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Knowing Yourself and Being Worth Knowing

ABSTRACT: *Philosophers have often understood self-knowledge's value in instrumentalist terms. Self-knowledge may be valuable as a means to moral self-improvement and self-satisfaction, while its absence can lead to viciousness and frustration. These explanations, while compelling, do not fully explain the value that many of us place in self-knowledge. Rather, we have a tendency to treat self-knowledge as its own end. In this article, I vindicate this tendency by identifying a moral reason that we have to value and seek self-knowledge that is independent of the reason that we have to value the beneficial ends that it helps us achieve. I argue that we are in an inescapable relationship with ourselves that requires both self-love and self-respect. Self-love gives us a noninstrumental reason to know ourselves, while self-respect demands that we take this reason seriously. To pursue a project of self-discovery carefully and for its own sake, then, is part of what it is to stand in a loving and respectful relationship with ourselves.*

KEYWORDS: self-knowledge, self-respect, self-love, respect, relationships

Introduction

Why should you know yourself?

Within moral philosophy, this question is typically answered in explicitly instrumentalist terms (the 'instrumentalist view'). Self-knowledge can be a means to moral virtue (Aristotle 1985; 1984; Plato 1997; O'Hagan 2012), autonomous self-governance (Meyers 1989; 2004; Roessler 2015; Baron 1998), and well-being,[1] while its absence opens the door to viciousness (Butler 1993; Smith 1976; Clifford 1879; Kant 1996; Linehan 1982) and frustrates our ability to get what we want (Cassam 2014; Tiberius 2008). As a descriptive thesis, the instrumentalist view holds clear appeal: it would be hard to deny, for instance, that knowing our desires helps us satisfy those desires. The view can also be motivated from the opposite direction, by comparing it favorably to a

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[1] Cassam (2014: 225–26); Hurka (2011: 90–94); Thomas (1986: 78). See also Tiberius, who argues that self-awareness (which requires self-knowledge) is both an instrumental good and constitutive component of the good life (2008: 129–33).

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noninstrumentalist account of self-knowledge's value. The idea of wanting self-knowledge for its own sake may call to mind the image of Narcissus endlessly gazing at his reflection in a pool of water. To avoid such condemnable self-obsession, we may want to insist that the value of self-knowledge is only as great as the value of the consequences it helps us secure.

In this article, I argue that, whatever beneficial consequences may result from having self-knowledge, we nevertheless have a strong moral reason to seek it for its own sake. While it may initially sound as though I am recommending that people become narcissistically self-obsessed, this article shows that an interest in self-knowledge for its own sake is actually a corrective to our narcissistic tendencies.

My argument proceeds as follows. After offering some clarifications about the project (section 1), I turn my attention away from self-knowledge and toward interpersonal knowledge (section 2). In doing so, I consider the reasons that we have to know *other* people, and conclude that we have a strong moral reason to know the people with whom we share loving relationships for the sake of knowing them. In sections 3 and 4, I use the results from section 2 to demonstrate why our relationship with ourselves, like our relationships with our loved ones, gives us a strong moral reason to know ourselves for the sake of knowing ourselves. I argue that we are in an intimate relationship with ourselves that, like its interpersonal counterpart, demands both love and respect. But whereas we have discretion with regard to what intimate relationships to form in the interpersonal case, we have no similar discretion when it comes to the relationship with ourselves. Rather, because our relationship with ourselves is inescapable, we are necessarily answerable to norms of both self-love and self-respect. Self-love gives us noninstrumental reasons to know ourselves, while self-respect puts constraints on the ways in which we may pursue this project of self-discovery. This means, among other things, that we have strong moral reasons not just to think about who we are, but to think about who we are clearly and carefully enough that we come to know ourselves.

1

Before proceeding to my positive project, I offer three clarificatory remarks. First, I will not take a stance on any of the epistemological debates about self-knowledge. I will assume that we can, in fact, have knowledge of ourselves, and I will remain mute on the question of whether this knowledge is of a fundamentally different kind than other types of knowledge. Thus, I will say nothing about the nature or extent of our so-called privileged access. The points I make in this article concern what we have strong reasons to value for its own sake and do not concern the means by which we can achieve what we are morally required to value.

Second, I do not argue that we should value all self-knowledge noninstrumentally. There are many trivial facts about ourselves—like the number of hairs on our head, the exact distance between us and the North Pole, or which sock we put on first this morning—that are at most valuable instrumentally. Rather, I show that a specific kind of self-knowledge, which Quassim Cassam has called 'substantial self-knowledge', should be noninstrumentally valued (2014: 29). Substantial

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self-knowledge is self-knowledge that pertains to facts about what makes us happy, what we value, what our characters are like, where our abilities and aptitudes lie, how we feel emotionally, and what we believe (Cassam 2014: 30). While Cassam provides criteria for determining whether a particular fact about oneself qualifies as substantial self-knowledge, he does not explain why these criteria are the right criteria or give an account of what, if anything, ultimately unites substantial self-knowledge into a distinctive category (2014: 29–32). There is, in fact, something that fundamentally unites all of the types of self-knowledge that Cassam labels 'substantial', and at the end of this article, I identify what it is.

Finally, while I argue that we have a strong moral reason to know ourselves, I do not claim that this reason is invariably overriding. Rather, my claim that we have a strong moral reason to seek and value certain types of noninstrumental self-knowledge is consistent with there being many situations in it would be inappropriate, or even morally wrong, to pursue self-knowledge given other facts about the situation. My position is also consistent with the possibility that we may at times overestimate the strength of our reasons to know ourselves, and thus inappropriately privilege them over other, weightier moral reasons.

2

Instead of directly investigating the reasons we have to know ourselves, first consider another question: What reasons do we have to know other people? Obviously, we have some purely prudential reasons. If you want a promotion at work, you will have a reason to learn whether your boss is a stickler about deadlines. If you want good relations with your neighbors, you will have a reason to find out how tolerant they are of loud parties and unkempt lawns.

We also have moral reasons to know people. To treat you with respect requires me to know *that* you're a person, insofar as it is your status as a person that largely determines what it means for me to act respectfully towards you (Darwall 1977: 36–40). But knowing that someone is a person gives us no insight into who she is as an individual person, and it is this sort of knowledge that interests me presently.

At times, morality *does* give us reason to obtain this sort of individualized knowledge. To treat people with respect may require that we know facts about their life circumstances or the etiquette norms that they observe. Respecting your coworker, for example, might require you to find out whether he observes any religious or ethical dietary restrictions before you decide to hold his retirement party at a barbeque joint. Here, the value of this individualized knowledge is once again instrumental—a little bit of personal knowledge about the people with whom we regularly interact helps ensure that we treat them with respect.

We have plenty of instrumental reasons to know other people. But we also have additional reasons to know the people with whom we share close friendships, familial relationships and romantic partnerships. These types of relationships, which I call 'loving relationships', are partially constituted by their participants' love for each other. To have a friendship with someone, for instance, is in part to love that person as a friend. And love provides us with reasons that cannot all be instrumental in nature. To understand what these reasons are, consider the

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distinctive mode of valuing that love involves. J. David Velleman describes loving people as caring for them as ends in themselves (1999: 338–75). We may appreciate the barista as the means to our morning coffee, but when we love someone, we do so without needing to appeal to the instrumental role that he or she plays in any of our ends. Harry Frankfurt describes love in similarly Kantian terms: "When we love something . . . we care about it not merely as a means, but as an end" (Frankfurt 2004: 42). To be sure, loving people typically involves more than just caring about them for their own sake. In particular, love often involves desires, emotional experiences, and vulnerabilities. But the particular desires and emotions that we feel toward our loved ones will vary greatly depending on the type of love that we have for them, and on the type of relationship that we share with them. Nevertheless, as Susan Wolf observes, caring about a person for their own sake is a feature of love that is common to every type of loving relationship (2015: 189).

My aim in this article is not to provide a full account of what it means to love another person, but rather to suggest that the particular type of caring that is associated with love is one that involves seeing the object of that love as a source of particular types of reasons. As Bernard Williams's famous example of the drowning wife demonstrates, our reasons for aiding, preferring, and supporting our loved ones need not bottom out in considerations that are in any way independent of the fact that you love them (Williams 1981). Instead, love gives us the reasons that inspire our devotion to our loved ones.[2] These reasons are often ones that we are eager to act on: when we love people, we typically want to come to their aid, support them through difficult times, and so forth. Love's reasons are also at least sometimes noninstrumental. To illustrate, consider the reasons you have to adopt your loved one's ends as your own. Perhaps you do so to make her happy or to help her live a fulfilling life. But even if your reasons for adopting her ends are instrumental, the reasons that you have to care about her happiness or self-fulfillment are not. Rather, your concern for these things can be fully explained by the love that you have for her.

Much of the philosophical literature on love's reasons focuses specifically on reasons for *action*. Loving people gives us reasons to help them, to contribute to their personal projects, and to save their life over the lives of strangers. But love, in addition to providing us with reasons for action, also gives us reasons to pay attention, to listen, and to try to know. To understand the pervasiveness of these reasons, think back to the fascination you felt towards your first crush or the interest you took in learning about your grandfather's war stories. If I were to ask you to explain why you were interested in *his* war stories over the war stories of the other veterans in the nursing home, it would be sufficient for you to say "I'm

[2] It might alternatively be said love involves, or is partially constituted by, these reasons for devotion, or that love consists in part in this devotion. I remain neutral on which description of the relationship between love and love's reasons is correct, but for my present purposes, I talk about love as giving us particular types of reasons. The claims in this article could, however, be translated into other terminology. Rather than saying that love gives us reasons to know, for instance, we could also say that love is partially constituted by an interest in knowing, and that this interest, in the context of a loving relationship, becomes something that we have a strong reason to pursue.

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interested because I love him." The love we have for others makes them uniquely interesting to us, and in particular, gives us reason to know them over and above any pragmatic, prudential, or moral reasons we may have already had.

One might object that in talking about the noninstrumental reasons that love gives us to know others, I have moved too fast and stacked the deck in my favor by appealing to the *beginnings* of love, rather than its middle or end. To be sure, the fascination that we feel for our loved ones often dissipates as we accomplish our goal of knowing them. It is easy to listen with rapt attention to everything that your first crush tells you about himself, but it is much more difficult to pay the same attention to a longtime friend and partner. The diminishment of interest that we sometimes have towards our longtime loves is, however, just what happens when we have largely accomplished the end that this particular reason of love motivates us to set. Seeing someone as worth knowing for the sake of knowing is consistent with not finding the story of the time she got stuck in an elevator as fascinating on the twentieth retelling as it was on the first. Even in these long-term loving relationships, however, we still have noninstrumental reasons to know. This becomes clear when we look at one of the hallmarks of falling out of love with someone: when, after a time, we lose interest in learning more about our loved one, our disinterest is usually a sign that our love has run its course.

Of course, we can love people with whom we do not share loving relationships. Outside of the context of loving relationships, love's reasons can be normatively weak. The senior partner's love for her junior colleague might, for instance, give her reason to learn about his life story, but she would owe him no explanation if she chose to privilege the reasons she has to maintain professional decorum over the reasons love gives her to get to know him. But when one is in a loving relationship with another person, love's reasons become especially weighty.[3] When we agree to enter into a loving relationship with another person, we affirm a commitment to act on the reasons that our love gives us to care about them for their own sake. Love's reasons, then, become moral reasons. This is not to suggest that the reasons that love provides in these relationships can never be overruled. Even in our most loving relationships, we regularly and reasonably privilege other considerations over the reasons that love gives us. Rather, to say that love's reasons are moral reasons within loving relationships is to point out that, when we are in a loving relationship with another person, we typically owe that person a justification when we choose to privilege competing interests over her, and that our unwillingness to act on love's reasons can at times make us a proper object of censure. If I decide to go out for drinks with colleagues after work instead of supporting my best friend through a personal crisis, then she could rightfully demand that I explain myself to her. If my excuse is not good enough, or if I make too much of a habit out of privileging other reasons over the reasons love gives me to care about her, then my best friend may rightfully blame me and question my commitment to our friendship. If I find that I cannot act on the reasons love gives

[3] The reasons that we have within loving relationships are not all reasons of love. Marriages, friendships, and familial relationships are complex social institutions, and as such, the reasons that they give rise to will be shaped by social convention and legal statute.

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me to care about her because I no longer love her, then I might owe it to my best friend to either end our relationship, or at least change it into one that does not require love from its participants.

Among the reasons we have within loving relationships is a noninstrumental reason to know the people with whom we share those relationships. Why is this? To answer, it is helpful to examine an example of a relationship whose participants are not interested in knowing each other. Consider a scene in Alice Munro's *The Beggar Maid* where the protagonist, Rose, considers why her soon-to-be husband Patrick loves her:

> Patrick loved her. What did he love? Not her accent, which he was trying hard to alter, though she was often mutinous and unreasonable, declaring in the face of all evidence that she did not have a country accent, everybody talked the way she did. Not her jittery sexual boldness (his relief at her virginity matched hers at his competence). She could make him flinch at a vulgar word, a drawling tone. All the time, moving and speaking, she was destroying herself for him, yet he looked right through her, through all the distractions she was creating, and loved some obedient image that she herself could not see. (1977: 85)

Patrick loves an idealized version of Rose that she herself cannot see, and that likely does not actually exist. And in loving this idealization, Patrick reveals himself to be fundamentally indifferent, and even inimical to knowing the real Rose. Insofar as he feels that he has any reason to know her, this reason is purely instrumental: some facts about Rose will be instrumentally valuable to Patrick insofar as they bolster his idealization. Likewise, Patrick will have a reason to avoid learning anything about Rose that might call into question his image of her. When, for instance, he discovers that the stepmother who raised Rose was rural and lower class, Patrick goes to great lengths to convince Rose (and himself) that her 'real parents can't have been like that':

> [Rose] saw that he was trying to provide for her a more genteel background, perhaps something like the homes of his poor friends: a few books about, a tea tray, and mended linen, worn good taste: proud, tired, educated people. (Munro 1977: 91)

We might say that Patrick's selective, instrumental interest in knowing more about Rose is not really an interest in knowing *her* at all. Still, Rose does no better by Patrick. Throughout their relationship, Rose shows a distinctive lack of curiosity towards him, and she seems unperturbed when she realizes that her landlady knows more about his family life than she does. When she ultimately marries Patrick, Rose quickly loses whatever small amount of curiosity she ever had toward him. Later, when she confesses to having an affair with another man (whom she does, as a matter of fact, find worth knowing for the sake of knowing), Rose finds herself completely uninterested in Patrick's reaction to the news (Munro 1977: 134).

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What can Patrick and Rose's unhappy marriage tell us about the importance of interpersonal knowledge to loving relationships? First, their case highlights the fact that it is a constitutive element of being in a loving relationship that we love the person with whom we share it, and thus that we want (at least some of the time) to act on the reason love gives us to know them. This is why, if Alice Munro were to explain to a reader why Rose and Patrick never had a loving marriage, it would be sufficient for her to point to the fact that neither ever had any serious interest in discovering who the other was.

It is, of course, not enough that we simply *want* to know the people with whom we share loving relationships. Rather, the norms of these relationships give us strong reasons actually to endeavor to gain knowledge of our loved ones. In this way, we have a strong moral reason *actually* to try to know the people with whom we share loving relationships. More often than not, we are happy to act on the reasons that love gives us. The love that we have for the people with whom we share these relationships, after all, makes us want to know them for the sake of knowing them. At other times, fulfilling this commitment may seem onerous: it can sometimes be frustrating, boring, or even upsetting to learn more about the people whom we love. And yet, when we continue to listen, we affirm that we see them as inherently worth knowing, even at the expense of our time, energy or well-being. That love gives us noninstrumental reasons to know our loved ones, and that these reasons become stronger within loving relationships helps explain why relationships based on projection, as Patrick's relationship with Rose was, are so far from ideal. We sometimes fall in love not with people, but with idealizations of people. When we do this, we construct our own story about who they are, and what they value. But when you start a relationship with someone (even if it is your idealization of her that motivates you to start it), you come to owe it to her to care about her as she is, and not simply as you want her to be.[4] If you try to keep the relationship alive in the ways that Patrick did, by refusing to listen to your beloved when she tells you things that contradict your projection of her, or by 'correcting' her when she expresses an opinion that you want her not to have, you not only threaten the stability of your relationship, but also mistreat the person with whom you share it.

When it comes to explaining why we ought to know our loved ones, an instrumentalist story is clearly inadequate. A certain amount of interest in knowing your loved ones is part of what it is to be in loving relationships with them. And a commitment actually to seeking knowledge of our loved ones is something that we have strong moral reason to have so long as we remain in loving relationships with them. While we may be able to construct a second-order account about the value of this sort of commitment—perhaps it could be argued that a commitment to knowing your loved ones for the sake of knowing them has

[4] The particular type of loving relationship that we share with another person also partially determines the types of interpersonal knowledge that will be most important to us. I want to know both my best friend and my mother for the sake of knowing them, but I do not want to know the same things about my mother that I want to know about my friend. Given that my mother is my mother, there are certain facts that I do *not* want to know about her. I am sure she feels the same way.

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benefits down the road that cannot be secured by a commitment to knowing them for instrumental reasons—this account would be motivationally inert and alien to our experiences of love and loving relationships.

3

In the interpersonal case, love gives us noninstrumental reasons to know the people whom we love, and being in a loving relationship strengthens these reasons. This means that knowledge of the people with whom we share loving relationships is something that we should seek, and indeed want to seek, for its own sake. How does this help demonstrate that self-knowledge is also something that we have noninstrumental reasons to want, and to seek out? What, in other words, do the normative demands of loving relationships have to do with the question of how we ought to treat ourselves? My answer, in short, is quite a lot. Just as we can be in better and worse interpersonal relationships, so too can we relate to ourselves in better and worse ways. Loving interpersonal relationships provide a natural model through which to understand the requirements that we must meet in order to relate well to ourselves. When we understand what it is to relate properly to ourselves, we will be able to see why we ought to be committed to knowing ourselves for the sake of knowing ourselves.

My argument in this section is as follows. I show that we are in a relationship with ourselves that is, by necessity, intimate and inescapable. Because we are stuck in this relationship, we have strong moral reasons to love ourselves. Because love gives us a reason to know its objects for the sake of knowing them, the reasons that we have to love ourselves imply a further reason to know ourselves for the sake of knowing ourselves. In section 4, I explain why this relationship is also answerable to norms of self-respect, which constrains the ways in which we may act on the reasons love gives us to know ourselves.

Relating to Ourselves and the Reasons of Self-Love

What does it mean to relate to oneself? Initially, the language of 'intrapersonal relationships' might be off-putting. We think of relationships as paradigmatically involving two people. If this were a necessary feature of relationships, then it would not be possible for us to talk about relationships with ourselves without first assuming some dualist theory of selfhood. But the very fact that we understand notions like self-love, self-hatred and self-knowledge shows that relationships need not always involve two people. Rather, having a relationship with ourselves is part of ordinary life. Here, I am not making any deep metaphysical point. By a 'relationship with the self', I mean merely to point out something that is assumed in every form of self-regard, be it cognitive or emotional, namely that we are capable of simultaneously regarding ourselves and being regarded. And the relationship that we have with ourselves, like the relationships that we have with others, can assume better or worse forms. We can take care of ourselves or neglect ourselves, and we can treat ourselves well or poorly.

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Here, we must ask what it means for our intrapersonal relationship to take one of these better forms. Joel Feinberg's discussion of self-love in 'Absurd Self-Fulfillment' gives us the beginnings of an answer:

> [S]elf-identity can be conceived as a kind of arranged marriage (I did not select the self that was to be me) that in a stable person ripens into true love, but in an unstable one sours into rancor and self-destruction. (2008: 178)

It is telling that in describing what it means to have a 'stable self-identity', Feinberg draws an analogy not just with any interpersonal relationship, but with marriage in particular. Marriages, when they are going well, are paradigmatic examples of loving relationships. Feinberg is not alone in analogizing the way in which we ought to relate to ourselves to a loving interpersonal relationship. This type of analogy goes back in philosophical history at least as far as Aristotle, who described the relationship that the properly self-loving person has with himself as a friendship (1985: 1166a1–b29). And it is also familiar to our nonphilosophical discourse. Fashion mogul Diane von Furstenberg, for instance, once began a speech to a class of graduating high school girls with the recommendation that they strive to become their own best friends (2015), while playwright Oscar Wilde likened self-love to 'a life-long romance' (1894).

Why think of our relationship with ourselves as a loving relationship? Certainly, most types of relationships will be perfectly fine even if their participants feel neutral towards each other. I do not have to love my accountant, for instance, to have a productive business relationship with him. And given the nature of our relationship, it would not be wrong of me if I never make any effort to form an attachment to him or his projects. But this sort of respectful disengagement is not an appropriate attitude to have towards someone with whom you share a close familial relationship. If you felt as neutrally toward your mother and her projects as you do toward your accountant, your neutrality would not constitute respectful disengagement, but would rather be a sign that you disvalue her and the relationship that you share.

To be sure, disengagement might be an *appropriate* response to one's mother, given other facts about the relationship. Nevertheless, it is a response that is far from ideal: even if we grant that neutrality is the best attitude that someone can have towards his mother given what she is like, we do not have to grant that their relationship is a good mother-child relationship. Rather, we can say that it is a shame that the relationship they have is one in which they cannot possibly live up to the central norms of loving relationships.

We can tell a parallel story about our relationship with ourselves. We are too close to ourselves to remain neutral on the subject. Rather, we must have some sort of relationship with, and some sort of attitude towards ourselves. While negative attitudes might be appropriate given what we are like, just as they may be appropriate attitudes to have towards awful spouses, they are not ideal attitudes given the nature of the relationship in question. Rather, just as a romantic

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partnership or friendship should involve love, so, too, should our intrapersonal relationship involve self-love. And so, it is to self-love that I turn my attention.

Self-Love and Self-Knowledge

Self-love, like its interpersonal analogue, is a mode of noninstrumental caring.[5] The reasons we have in virtue of loving ourselves, like the reasons we have in virtue of loving other people, are often noninstrumental reasons. We can see these noninstrumental reasons by considering why we are invested in advancing our own interests in a way that we are not invested in advancing other peoples' interests. The frazzled assistant professor might be able to answer the question of why she cares more about her tenure file than the tenure file of her colleague by pointing to the instrumental connection between tenure and increased wellbeing. But she would be hard-pressed to answer the further question of why she is uniquely invested in *her* wellbeing in similarly instrumentalist terms. Rather, her wellbeing is uniquely important to her for the same type of reason that it is uniquely important to her brother. Just as her brother loves her, so, too, does she love herself, and that love gives both of them noninstrumental reasons to be especially invested in her wellbeing.

In addition to giving us reason to be especially invested in our personal projects, self-love also supplies us with noninstrumental reasons to know ourselves. That we pay to ourselves a level of attention that would be inappropriate if directed at almost anyone else speaks to the extent to which we act on these reasons. We are often fascinated by facts about our personal history, invested in questioning our motives for even long-past or one-off actions, and eager to puzzle out what we really think about world events, even when we know that our opinions will not affect these events. While self-knowledge's instrumental value may partially explain the interest that we have in knowing ourselves, it cannot offer an exhaustive explanation. This is because our interest often persists past the point that self-knowledge ceases to be instrumentally valuable: even if you fully believe that uncovering some fact about your past is going to cause more harm than good, for instance, you can still reasonably prefer to uncover it.

That self-love would give us a noninstrumental reason to know ourselves in the same way that interpersonal love gives us a noninstrumental reason to know others helps to explain why an absence or deficiency of self-love is often accompanied by an indifference towards self-knowledge.[6] Think about some of the people whom we would intuitively consider to have little, if any, love for themselves. On one side of the spectrum, you will find the cult member who has committed herself to disowning every aspect of her individuality. She is not about to try puzzling out who she is, as she no longer finds that person worthy of attention. On the other side, you will find people who loathe themselves, or who have a cripplingly low sense of self-worth. To see how these forms of self-regard

[5] Self-love, like interpersonal love, involves attitudes, emotions, and desires. For this project, I focus on one aspect of self-love, namely the noninstrumental reasons that it gives us to care about ourselves.

[6] For an argument that self-love is required for self-knowledge see Bransen 2015: 309–21.

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frustrate our ability to value self-knowledge, consider the case of 'Suzanne', a woman who struggled to have a sense of self-worth after being forced as a teenager to give a baby up for adoption.[7] When asked to share her story with Ann Fessler, who was writing a book on the subject of adoption in the decades of *Roe v. Wade*, 'Suzanne' initially demurred. 'There's still that voice in me that says, "Who would be interested? No one cared then, why would they care now?"' she remarked, 'I was abandoned when it was right in everybody's face, so I still believe that nobody cares. My personal struggle is to get beyond thinking I'm not worth caring about' (Fessler 2006: 7). 'Suzanne's' struggle to lovingly care for herself is not separate from her struggle to see her own story as worth retelling. Rather, her inability to love herself adequately is partially constituted by the inability to see her life story as deserving of attention.

To be sure, people who lack self-love may at times pay a great deal of attention to themselves, and may have a great deal of self-knowledge. Self-hatred, for instance, may motivate us to fixate on our flaws. In these cases, self-knowledge, rather than being valued for its own sake, serves as a means of self-flagellation: the self-loather looks at himself not because he sees himself as worth knowing for the sake of knowing himself, but because he hates the person he sees and wants to punish that person by forcing himself to take a closer look at an image that he finds repugnant. The claim that there is a tight connection between self-love and an interest in self-knowledge is thus consistent with the possibility that an interest in self-knowledge may sometimes be indicative of less savory self-regarding attitudes.

That self-love gives us the same noninstrumental reason to know ourselves that interpersonal love gives us to know our loved ones is all that we need to establish that self-knowledge can be worth having for its own sake. But I offer the stronger claim that we all have a strong reason to seek self-knowledge for its own sake. On its own, self-love cannot give us this claim. *If* we love ourselves, we have a reason to know ourselves for the sake of knowing ourselves. But if we do not love ourselves, as 'Suzanne's' case illustrated, then presumably we will not have this reason.

'Suzanne's' case actually gives us the resources that we need to get out of this objection. To see what these resources are, one must keep in mind that, while 'Suzanne' may have internalized the message that her teenage pregnancy makes her unworthy of love, she nevertheless still wants to love herself. Her reason to love herself is the same one that we have for loving our close family members: in both cases, we are stuck in an intimate relationship that requires love from its participants. And so, 'Suzanne' will continue to have reason to love herself even when she cannot stand herself.[8]

[7] Fessler (2006: 7). I follow Fessler in using quotation marks to indicate that her name was changed to protect her identity.

[8] As an anonymous reviewer helpfully pointed out, we might think that this account implies that 'Suzanne' has wronged herself by failing to love herself. This conclusion would be worrying if it carried with it the further implication that 'Suzanne' is somehow blameworthy for her lack of self-love. I think we can say that 'Suzanne' is failing to act on strong moral reasons that she has to love herself, while denying that she ought to be blamed for this failure. Rather, we might think that the blame lies with the people who made it so difficult for 'Suzanne' to have a good relationship with herself.

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Here a worry arises. Although familial relationships typically involve love, we do not typically think that people can be required to love each other. This is in large part because we have little control over whom we find loveable. At best, we might try to cultivate love for others by endeavoring to see them in a sympathetic light in the way that Iris Murdoch described (1997: 312–13). But if your unpleasant mother is, even on the most sympathetic interpretation, unlovable in your eyes, then you cannot be blamed for your inability to love her. In this case, the best thing you might be able to do for your mother's sake and your own is to ensure that your relationship with her is not an unnecessarily close one.

If we cannot be expected to love people simply because we share close relationships with them, how can we be expected to love ourselves? To answer, consider two important differences between the intrapersonal and interpersonal cases. First, while we can make our intimate interpersonal relationships less intimate, we cannot make our relationship with ourselves less intimate. As such, we are stuck with the norms of that relationship whether we like them or not. But being stuck with an unlovable self is not as bad as being stuck with an unlovable mother. To see why, consider the difference between the control that 'Suzanne' has over herself and the control that we have over other people. While we have no direct control over other people, and thus can only indirectly work to change insufferable people into loveable ones, 'Suzanne' can directly work to make herself into someone whom she can love. She can do this both by taking steps to change her character traits and habits, and by trying to act in ways that affirm her value as a person. Further, even if 'Suzanne's' attempts at character changes are unsuccessful (as they often are), they may nevertheless still help to make her more loveable to herself. Even if 'Suzanne' had clammed up during the interview, for instance, the very act of agreeing to do it still would have served as an affirmation that she was someone whose story deserved telling. Our attempts to make ourselves loveable to ourselves, in other words, can sometimes themselves be the beginnings of self-love.

How Should We Act on the Reasons Love Gives Us to Know Ourselves?

The story thus far is as follows: insofar as we have self-control, we will be able to act in ways that either promote or frustrate the development of self-love. And given the intimate and inescapable nature of the relationship that we have with ourselves, we have reason to love ourselves, and to strive to make ourselves loveable. Because self-love gives us a noninstrumental reason to know ourselves, the reasons that we have to love ourselves give rise to this further noninstrumental reason.

Here we may ask: What does it take to act on self-love's reasons to know ourselves, and can we make mistakes about how to act on them? We can answer these questions indirectly, first by looking at a case of unideal love, and then by considering what is missing from it. Consider how self-love, instead of driving us towards self-knowledge, may instead blind us to our flaws, as Shakespeare demonstrates in sonnet 62:

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> Sin of self-love possesseth all mine eye,
> And all my soul, and all my every part;
> And for this sin there is no remedy,
> It is so grounded inward in my heart.
> Methinks no face so gracious is as mine,
> No shape so true, no truth of such account,
> And for myself mine own worth to define,
> As I all others in all worths surmount. (2002: 505)

In one sense, it would seem as though the self-lover is responsive to the reason self-love gives him to know himself. And yet, if there is something morally admirable about acting on love's noninstrumental reason to know oneself, we will not find it in Shakespeare's narcissistic self-lover. What exactly is missing from this type of self-inquiry that keeps it from being admirable? One answer that I reject is that Shakespeare's self-lover is, paradoxically, lacking self-love. I think we can grant that Shakespeare's self-lover does indeed love himself, insofar as he cares about himself for his own sake in a way that is indicative of love. Instead, I think we should say that love in both its interpersonal and intrapersonal forms can be more or less ideal, and that Shakespeare's self-lover represents a nonideal form of self-love. Our task, then, is to determine what it is about this form of self-love that makes it nonideal.

To do this, we may contrast the attention that Shakespeare's self-lover pays to himself with a more ideal form of self-inquiry. As an example of the ideal, I turn back to Rose, the protagonist in Munro's *The Beggar Maid*. Despite the scant attention she paid to her husband, it is clear in the novel that she has the sort of self-insight that many of us strive towards. In one scene, Rose finds herself wondering why she dislikes a younger party hostess. While looking closely at the woman, Rose reveals her own self-awareness:

> On the other side of the spool bed was a large mirror, hung suspiciously high, and tilted. Rose tried to get a look at herself when the girl was bent over the basket. It is very hard to look in the mirror when there is another, and particularly a younger, woman in the room. Rose was wearing a flowered cotton dress, a long dress with a tucked bodice and puffed sleeves, which was too short in the waist and too tight in the bust to be comfortable. There was something wrongly youthful or theatrical about it; perhaps she was not slim enough to wear that style. Her reddish-brown hair was dyed at home. Lines ran both ways under her eyes, trapping little diamonds of darkened skin.
>
> Rose knew by now that when she found people affected, as she did this girl . . . it was usually because she, Rose, hadn't received and was afraid she wouldn't receive the attention she wanted, hadn't penetrated the party, felt that she might be doomed to hang around on the fringes of things, making judgments. (Munro 1977: 157–58)

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While Rose's insight into herself does not inspire any behavioral transformations (after noting her insecurity, she proceeds to seek out the very attention that she wishes she did not crave from the other partygoers), there is nevertheless something admirable about it. Rose looks at herself in the mirror (quite literally) in order to see herself as she is, and not as she wants herself to be. In this way, she extends to herself the same careful attention that we hope our loved ones extend to us.

Rose's attempts at self-scrutiny are admirable in a way that Shakespeare's self-lover's narcissistic navel-gazing is not. And the difference between Rose and the self-lover, I think, has to do with the ways in which each attends to their project of self-discovery. While Rose and the self-lover see themselves as worth knowing for the sake of knowing, only Rose takes seriously the task of knowing herself. She tries to see herself for the flawed person she actually is, while Shakespeare's self-lover chooses to focus his attention selectively on his most attractive parts. In the next section, I argue that the difference between Rose and Shakespeare's self-lover is ultimately a difference in self-respect. While Rose's and Shakespeare's self-lovers both love themselves, Rose's self-love involves self-respect in a way that Shakespeare's self-lover's does not. Self-respect, I claim, holds us back from paying unduly selective and objectifying attention to ourselves.

4

I have two aims in this section. The first is to show that among the norms that govern our relationship with ourselves are norms of self-respect. The second is to elaborate on the connection between self-respect and our pursuit of self-knowledge. Specifically, I argue that abiding by these norms both limits the ways in which we can pursue our project of self-discovery and helps to make us into the sort of self-loving people who see self-knowledge as something worth having for its own sake.

I begin with the first claim. The thought that our relationship with ourselves is answerable to norms of self-respect follows from the more general claim that all relationships require some form of respect from their participants. The type of respect that I have in mind here is what Darwall has called 'recognition respect' (1977: 36–40), and it is the type of respect that we owe to persons simply for being persons, where being a person involves having 'dispositions to act for particular reasons or a higher level disposition to act for the best reasons' (1977: 45; see also Kant 2002; 1996; Hill 1991; Telfer 1968; Raz 2001; Meyers 1989). Because respect is something that we owe to people regardless of what relationships we share with them, it is something that we automatically owe to the people with whom we share loving relationships. To treat our loved ones as they deserve thus requires us to meet special obligations that stem from love's reasons, and also to treat them with the respect that all persons are owed. This is why loving relationships require more than just love from their participants: two spouses can love each other deeply, but their marriage will still be destructive if they do not treat each other with respect. (See Scanlon 1998: 165 for a similar claim.) Likewise, whatever else relating properly to oneself involves, it must involve self-respect.

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Even if we grant that our intrapersonal relationship requires self-respect, why should we think that self-respect has anything to do with our pursuit of self-knowledge? If we look at the interpersonal case, in fact, we find that respect often holds us back from knowing others. This is because treating other people with respect largely demands noninterference. To respect you as a person, for instance, typically requires that I not paternalistically meddle in your affairs or force you to make the life choices that I want you to make. And so, while hacking into your email account or coercing you into telling me your secrets might make it easier for me to get to know you, the respect that I have for you as a person holds me back from such direct routes to interpersonal knowledge.

But while interpersonal respect often requires that we 'back off' from other people, self-respect carries with it the opposite demand. Respecting you, for instance, might require that I respect your decision to spend your life engaged in a project that I consider trivial, but intrapersonal respect carries with it the opposite requirement. The decisions that I make about how to live and what to be like are reflective of the capacities that make me a person and, as such, self-respect requires me to be invested in ensuring that they properly reflect the value of that personhood.

Self-respect thus has an aspirational dimension to it insofar as it requires that we strive to set worthwhile ends for ourselves, and that we be careful about the ways in which we pursue those ends. We ought to exercise this care for two reasons. First, the decisions we make about how to pursue the ends that we set, like the decisions we make about what ends to set, are reflective of our personhood. Second, by carefully pursuing our ends, we affirm that those ends, and ultimately the person who set them, are worthy of our respect. If we pursue our ends in ways that are self-defeating or independently self-disrespectful, we may be charged with having disrespected those ends, and also the person who set them.

This helps explain the distinction between Rose and Shakespeare's narcissistic self-lover. Both have been moved by self-love to commit themselves to a project of self-discovery. As with any end that one sets, there are better and worse ways of seeking self-knowledge. It is beyond the scope of this article to offer a full account of what these better and worse ways are. Nevertheless, it seems likely that, whatever else the self-respecting self-discoverer should do, she should at least be careful not to go too easy on herself in her pursuit of self-awareness. Rather, she should be willing to confront harsh truths and to accept that some parts of her self-conception might need to change in light of new evidence. An unwillingness to do these things would actively frustrate her ability to achieve the end of self-knowledge at which her project of self-discovery aims. And Rose, as I have shown, is careful not to go too easy on herself in this regard. When she looks at herself with a critical eye, she respects one of her ends, and by extension the person who set it. The love that she has for herself might have been what moved her to set it, but self-respect is what propels her to pursue it in ways that are conducive to achieving it.

This is not to say that Rose's self-scrutiny will always be successful. Even after carefully examining herself, Rose may still end up with some false beliefs due to

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bad luck, minor acts of epistemic negligence, interference from others, or environmental factors outside of her control.

Indeed, depending on the circumstances Rose finds herself in, it may be very hard, if not impossible for her to arrive at an accurate picture of herself. Nevertheless, even unsuccessful attempts at self-scrutiny, so long as they are the result of careful deliberation aimed at achieving an accurate self-conception, can still speak to an individual's self-love and self-respect.

Shakespeare's self-lover pursues his project without similar care. By paying selective attention to himself, he actively frustrates his ability to accomplish one of the ends that he has set for himself. His unwillingness to investigate himself in ways that are likely to lead to greater self-insight may in fact suggest that he doubts, on some level, that his actual self is worth getting to know.

While self-respect constrains the ways in which we may pursue self-discovery, it also helps us overcome some of the greatest obstacles to self-love. Consider the spiral of self-hatred that we can fall into when our actions fail to honor the commitments we have made or would like to have made for ourselves. The human rights activist who takes a job at a corporation with a history of human rights abuses, for instance, may come to loathe herself for violating her political principles. And with this self-loathing often comes a loss in self-investment: if she is such a hypocrite, the activist might think to herself, why should she care about honoring her commitments in the future? But self-respect demands this kind of care. To treat ourselves with respect, we must continue to strive for ideals that we have reasonably affirmed to be worth striving towards. In this way, self-respect both demands that we act in ways that will make us more lovable to ourselves, and that we be invested in ourselves and our lives in the way that self-loving agents are.

In the last chapter of *The Beggar Maid*, Rose recalls a moment in her childhood when her teacher, fed up with Rose's unwillingness to follow instructions, asked her, 'Who do you think you are?' (Munro 1977: 195–96). That this question can be an admonishment to not get too full of oneself, along with an encouragement towards self-examination,[9] reflects the extent to which self-respect, self-love, and self-knowledge are entwined within our relationship with ourselves. Self-love moves us to look closely at ourselves, while self-respect arrests our tendency to fixate on the prettiest parts of our image while ignoring our warts. To take seriously the project of figuring out who we are, and to see that project as worth doing for its own sake, is thus not a symptom of narcissistic self-obsession, but rather part of what it takes to stand in a healthy loving relationship with oneself.

5

There is now one last puzzle to resolve. Earlier I noted that not all self-knowledge is worth having for its own sake. Indeed, the person who thinks that there *is* something

[9] For a discussion of this passage, see Seyersted (1992: 21–22) and Munro (1982). When asked in an interview what she thought Rose achieved by the end of the novel, Munro observed that while she did not get 'the obvious things, the things she thinks she wants', Rose nevertheless achieved 'a knowledge of herself' (Munro, 1982: 19).

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noninstrumentally valuable about knowing how many of his friends are more beautiful than him, or how far away he is from the North Pole at any given moment is either condemnably self-absorbed or psychologically bizarre. In contrast, the type of self-knowledge that Cassam calls 'substantial self-knowledge' is, I think, something that we have noninstrumental reasons to want. We need not appeal to instrumental considerations, for instance, to explain why we are interested in figuring out why we made certain major life decisions, or whether we actually value what we purport to value.

What unites these types of self-knowledge into a single category and grants them their special value? The parts of ourselves that are worth knowing for the sake of knowing, I think, are the parts that are most directly relevant to the relationship that we have with ourselves. And this relationship is one that we have with a person. Given that the reasons that we have for wanting certain types of self-knowledge for their own sake are bound up in what it means to be in an intrapersonal relationship, it is no coincidence that the types of self-knowledge that Cassam labels 'substantial' are those types that speak most directly to our personhood.

This gives us the resources to explain why certain types of self-knowledge are not substantial. Just as you can learn your best friend's blood type without feeling that you have learned anything about *her*, so, too, can you learn that you put your left sock on first this morning without feeling that you know yourself any better as a result. When we discover something about our values, talents, preferences, significant life events, or motivations, in contrast, we do learn something meaningful about the person with whom we share our intrapersonal relationship.

Of course, not every fact about our motivations and life story will be equally interesting to us. As persons, we set ends for ourselves, and which ends we set at a particular time will influence what topics of self-inquiry matter to us most. As an image-obsessed teenager, you were probably more concerned with figuring out your pop-culture loyalties than you are now. Having a child, meanwhile, can make facts about your own childhood fascinating to you in new ways. But whatever parts of you are particularly interesting to you given your life circumstances, you will have a reason to know more about them that does not depend on the instrumental benefits that knowing them might bring to you. To be motivated to know yourself for the sake of knowing yourself is part of what is involved in loving yourself, which in turn is part of what it takes to properly relate to yourself. And properly relating to ourselves, by loving ourselves and respectfully acting on love's reasons, is something that we should all strive to do.

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