⁴ Jesus, a paradigmatic example of spiritual advancement, has friends.³⁵ The second aspect of this objection,

31. Or authority of any kind. There are good reasons for this worry, and it is historically understandable (see Jeffrey Stout, *The Flight from Authority: Religion, Morality, and the Quest for Autonomy* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame, 1981)). But this anxiety over authority might be overstated. See Linda Zagzebski, *Epistemic Authority: A Theory of Trust, Authority, and Autonomy in Belief* (Oxford: Oxford, 2012).

32. For a treatment of spiritual direction that takes on some of these issues, see Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 40-54.

33. A compelling account of this view can be found in Zizioulas, *Being*, 27-49.

34. Even without such an articulated view of God, an anti-social stance to the world is strange and unacceptable for the Christian. See de Lubac, *Catholicism*, 13-20.

35. The Gospel of John emphasizes this the most. Cf. John 15:13-15.

whether or not these relationships are common, is irrelevant to my project. Something does not have to be common to be helpful. In fact, it seems probable that these relationships would be quite rare,³⁶ simply because spiritually advanced persons are quite rare. But that does not make them less helpful, and certainly not less valuable. Actually, in many realms rarity positively correlates to value, and this is likely the case with SF.

As for the second objection, my response is simply that we have no better options, but the potential benefits outweigh the dangers. We can shield ourselves from the possibility of dangerous epistemic pitfalls in our friendships, but if we do so we risk never being aware of relevant knowledge for our self-understanding. I would assert that this danger can be offset, to some degree, by spiritual and ecclesial practices, practices of introspection, and spiritual direction that can supplement, correct, and work in accordance with the relevant knowledge supplied by the friend. The friend can certainly be wrong, but this risk can be manageable when it is coupled with other practices that supply relevant knowledge from other, different angles. Thus SF is not to be relied on alone, but is part of a greater network of practices within the economy of SKU acquisition.

The third objection: Have I then found a way to get the oppressor back into the control seat, albeit a slightly more casual and comfy one? “So I can’t be your spiritual director and tell you what to do and who you are in any authoritarian way,” says the oppressor with a sly smile, “but can’t we still be friends?” This is not an unfounded concern. After all, if friendship occurs in the real world, which it must, then it occurs in an environment filled with systemic oppression of various sorts. I alluded to this in the

36. As are good character friendships, cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean*, 142. “Rare it is probable Friendships of this kind will be, because men of this kind are rare.”

last chapter. However, this problem is not fatal. It seems quite reasonable to assert that a spiritually advanced friend just will not fall into these sorts of problems, or if she does, they will be minimal—certainly less than someone who is not spiritually advanced. A person who is capable of seeing God’s intentions in the created realm should be expected to see divergences from those intentions, which include even casual forms of systemic oppression, and would conduct herself accordingly. Although a spiritually advanced person may still sin in this way, she can be expected not to fall headlong into these kinds of problems regarding power-dynamics. Remembering the condition of *equality*, in which the friend cannot subordinate the other, further alleviates this problem. To utilize the relationship to acquire power over the other would not be possible if SF is to be maintained. It is possible there may be occasional infractions, but they would not characterize the relationship if it were to be sustained.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided an account of how a specific form of friendship, SF, may help to alleviate the problematic epistemic pitfalls a person may have in her pursuit of SKU and help her to acquire it. I have outlined the type of friendship required for this and the process by which a friend might contribute to the human agent’s acquisition of SKU. Further, I have taken up relevant objections to my project. In the next chapter, I intend to draw my argument to a close and bring up potential avenues for future research into the intersection of deification, self-knowledge, and friendship.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

4.1 Summary

In the preceding pages, I have advanced an argument for how human friendship can contribute to the process of deification by helping the human agent come to greater self-knowledge. Acquiring self-knowledge, or SKU, is an important part of the process of deification: it is part of the wider noetic transformation that allows the human agent to properly see the world, God, and her relatedness to each. However, the social environment in which we come to understand ourselves is fraught with epistemic pitfalls that threaten our ability to acquire SKU. But human friendship, specifically SF, can help the human agent avoid these pitfalls, as well as acquire relevant knowledge that p that can be incorporated into SKU. In this way, friendship plays an important role in the process of deification.

Having made this argument, I would like to conclude by considering some potential avenues for future research suggested in the course of this argument.

4.2 A Systematic Account of Self-Knowledge Acquisition in the Process of Deification

The work taken up in this project gestures toward a potential systematic, analytic account of self-knowledge acquisition in the process of deification. Here I have outlined the role of friendship, but there are other ways in which we come to properly know the self. A full account of self-knowledge in the process of deification would need to include

treatment of the role of sacraments, spiritual direction, the study of Scripture, liturgy, prayer, and the church in helping the human agent acquire SKU, as well as the work of the Holy Spirit through all of these things. This admittedly ambitious project has the potential to bring together a host of currently interesting theological inquiries in a complex and profitable synthesis that would shed a great deal of light on the quest for self-knowledge in the life of the Christian, and the process of deification. Further, an extended treatment of this topic has the potential for making good on a common but relatively undeveloped theme in the Christian tradition: that self-knowledge and knowledge of God are intimately connected.¹

4.3 A Treatment of the Systemic Pitfalls in Our Epistemic Environment

Connected to the aforementioned project, and perhaps a starting point for it, is to consider other problems and epistemic pitfalls entailed in the process of acquiring SKU. In this project, I have taken a look at issues of epistemic injustice between individuals. But epistemic injustice extends as well to larger social networks and systems. The problems of systemic injustice, social and economic inequality, and the indignity faced by the poorest of the poor are all issues that have an impact on the epistemic environment in which we come to know ourselves. An evaluation of the epistemic pitfalls entailed in oppressive *systems* for the acquisition of SKU might be one way of developing this project. Further, it could create a fruitful bridge between work on deification and liberation theologies. Much liberation theology has already pointed toward the problem

1. See especially John Calvin, *The Institutes*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1960), 1.1.1-1.1.2, pgs. 35-38; Catherine of Siena, *The Dialogue*, trans. Suzanne Noffke (New York: Paulist, 1980), 25, 29, 48, 88. In my view, Rahner's ideas of the pre-apprehension of being, and unthematic knowledge, have the best recent claim to providing an account of this connection. See *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych, (New York: Crossroads, 1985), 24-89.

of oppressive systems for coming to know the self,² and their social criticisms could be helpfully employed for this wider systemic project. A full account of the systemic pitfalls we face in our epistemic environment in our quest to know the self would provide a better account of the problems facing SKU acquisition in the process of deification, but would also provide another very strong theological and pastoral case for investigating and critiquing oppressive power structures.

I see this avenue as particularly interesting and helpful for the field of theology, as it provides an opportunity for synthesis between areas of theological inquiry usually left disconnected. Projects that offer this kind of rapprochement between patristic studies, analytic epistemology, and liberation theologies offer a basis for potentially fruitful collaboration needed in the discipline of theology and would be beneficial for all of these areas of inquiry.

4.4 Concluding Remarks

The proper end for human beings is deification, but the process of deification is not an individualistic affair. It is a process that occurs within a social environment and requires social relations. In spite of this, human friendship has often remained at the peripheries of theology. As I have argued, friendship with humans is an important way for us to pursue union with God. It is *through* human friendships that we understand ourselves and purge our life of the destructive misunderstandings of the self that are unfortunately so common. The process of deification is therefore not a solitary endeavor, nor can it be. From beginning to end we must struggle toward that end with others, in friendships bound together by a desire for union with God.

2. This is true as well in some secular discourse, including discussions of feminist conscious raising, and Black consciousness. The focus in these discussions is more psychological than soteriological, however. Rachel Helton Hart pointed this out to me.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aelred of Rievaulx. *Spiritual Friendship*. Translated by Dennis Billy. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria, 2008.
- Alston, William P. *Beyond Justification*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 2005.
- Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologica*. Edited by William Barden. Cambridge: Cambridge, 1963.
- Aquino, Frederick D. "Maximus the Confessor." Pages 104-20 in *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*. Edited by Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley. Oxford: Oxford, 2004.
- . "The Synthetic Unity of Virtue and Epistemic Goods in Maximus the Confessor." *Studies in Christian Ethics* 26, no. 3 (2013): 378-90.
- Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Mineola, NY: Dover, 1998.
- Audi, Robert. "Moral Perception and Moral Knowledge." *The Aristotelian Society* 84 (2010): 79-97.
- Blowers, Paul. "Aligning and Reorienting the Passible Self: Maximus the Confessor's Virtue Ethics." *Studies in Christian Ethics* 26 (2013): 333-50.
- . "Gentiles of the Soul: Maximus the Confessor on the Substructure and Transformation of the Human Passions." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4, no. 1 (1996): 57-85.
- . "Maximus the Confessor, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Concept of 'Perpetual Progress.'" *Vigiliae Christianae* 46 (1992): 151-71.
- Brewer, Talbot. "Virtues We Can Share: Friendship and Aristotelian Ethical Theory." *Ethics* 115 (July 2005): 721-58.
- Burt, Donald X. *Friendship and Society: An Introduction to Augustine's Practical Philosophy*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.
- Calvin, John. *The Institutes*. Translated by Ford Lewis Battles. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1960.

- Carmichael, Liz. *Friendship: Interpreting Christian Love*. New York: T&T Clark, 2004.
- Cassam, Quassim, ed. *Self-Knowledge*. Oxford: Oxford, 1994.
- Cassian, John. *Conferences*. Translated by Colm Luibheid. New York: Paulist, 1985.
- Catherine of Siena. *The Dialogue*. Translated Suzanne Noffke. New York: Paulist, 1980.
- Cooper, John M. "Friendship and the Good in Aristotle." *Philosophical Review* 86, no. 3 (July 1977): 290-315.
- Dainton, Barry, and Tim Bayne, "Consciousness as a Guide to Personal Persistence." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 83, no. 4 (December 2005): 549-71.
- Elgin, Catherine. "Understanding and the Facts" *Philosophical Studies* 132 (November 2007): 33-42.
- Evans, Gareth. *The Varieties of Reference*. Oxford: Oxford, 1982.
- Faulkner, Paul. *Knowledge on Trust*. Oxford: Oxford, 2011.
- . "On Telling and Trusting." *Mind* 116 (October 2007): 875-902.
- Florensky, Pavel. *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*. Translated by Boris Jakim. Princeton: Princeton, 1997.
- Fricker, Miranda. *Epistemic Injustice: Power & the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford: Oxford, 2007.
- Goldberg, Sanford C. *Relying on Others*. Oxford: Oxford, 2010.
- . "Self-Knowledge." *The Routledge Companion to Epistemology*: 305-15.
- Gordon, Emma C. "Is There Propositional Understanding?" *Logos & Episteme* 3, no. 2 (2012): 181-92.
- Grimm, Stephen R. "Is Understanding a Species of Knowledge?" *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 57 (2006): 515-35.
- . "The Value of Understanding." *Philosophy Compass* 7, no. 2 (2012): 103-17.
- Hadot, Pierre. *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2002.
- Howell, Robert J. "Self-Knowledge and Self-Reference." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Studies* 72, no 1 (January 2006): 44-70.

- Hume, David. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Edited by L. A. Shelby-Bigge, revised by P.H. Nidditch. Oxford: Oxford, 1978.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. *Works of Love*. Translated by Howard and Edna Hong. New York: Harper & Row, 1962.
- Kimbriel, Samuel. *Friendship as Sacred Knowing*. Oxford: Oxford Press, 2014.
- Lippitt, John. "Cracking the Mirror: on Kierkegaard's concerns about friendship." *The International Journal of the Philosophy of Religion* 61 (2007): 131-50.
- . "Kierkegaard and the problem of special relationships: Ferreira, Krishek and the 'God Filter'." *The International Journal of the Philosophy of Religion* 72 (2012): 177-92.
- Lossky, Vladimir. *The Vision of God*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's, 1983.
- Louth, Andrew. *Maximus the Confessor*. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- De Lubac, Henri. *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*. Translated by Lancelot C. Sheppard and Sister Elizabeth Englund, OCD. San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988.
- Maher, David P. "Contemplative Friendship in *Nicomachean Ethics*." *The Review of Metaphysics* 65 (June 2012): 765-95.
- Mantzarieds, Georgias. "Self-Knowledge and Knowledge of God According to St Gregory the Theologian." *Phronema* 26, no. 2 (2011): 11-25.
- Maximos the Confessor. *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers*. Two volumes. Edited and translated by Nicholas Constas. London: Harvard, 2014.
- Maximus the Confessor. *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*. Translated by Robert Louis Wilken and Paul M. Blowers. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's, 2003.
- Maximus the Confessor. *Maximus the Confessor: Selected Writings*. Translated by George C. Berthold. New York: Paulist, 1985.
- McFarland, Ian. "Fleshing Out Christ: Maximus the Confessor's Christology in Anthropological Perspective." *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 49, no. 4 (2005): 417-36.
- McMyler, Benjamin. *Testimony, Trust, and Authority*. Oxford: Oxford, 2011.
- Meilander, Gilbert C. *Friendship: A Study in Theological Ethics*. London: University of Notre Dame, 1981.

- Miner, Robert C. "Nietzsche on Friendship." *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 40 (2010): 47-69.
- Moser, Paul K. "The Virtue of Friendship with God." Pages 140-55 in *Religious Faith and Intellectual Virtue*. Edited by Laura Frances Callahan and Timothy O'Connor. Oxford: Oxford, 2014.
- St. Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth, compilers. *The Philokalia*, vol. 2. Edited and translated by G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware.
- Pelikan, Jaroslav. *Christianity and Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism*. New Haven: Yale, 1993.
- Plantinga, Alvin. *Warrant: The Current Debate*. Oxford: Oxford, 1993.
- Rahner, Karl. *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*. Translated by William V. Dych. New York: Crossroads, 1985.
- Riggs, Wayne D. "Understanding 'Virtue' and the Virtue of Understanding." Pages 203-26 in *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology*. Edited by Michael DePaul and Linda Zagzebski. Oxford: Oxford, 2003.
- Rovane, Carol "Self-Reference: The Radicalization of Locke." *The Journal of Philosophy* 90, no. 2 (1993): 73-97.
- Russell, Bertrand "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 11 (1910-11): 108-28.
- Russell, Norman. *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford, 2004.
- Schwartz, Daniel. *Aquinas on Friendship*. Oxford: Oxford, 2007.
- Shoemaker, Sydney S. "Self-Reference and Self-Awareness." *The Journal of Philosophy* 65, no. 19 (October 3, 1968): 555-67.
- Sorabji, Richard. *Self: Ancient and Modern Insights about Individuality, Life, and Death*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2006.
- Stout, Jeffrey. *The Flight from Authority: Religion, Morality, and the Quest for Autonomy*. Notre Dame: Notre Dame, 1981.
- Strawson, Galen. "The Self." *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 4, no. 5-6 (1997): 405-28.

- Stump, Eleonore. *Wandering in Darkness*. Oxford: Oxford, 2010.
- Stroud, Sarah. "Epistemic Partiality in Friendship." *Ethics* 116 (April 2006): 498-524.
- Törönen, Melchisedec. *Union and Distinction in the Thought of St Maximus the Confessor*. Oxford: Oxford, 2007.
- Wadell, Paul J. *Friendship and the Moral Life*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1989.
- Wessel, Susan. "The Theology of *Agape* in Maximus the Confessor." *St. Vladimir's Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (2011): 319-42.
- Williams, Rowan. *The Edge of Words: God and the Habits of Language*. London: Bloomsbury, 2014.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*, Revised 4th edition. Translated by G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte. Edited by P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.
- Wright, Crispin, Barry C. Smith, and Cynthia Macdonald, eds. *Knowing Our Own Minds*. Oxford: Oxford, 1998.
- Zagzebski, Linda. *Epistemic Authority: A Theory of Trust, Authority, and Autonomy in Belief*. Oxford: Oxford, 2012.
- Zizioulas, John D. *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's, 1985.

