



Credible Catholic

CREDIBLE CATHOLIC

Big Book - Volume 13

FOUR LEVELS OF HAPPINESS



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Credible Catholic Big Book Volume Thirteen

Four Levels of Happiness

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Editor's Note:

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**This Volume supports The Catechism of the Catholic Church,
Part Three – Life in Christ**

NOTE: All teachings in the **Credible Catholic** materials conform to the **Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)** and help to explain the information found therein. **Father Spitzer** has also included materials intended to counter the viral secular myths that are leading religious people of all faiths, especially millennials, to infer that God is no longer a credible belief. You will find credible documented evidence for God, our soul, the resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and the Catholic Church, as well as spiritual and moral conversion.

Part One from the CCC is titled, ***THE PROFESSION OF FAITH***. The first 5 Volumes in the *Credible Catholic Big Book* and *Credible Catholic Little Book* fall into Part One. **Part Two** of the CCC is titled, ***THE CELEBRATION OF THE CHRISTIAN MYSTERY***. This is covered in Volumes 6 through 12. **Part Three** of the CCC is ***LIFE IN CHRIST*** and information related to this topic will be found in Volumes 13 through 17. Credible Catholic Big and Little Book Volumes 18 through 20 will cover **Part Four** of the CCC, **Christian Prayer**.

The Big Book can also be divided into two major movements – the rational justification for God, the soul, Jesus, and the Catholic Church (Volumes 1 through 6), and life in Christ through the Catholic Church (Volumes 9 through 20). If you would like a preview of this dynamic, please go to Volume 6 (Chapter 7) at the following link – [Chapter 7 – Where Have We Come From and Where are We Going?](#)

We all need to be Credible Catholics. St. Augustine said in his work, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*,

"Usually, even a non-Christian knows something about the earth, the heavens and other elements... Now, it is a disgraceful and dangerous thing for an infidel to hear a Christian, presumably giving the meaning of Holy Scripture, talking nonsense on these topics; ...If they find a Christian mistaken in a field which they themselves know well and hear him maintaining his foolish opinions about our books, how are they going to believe those books in matters concerning the resurrection of the dead, the hope of eternal life, and the kingdom of heaven..."

If we don't respond to these secular myths, who will?

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Introduction to Part Three of the *Catechism* and this Volume

Part Three of the *Catechism* concerns life in Christ, and more specifically, Christian moral life. The *Catechism* emphasizes the dignity of the human person, the formation of conscience, our responsibility to just and good actions within society, and the Ten Commandments. Particular emphasis is given to the Ten Commandments. Volumes 13-17 of *Credible Catholic* will treat these topics by first discussing the Four Levels of Happiness -- meaning in life (Volume 13), the reality of spiritual good and evil within the world, the tactics of the evil spirit and good Spirit (Volume 14), and the 8 Deadly Sins (Volume 15). This will prepare the way to treat spiritual and moral conversion (Volume 16), and personal and social ethics (Volume 17). The latter discussion gives special emphasis to the Ten Commandments (personal ethics) and the dignity of human beings and the necessity for justice within society (social ethics).

It may seem somewhat unusual to begin an exploration of a Life in Christ with a Volume on happiness, but this is not as strange as it might at first seem. As we shall see below, happiness is what all of us desire – and indeed it reflects all four kinds of human desire. In that sense, it provides an excellent looking glass into the human soul, for our powers, awareness, freedom, and purpose are all connected to our four fundamental desires which, in turn, determine whether we are happy in the moment, and more importantly, whether we will be ultimately happy and fulfilled in the long term. As you might have already inferred, this “look into our souls” reveals whether we have chosen to be narcissistic or altruistic, domineering or loving, disdainful or respectful, and worshippers of God or worshippers of self. In order to show these connections, we will have to begin with a definition of happiness followed by an exploration of six topics:

1. Four Kinds of Happiness.
2. Four Levels of Happiness.
3. The Comparison Game – the incompleteness of Level Two.
4. Escaping the Comparison Game – the move to Level Three.
5. Cosmic Emptiness, Loneliness, and Alienation – the move to Level Four.
6. How Do We Enter Into A Level Four Life?

With this as a foundation, we can then explore the reality of evil and the rationale for Jesus’ teaching on love, morality, and faith. Hopefully, this exploration of Christian morality will help the reader into a life of fulfillment, virtue, and worship that will in turn lead to not only sanity, peace, and authenticity, but also to eternal bliss with the Lord of unconditional love revealed by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter One

Four Kinds of Happiness

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Introduction

Have you ever found yourself asking any of the following questions?

- Why do some people think they're unhappy?
- Why are some people unhappy and happy at the same time — full and empty, fulfilled and unfulfilled?
- Why do some teenagers who have great potential have suicidal feelings?
- How can a genius be obsessed about someone who might be only slightly smarter or more fortunate?
- How can some people with obvious intellectual and practical gifts be so cynical that they take away the hope and joy of others who look up to them?
- Why do some extremely gifted people resent so deeply the little successes of people who do not have nearly as much — and even belittle those successes?
- Why do we sometimes move from a sense of superiority and contempt to a sense of inferiority and fear over the course of just a few minutes?
- Why do some people who have every imaginable form of giftedness and success drink or drug themselves into oblivion and failure?
- Why do people sometimes get a promotion, move into a new house, get a new car, win the esteem of others, and still feel a profound emptiness or loneliness – as if something were missing?
- Why do some people who look confident in every imaginable way feel profound insecurity about losing the esteem of others?
- Why do some extremely successful people come to the brink of suicide because of seemingly insignificant failures or embarrassments?
- Why do some people who are exceedingly loving feel a profound emptiness or loneliness?
- How is it that people who have made everybody else feel at home can feel as if they are not at home in the totality of things?

All of these questions are articulations of what we mean by *unhappiness*. But notice that in all of these questions, there is an element of surprise – of not expecting the unhappiness or emptiness – which makes the unhappiness even worse:

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I thought this would make me happy, but surprisingly, I'm still empty (or jealous, resentful, fearful, cynical, self-pitying, lonely...). I have no idea why I feel the way I do. Why is it that I had a great bolt of happiness for a while, and now I feel like somebody or something snatched it away from me?

This surprise, this non-anticipation of unhappiness, is, in part, what this volume is meant to address.

The reason for the surprise is that people often lack a deeper insight into happiness. Despite their best efforts, many people seem to be partially or even completely unaware of their complex selves – selves that seek truth, fairness, love, beauty, home, creativity, and even transcendence. If these people are to find a deep and efficacious happiness (and avoid the “unhappiness surprise”), they will have to know themselves in their complexity and this will take a little time to explore. But at the end of the day it will be worth it.

This is not going to be an easy “how-to” volume. If I were to write something like that, or give you a collection of aphorisms (which would fail to explore the depth of your being and meaning), all I would give you is a superficial (and in the end, unsuccessful) answer to your search for happiness.

To show you how important this endeavor is, one of the greatest philosophers, Aristotle, pointed out that happiness is the one thing that you can choose in and for itself. Everything else is chosen for the sake of happiness.¹ If Aristotle is right, this little term, “happiness,” is at the root of every decision we make and every action we perform, and therefore it determines whether you think your life has meaning or not, whether you believe are going somewhere with your life or not, whether you consider yourself to be successful or not, whether you think you are worth anything or not, whether your life is lived to the full or is wasted, and whether you believe that life is worth living or not.

Because this one little term can influence our whole identity and purpose in life, it will probably influence the kinds of friends you make, the person you want to marry, the career you pursue, the clubs to which you belong, the associations with which you affiliate, and everything else of relevance.

Therefore, it is worth spending a little time on this all-important term, which can have so much power and effect on us and those around us. If we can get a good definition of happiness, then we are very likely to live more fulfilled lives in our relationships, careers, associations, workplaces, communities, churches, and even in culture and society; and that fulfilled life could do a lot of objective good for individuals and the common good in this world and even the next.

I would beg the reader’s indulgence when I go into philosophical depth about love, conscience, meaning in life, transcendence, freedom, suffering, and all of the other profound ideas associated with the supposedly simple idea of happiness. My hope is not to give a recipe book for cooking up some happiness, but rather to give you as many tools as I have to

¹ Paraphrase from Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, Chapter 1.

discovering the richness of yourself and your potential so that happiness follows from your pursuit of the good life.

I. A General Definition of Happiness

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Perhaps the most general definition of happiness is “the fulfillment of desire” (whether that desire be superficial or sublime). It follows from this that unhappiness would be the nonfulfillment of desire. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to discover what our major desires are – what drives us, what we yearn for, and what we seek for satisfaction and fulfillment.

Throughout the centuries, philosophers (and later theologians, psychologists, and anthropologists) have elucidated four major kinds of desire (and therefore four major kinds of happiness). At least three of these four kinds of desire/happiness are addressed by thinkers as diverse as Plato² and Aristotle³; Catholic existential philosophers such as Max Scheler⁴ and Gabriel Marcel⁵; Protestant philosophers such as Soren Kierkegaard⁶ and Karl Jaspers⁷; Jewish philosophers such as Martin Buber⁸ and Abraham Heschel⁹; contemporary neo-Thomist philosophers such as Jacques Maritain,¹⁰ Josef Pieper,¹¹ and Bernard Lonergan¹²; phenomenologists such as Edith Stein¹³ and Simone Weil¹⁴; moral psychologists such as Lawrence Kohlberg¹⁵ and Carol Gilligan¹⁶; and many others such as Abraham Maslow (the psychologist behind the need hierarchy),¹⁷ Martin Seligman (the founder of the school of positive psychology),¹⁸ the developmental psychologist Erik Erikson,¹⁹ and theologians such as St. Augustine,²⁰ St. Thomas Aquinas,²¹ St. Teresa of Avila,²² and James Fowler.²³

² See Plato 1991, Books VI and VII.

³ See Aristotle 1999, Book I.

⁴ See Scheler 1960. See also 1987.

⁵ See Marcel 2001(a). See also 2001(b) and 2002.

⁶ See Kierkegaard 1987. See also 1988.

⁷ See Jaspers 2003. See also 1971.

⁸ See Buber 2010.

⁹ See Heschel 1976.

¹⁰ See Maritain 1974.

¹¹ See Pieper 1958. See also 1963.

¹² See Lonergan 1992, pp 709-752.

¹³ See Stein 2002.

¹⁴ See Weil 1978.

¹⁵ See Kohlberg 1981. See also 1984.

¹⁶ See Gilligan 1988 and 1982.

¹⁷ See Maslow 1997, 1970 and 1968.

¹⁸ See Seligman 2004.

¹⁹ See Erikson 1994.

²⁰ See Augustine 2012.

²¹ See Aquinas 1981, Part I-II, Questions 1-5.

²² See St. Teresa of Avila 1976.

²³ See Fowler 1995.

So what are these four kinds of desire which give rise to four kinds of happiness?

1. Desires connected with biological (instinctual) opportunities and dangers
2. Ego-comparative desires
3. Contributive-empathetic desires
4. Transcendental-spiritual desires

These four kinds of desire/happiness come from the following faculties (internal powers or capabilities):

1. The brain and sensory faculties (giving rise to the first kind of desire)
2. Self-consciousness (giving rise to the second kind of desire)
3. Empathy and conscience (giving rise to the third kind of desire)
4. Transcendental awareness (giving rise to the fourth kind of desire)

It is not my objective to explain these faculties in great detail here, because I have done so elsewhere.²⁴ However a brief explanation of them in relationship to the four kinds of desire/happiness will be helpful.

II.

The First Kind of Desire: External-Pleasure-Material

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The brain and sensory faculties give rise to the desires connected with *biological* opportunities and dangers. Thousands of volumes have been devoted to showing how the brain and sensory faculties in both humans and other animals are connected with a set of biological instincts necessary for survival and propagation of the species. Evidently, these instincts are connected with the acquisition of food, water, and shelter. They are also connected with herd and pack behaviors, procreation, and in mammals, affection. They also give rise to warnings about dangers linked to the sensorial world (predators and poisonous foods, etc.). Interestingly, animals seem to be limited to the quest for these biological opportunities and dangers, but human beings are not. As Bernard Lonergan points out:

[I]t is only when [animals'] functioning is disturbed that they enter into consciousness. Indeed, not only is a large part of animal living non-conscious, but the conscious part itself is intermittent. Animals sleep. It is as though the full-time business of living called forth consciousness as a part-time employee, occasionally to meet problems of malfunctioning, but regularly to deal rapidly, effectively, and economically with the external situations in which sustenance is to be won and into which offspring are to be born... When the object fails to stimulate, the subject is indifferent; and when non-conscious vital process has no need of outer objects, the subject dozes and falls asleep.²⁵

²⁴ See Spitzer 2000

²⁵ Lonergan 1992, p. 207.

Put simply if a pet is not presented with either biological opportunities or dangers—that is if there is no opportunity for food, shelter, affection or procreation, and there are no threats to survival, the pet will find a comfortable spot and fall asleep. Human beings do not do this. When we run out of biological opportunities and dangers, our minds become engaged with thoughts about the other three kinds of happiness: ego-comparative, contributive, and transcendent (explained below).

Human beings can become focused on the first kind of happiness, and push the other three into a subordinate position. We can become fixated by food, drink, cigars, and virtually any physical stimulus. We can also become engrossed in material things such as clothes, houses, cars, jewelry, and, of course, money. Though the latter group may start out as fulfilling needs of material comfort and pleasure, it can also fulfill the second kind of desire (ego-comparative desires). For example, “My house is bigger than yours, and I have more money than you.” This will be explained further below. Some people will fixate on the first kind of happiness throughout their lives. Most will move to the second kind of happiness. And many then move on to the third or fourth kinds.

III.

The Second Kind of Desire: Ego-Comparative

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Self-consciousness gives rise to ego-comparative desires. It is also connected with contributive desires in conjunction with empathy and conscience. I will explain each of these kinds of desire after a brief examination of self-consciousness.²⁶ In brief, self-consciousness refers to the human ability to be aware of awareness. We are not only aware of, say, this book in front of us, but we are simultaneously aware of *being aware* of it. If we want, we can actually be aware of being aware of our awareness! It seems as if we can double back on ourselves like a dog trying to capture its tail, but actually be like a dog swallowing its entire self – and even swallowing itself swallowing itself. This is exceedingly difficult to explain in the categories of macroscopic physics (and may even be inexplicable in terms of quantum physics²⁷). Some philosophers try to explain this as a kind of self-transparency – where one can, so to speak, be inside oneself and be present to oneself both as the thinking subject and as the object of thought at the same time. I won’t take up the complex explanation of this phenomenon here because I have discussed it in detail elsewhere (see Volume Two, Chapter Five). Instead, I would like to focus on the desires that give rise to happiness.

So what happens when human beings are conscious of their consciousness (capture themselves capturing themselves)? They can form their own private internal world – and even their own inner universe. This has the remarkable effect of juxtaposing “my inner world” with “the outer world.” As Jean Piaget indicates, children’s sense of the ego world (the inner world) is so dominant at first that they actually believe that it is at the center of reality and that everything in the outer world is subject to it. For example, they will think that the sun is following them. This absolutizing of the ego world requires interaction with other human beings (mostly parents)

²⁶ An extensive explanation of self-consciousness may be found in Spitzer 2010 (a) pp 5-27.

²⁷ See Spitzer 2010 (a) pp 5-27.

to recognize other perspectives different from their own. This reveals the presence and independence of other ego worlds as well as the independence of the outer world of non-human objects. The child soon learns that the outer world is really a shared world that is not subject to them, but rather maintains itself over against their and their parents' ego worlds.²⁸ Once this lesson is learned, children can go in one of two directions. They can either try to bring the outer world (and other persons' ego worlds) under their control and dominion (the second kind of desire), or they can give their inner world over to the outer world to help and enhance others (the third kind of desire). The first direction can occur through self-consciousness alone, but the second direction requires the help of empathy and conscience.

When self-consciousness is left to itself, it naturally tends toward ego-comparative desires. Most parents will recognize this natural tendency in their young children – they not only have a strong sense of independence, but they can exert it forcefully over against their parents with a resounding “unh unh” or just plain “no!” It does not take long for the child to learn that such expressions exert control over (and produce frustration in) their parents. Slowly but surely children also figure out how to manipulate their parents – to set one parent over against the other, or to use some of the parents' desires as leverage to get something that parents initially might not want to give. As most parents know, if they give way to manipulation too much, children will simply take over the household.

This natural tendency does not stop with childhood. When children reach adolescence, they become hyper aware of their peers, and that they are in competition with them on many different levels. This is not limited to winning or losing on the playground, but extends to achievement, popularity, status, beauty, intelligence, perceived intelligence, control, power, and every other form of honor or prestige. As children progress through grade school their worlds become blanketed with a myriad of ego comparisons – who's achieving more or less? Who's smarter or not so smart? Who's beautiful and who's ugly? Who does better in school and who does not? Who is better in sports and who is not? Who's winning and who's losing? Who's more popular and less popular? Who is admired and who is not? Who's favored by the teacher and who's not? Who's favored on the playground and who's not?

Now recall for a moment what was said above. When our desires are fulfilled, we experience feelings of satisfaction – happiness; but when they are not fulfilled, we experience dissatisfaction – unhappiness. As we shall see below, older children in adolescence who mistakenly think that ego-comparative happiness is the *only* kind of happiness will encounter grave challenges and problems which I term “the comparison game disaster.” But I am getting ahead of myself here, for my sole purpose is to briefly describe the four kinds of desire and their associated forms of happiness. I will explain the comparison game below. For the moment, suffice it to say that our remarkable capacity for self-awareness allows us to create our own private inner world (ego world) which has a natural tendency toward self-centeredness. This tendency, in turn, motivates us to bring the outer world (including other human beings) under our influence and even our dominion. It also plunges us into a world of ego comparison, seeking advantage in the areas of status, popularity, achievement, intelligence, athletics, beauty, control,

²⁸ See Piaget 1977, p. 137. See also Piaget 1930.

power, and every other domain of comparison. Left to itself, it can create an existential crisis in our lives.

IV.

The Third Kind of Desire: Contributive-Empathetic

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As noted above, contributive-empathetic desire arises in part out of our self-consciousness; for just as we may desire to bring things under the influence of our inner world, so also we can desire to invest our inner world in the outer world to help and enhance it – even to the point of great self-sacrifice.

In addition to self-consciousness, human beings have a very powerful capacity for *empathy*. It seems as if we make a connection with other human beings simply because we recognize their value *in and for themselves*. We can simply catch a glimpse of someone else's eye (the window to the soul) and not only respond positively, but actually allow the other person to affect us. If that person responds in kind to us, we interact with each other sympathetically. Children do this naturally – so much so that they will talk to complete strangers, trust them, and do things for them without question. This drive is so powerful that we have to train children not to be *too* empathetic, and to be more cautious.

Empathy (in-feeling; in Greek, *en-pathos*; in German, *ein-Fühlung*) begins with a deep awareness of and connection to the other as uniquely good. When we allow this awareness of and connection with another person to affect us, it produces an acceptance of the other and a consequent unity of feeling with the other, which opens upon an identification with the other tantamount to a sympathetic vibration. Though this unity with the feelings and being of another does not cause a loss of our self or self-consciousness, it does cause a break in the radical autonomy we can effect when we focus on ourselves as the center of our personal universe (egocentricity). Were it not for the capacity to be radically open to the unique goodness of the other, human beings might be inexorably caught up in egocentricity and radical autonomy. But empathy does not allow self-consciousness to become radically autonomous and absolute; it presents the possibility of relational personhood whenever we choose to accept our “unity of feeling with the other,” and to identify with the goodness of the other person.²⁹

In sum, empathy (the radical openness to the goodness of the other) opens the way to sympathy (when one accepts this openness). This gives rise to a sympathetic feeling, which at first creates care *about* the other, and then, if these feelings are accepted more deeply, care *for* the other. This care *for* the other produces a unity with the other whereby doing the good for the other is just as easy, if not easier, than doing the good for ourselves. This bond not only breaks through the drive for egocentricity and autonomy, but also creates the condition for generous and even self-sacrificial love. This powerful drive and capacity forms the basis for the third kind of desire – the contributive desire to make a positive difference to someone or something *beyond* ourselves). But it is not the only faculty (internal capacity) involved in this desire.

²⁹ See Stein 1989.

Philosophers have long recognized that *conscience* is one of the most important human faculties. It is generally viewed as an inner attraction to and love of goodness and justice and an inner shunning and fear of evil and injustice. Our love of the good leads to feelings of nobility and fulfillment when we do the good, while our shunning and fear of evil leads to feelings of guilt and alienation when we do evil. Thus this two-sided inner sense causes not only feelings, but a sense of our inner self before and after we do good or evil. We love and are drawn to the good before we do it and we feel noble and at home within ourselves after we do it. Conversely we are repulsed by and fear evil before we do it, and feel guilty and alienated after we do it.

These are not the only effects of conscience. Philosophers have also recognized that conscience has *intellectual* content enabling us to judge actions as good and just or evil and unjust. There is disagreement among philosophers about how much of this content is part of our natural awareness and how much is learned. Aristotle for example believed that *some* human beings could know a *considerable amount* of ethical content by nature.³⁰ St. Thomas Aquinas held that the vast majority of people know *general* precepts by nature, but must be taught more specific precepts. General precepts include do good, avoid evil, do not kill an innocent person, do not unnecessarily injure another, steal from another, or otherwise unnecessarily harm another; give a person their just desserts, and be truthful to yourself and others.³¹

Most of the above precepts come under the rubric of the Silver Rule: “Do not do unto others what you would not have them do unto you,” which might be rephrased as “Do not do a harm to others that you do not want done to you.” This is the minimal standard of justice upon which all other ethical precepts are based. The vast majority of us seem to know and believe in this basic sense of justice and good by nature, and if we do not, we are described by most psychologists as sociopaths.³²

Many philosophers, including Plato,³³ Aquinas,³⁴ and Kant,³⁵ do not think that this basic sense of and attraction to justice and goodness can be taught. If it is not present in children *by*

³⁰ See for example: “...but one must be born with an eye, as it were, by which to judge rightly and choose what is truly good, and he is well endowed *by nature* who is well endowed with this. For it is what is greatest and most noble, and what *we cannot get or learn from another*, but must have just such as it was when given us at birth, and to be well and nobly endowed with this will be perfect and true excellence of natural endowment.” Aristotle 1942, 1114b5-10. Italics mine.

³¹ “[I]t is fitting that we have bestowed on us *by nature* not only speculative principles but also practical principles...[T]he first practical principles bestowed on us by nature, do not belong to a special power but to a special *natural habit*, which we call *synderesis*. Thus *synderesis* is said to incite to good and to murmur at evil, inasmuch as we proceed from first principles to discover and judge of what we have discovered.” Aquinas 1947, p. 407 (Pt 1, Q. 79, Art 12). Italics mine.

³² “[A sociopath is] a person with a psychopathic personality whose behavior is antisocial, often criminal, and who lacks a sense of moral responsibility or social conscience.” (Cited “sociopath” in *dictionary.com* -- URL: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/sociopath>). This definition is corroborated by the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. See American Psychiatric Association 1994.

³³ In a famous passage in *The Meno* (sections 90-96) Plato argues that if virtue can be taught, why can't truly virtuous men teach their children virtue. He cites five examples of outstanding men in Athens whose children turned out to be “less than virtuous.” This indicated for Plato that there must be something about virtue with which people are endowed by nature.

³⁴ See the above quotation. *Summa Theologica*. Pt 1, Q. 79, Art 12.

nature, they will be incapable of moral responsibility and believing in moral precepts – they will be “natural sociopaths.” However the fact is the vast majority of children are not sociopaths, and among those who do show tendencies toward sociopathic behavior, the majority of cases are not genetically caused but rather caused by environmental conditions (mostly due to severe neglect by parents) or severe trauma in early childhood.³⁶ Evidently, these environmental and traumatic causes of sociopathic behavior presume that the affected children had a *natural* capacity for conscience and empathy, but lost it because of these circumstances.

In view of this, it should not be surprising that virtually every culture and religion on the face of the earth adheres to the Silver Rule and the common general precepts derived from it (see Volume Seventeen, Chapters One through Three). In European common law a distinction is made between precepts which are *malum in se* (evil in themselves, such as killing an innocent person) versus those which are *malum prohibitum* (evil because they are prohibited by legislation, such as going through red lights). Ignorance is no excuse for violating the law in cases of *malum in se*, but it can be for precepts that are *malum prohibitum*. Our common law expects that we will know by nature that certain behaviors are evil in themselves.

Can conscience be lost or suppressed, and could this explain sociopathic behavior? It seems so. As noted above there are very few children with sociopathic tendencies and the majority of these cases are not genetically caused, but rather caused by environmental and traumatic conditions. This means that the vast majority of children are born into the world with the natural capacity for conscience and empathy, but because of severe neglect by parents or severe trauma, they have lost a connection to these two essential natural capacities. Obviously these children are not to blame for their loss of conscience and empathy.

Could someone voluntarily lose or dull their capacity for conscience and empathy? It seems so. Adults who display no sign of sociopathic tendencies as children can choose, for example, to ignore their consciences for the sake of wealth, power, prestige, and other comparative advantage. At first, this ignoring of conscience produces self-alienation and guilt, but repeated and habitual ignoring of conscience makes the state of self-alienation and the feelings of guilt subside. Eventually one does not feel any repulsion toward evil and feels almost no self-alienation or guilt. At this point, a person has lost almost all of the connection to conscience and is well on the way to becoming a career criminal voluntarily.

Can conscience be enhanced? Evidently it can. Parents try to share their values with their children, and most children accept those values (based on their natural attraction toward justice and the good). Some people take these values much further, and pursue a life of virtue (through philosophy or religion). Many of these virtuous individuals become great role models, moral and

³⁵ Immanuel Kant believed that human beings have a *natural* awareness of the highest good as an absolute duty (categorical imperative), and used this as a basis for our *natural* knowledge of God: “Through the idea of the supreme good as object and final end of the pure practical reason the moral law leads to religion, that is, to the recognition of all duties as divine commands, not as sanctions, that is, as arbitrary commands of an alien, which are contingent in themselves, but as essential laws of every free will in itself, which, however, must be looked on as commands of the supreme Being, because it is only from a morally perfect (holy and good) and at the same time all-powerful will, and consequently only through harmony with this will, that we can hope to attain the highest good, which the moral law makes it our duty to take as the object of our endeavour.” Kant 2004. p.233.

³⁶ See American Psychiatric Association 1994 “Antisocial Personality Disorder.”

religious teachers, as well as cultural, societal, legal, and political leaders. Most of the progress that has been made throughout the centuries in the articulation of theories and systems of justice, individual, political, and economic rights, and even in the evolution of just democracy have been produced by these exemplary virtuous individuals. If we look beneath the surface of virtually all of them, we will find a profound awareness of and testimony to their sense of conscience, justice, and the common good.

In view of the seeming agreement among philosophers, psychologists, and the common law, it is justified to hold that people by nature have a conscience that attracts them to the good, repulses them from evil, and informs them about general precepts derived from the most basic form of justice expressed in the Silver Rule. It can be undermined by severe parental neglect and trauma in children and voluntarily undermined by those wishing to pursue a life of injustice and crime. However for many people, this natural capacity is valued, fostered, and trained, and it (along with empathy) becomes the foundation for human civility, common law, and social order.

The Contributive-Empathetic Desire. So what does this discussion of empathy and conscience have to do with our third kind of desire (the desire to contribute to someone or something *beyond* ourselves)? We saw above that empathy breaks through the tendency toward egocentricity and autonomy (produced by self-consciousness) through a natural attraction toward other human beings, and if deeply accepted can lead to sympathy, care, and even self-sacrifice for others. We also saw that *conscience* can overcome egocentricity and autonomy through a natural attraction to justice and goodness (and a natural revulsion toward injustice and evil), and that this could lead to high degrees of virtue and the common good. Empathy and conscience can work in two ways. They can prevent us from doing something negative, but they can also inspire us to move toward great heights of positivity. So for example empathy for someone might prevent a person from being insensitive or cruel, but it does not need to stop there. If we allow our empathy to reach us on the deepest level, it can also inspire us to do good for that person—far beyond just avoiding harm. Thus empathy can inspire generosity, self-sacrifice, and altruism. Similarly conscience can prevent a person from committing injustice by initiating feelings of self-alienation, revulsion, and guilt. But it need not stop there. It can also inspire feelings of nobility and fulfillment when we act for justice and the common good. There does not seem to be any intrinsic limit to the altruistic feeling inspired by empathy or the feelings of nobility inspired by conscience. And for this reason, people who assent to these inspirations tend to be heroically generous and idealistic.

We might think for a moment that such generosity and idealism is beyond the ordinary person, but it really is not, because all of us want our lives to be significant in some way. If we assent to the inspiration of empathy and conscience, we find ourselves wanting the world to be better off for our having lived. In fact, we cannot stand the thought that our lives might not make a difference to the world. Nobody wants to get to 70 years old and ask, “What was the difference between the value of my life and the value of a rock?” and have to say, “Not much.” If we did not contribute much to anyone or anything beyond ourselves, we would probably be in a state of meaninglessness, emptiness, and incipient despair. We will explain this in greater detail when we discuss the “comparison game” below (Chapter Three).

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We not only seek to have *some* positive meaning in our lives—*some* way in which we made the world better off for our having lived – our capacity for empathy and conscience inspires us to make as much positive difference as we can before we leave this earth. Making the world better for our having lived can become addictive because it produces its own kind of happiness. This kind of happiness does not feel the same as enjoying a good bowl of pasta (the first kind of happiness) or getting a standing ovation or a promotion (the second kind of happiness), but it does bring a sense of purpose which is both inspiring and enjoyable. After a while we begin to think about how much more we can do, and perhaps the kind of legacy we want to leave, and this gives us an even greater sense of purpose and inspiration. We can become virtually intoxicated by it—even to the point of burn out.

You might recall the movie *Schindler's List*, in which the main character Oscar Schindler began the war as a person completely caught up in the first and second kinds of happiness (material-pleasure and ego-comparative). He is riding his horse with a girlfriend one day, and stumbles upon the “cleansing” of the Krakow ghetto. As he stares at a little girl in a red dress walking through the pandemonium as if it typifies her life, he is moved by the sight. He has empathy for the little girl and his conscience is disturbing him about the whole dark and unjust scene. He rides away and tries to put it behind him, but events keep occurring affecting his conscience and empathy.

He buys an enamelware company with the advice of a Jewish accountant, Itzhak Stern whom Schindler regards only as a good business advisor and someone capable of running the business. Stern sees Schindler's limitations and so makes an appeal to Schindler to hire Jewish workers (instead of Polish ones) because of the much lower cost – appealing to the first two kinds of desire.

However, as the movie progresses, Stern is able to reach Schindler's empathy and conscience, and urges him not only to hire Jewish laborers for the business, but also Jewish teachers and intellectuals whose productivity is far less than the full-time laborers. Schindler accedes to Stern's request, and even allows him to “doctor up” the qualifications of these people so that he will not incur suspicion from the Nazis. At this point, Schindler has definitively arrived at the third kind of happiness. He begins to take greater and greater risks to get additional “partially qualified” Jews into the factory, and he finds himself having to justify some of his actions to the Nazi's—which he ingenuously does. He then begins to purchase Jews from the concentration camps to work in the factory—even to the point of spending his entire personal fortune. At the end of the film, Schindler takes personal custody of his Jewish workers to make sure that they are safe when the Nazis flee the allied advance.

We probably all know some people who are generous to a fault—they try to make an optimal positive difference to the people around them with every fiber of their being, and this frequently leads them to self-sacrifice and even into great risk of harm. We can classify such people as dominantly contributive – that is they find their happiness and fulfillment in the third kind of happiness, and are free and willing to sacrifice the first two kinds of happiness for it.

How do we typically satisfy this third kind of desire, and attain the third kind of happiness? We can do this by making contributions to others or simply by being with others.

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Anyone who helps another person will make the world better, and this will give purpose and inspiration to the person making the contribution. For example, you might help a family member or a friend to get a job or go to college. You might write a book that is helpful to others, invent a process to help an organization, volunteer at a community center, help church members understand their faith, or attempt to bring greater value or virtue to the culture.

This does not exhaust the ways that we can make the world better. We can also do this through pure acts of empathy – simply being with another, listening to another in times of suffering, spending time with children or an older relative, visiting a person in a hospital, or being with a person in mourning.

I recall when I was a younger man that I was visiting my sister's house during Christmas vacation and I was under pressure to get an article finished for a scholarly publication. My little nieces came up to me and asked, "Uncle Bobby, would you play Crazy Eights with us?" I immediately thought to myself, "I cannot afford the time to do this. I've got to get this article done. And besides, I hate that game." Yet when I looked at the longing in my nieces' eyes, I discerned that they would view my saying "no thank you" as a lack of desire to spend time *with them*, and that this might be viewed as a kind of rejection. They didn't think that playing Crazy Eights was a waste of time. It was an opportunity to *be with* me, and this "being with" signified something about their self-worth. Since I didn't have a chance to be with them very often, I changed my mind and decided to play. When the game was finished, they said, "Thank you, Uncle Bob—we love you," which gave me the occasion to say, "And I love you too!" Since I had spent the time with them, my words were not empty, *and they knew it*. I had to spend an extra hour at midnight working on the article to make up for my lost productivity, but in the contributive scheme of things, it was absolutely worth it.

When we accentuate the third kind of desire, our outlook and viewpoint begins to shift. Instead of looking for opportunities to gain material wealth, pleasure, or ego-comparative advantage, we begin to *naturally* seek opportunities to make a positive difference to the people around us – either through doing for others or "being with" others. We seek these opportunities for our families, friends, organizations, stakeholders within our organizations, communities, churches, and even for the culture, society, and the Kingdom of God. At this juncture we become very efficient in our use of time, learning how we can still take care of the first and second kinds of happiness (which have their proper place) while seeking optimal opportunities for the third kind of happiness.

Conclusion

The first three levels of desire reveal how wonderfully deep and complex we are. We not only have a physical and organic nervous system and brain, we have the remarkable power of self-consciousness which enables us to create our own inner universe; the power of empathy which enables us to connect with others through strong feelings of sympathy, care, and unity; and the power of conscience which not only informs and incites us to avoid evil, but to pursue the heights of goodness and social justice.

Yet this is the tip of the iceberg. We are so much more. We have powers to recognize and even probe perfection in truth, love, goodness and fairness, beauty, and being (which we discussed extensively in Volume Two, Chapter Two). We are not only capable of self-transcendence, but can make contact with a transcendent and spiritual world (discussed extensively in Volume Two, Chapter Three). We not only have yearnings for a trans-physical and eternal life, we have, as evidenced by new medical discoveries, a trans-physical “soul” capable of entering into that life (see Volume Two, Chapter One). We are remarkable mysteries, possessing transcendent powers far beyond the physical world, and these powers bring our self-consciousness, empathy, and conscience to new, almost inestimable heights.

Chapter Two

Four Levels of Happiness

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Introduction

We are now in a position to explore the relationship among the four kinds of happiness, as well as the journey that takes us from one kind to another. This volume will explore that journey in five stages: (1) the four levels of happiness (Chapter Two), (2) the comparison game (Chapter Three), (3) the way out of the comparison game – moving to Level Three (Chapter Four), (4) cosmic emptiness, loneliness and alienation (Chapter Five), (5) moving out of cosmic emptiness, loneliness and alienation—the transition to Level Four (Chapter Six). These discussions will show why most of us cannot be completely satisfied by the first two kinds of happiness, provoking us to look for something more – something that will be ultimately satisfying – the third and fourth kinds of happiness.

I.

The Four Levels of Happiness

Up to now, we have talked about four *kinds* of desire or happiness. However, as Plato, Aristotle, and other philosophers noticed they may be organized into four *levels* on the basis of their pervasiveness, endurance, and depth. The following chart will be helpful in assessing these three criteria and the four levels of happiness.

FOUR LEVELS OF DESIRE - HAPPINESS			
<p>1 - External - Pleasure - Material</p> <p>Source: Brain and sensory faculties</p> <p>Satisfaction: Food, drink, shelter, affection, procreation, and material satisfaction - clothes.</p> <p>Problem: Superficial, profound emptiness, reduces self to the merely material</p>	<p>2 - Ego-Comparative</p> <p>Source: Self-consciousness - trying to bring the outer-world under the influence or dominion of the inner-world (ego world)</p> <p>Satisfaction: Comparative advantage in achievement, status, popularity, intelligence, perceived intelligence, power, control, and winning.</p> <p>Problem: Does not address the contributive; a profound emptiness, and negative emotions of the comparison game.</p>	<p>3 - Contributive - Empathetic</p> <p>Source: Self-consciousness, as well as, empathy and conscience creating a desire to make an optimal positive difference to the world beyond myself.</p> <p>Satisfaction: Contributing through actions and empathy to family, friends, organization, stake holders of organization, community, church, kingdom of God, culture and society.</p> <p>Problem: Does not deal with the five transcendental desires and the yearning for the sacred.</p>	<p>4 - Transcendent</p> <p>Source: Transcendental awareness of and desire for the sacred, and spiritual, as well as, perfect and unconditional truth, love, justice-goodness, beauty, & being-home.</p> <p>Satisfaction: Openness to a transcendental power who is perfect and unconditional truth, love, justice-goodness, beauty, & being-home.</p> <p>Problem: Not maintaining life of prayer and moral-spiritual connection.</p>

So what is meant by “pervasive,” “enduring,” and “deep?” “*Pervasive,*” the first of the three criteria, refers to “the degree to which the effects of activities associated with each kind of happiness extend beyond the self. So for example, the effects of activities associated with the first kind of happiness (say eating a good steak or buying some nice clothes) do not extend very far beyond the self. Similarly, the effects of the second kind of happiness (winning a chess game, receiving an award, being acknowledged as intelligent) are also mostly confined to the self. Activities associated with the third kind of happiness (making a difference to someone or something *beyond* the self) are decidedly different. Instead of bringing the locus of control and the focus of attention to ourselves, we invest ourselves in the people and community *beyond* us. Thus by definition, the third kind of happiness must be more pervasive than the first two kinds. Finally, the fourth kind of happiness (concerned with transcendence) pertains not only to the people and community around us, but to the whole transcendent domain – that is God and the totality of all that is. When we invest ourselves in the projects of God (and/or the totality of all that is) we have an even more pervasive effect than with the third kind of happiness.

The second criterion, “*enduring,*” refers to how long the effects of activities associated with a particular kind of happiness last. So for example, the effects of the activities associated with the first kind of happiness do not last very long, i.e., a fine steak, and within an hour we might be looking around for something else to eat. The effects of activities associated with the second kind of happiness can last longer than those of the first – the afterglow of receiving an award or winning a sports game or achieving a milestone. The effects of activities associated with the third kind of happiness can last longer than the second – when we do something to improve the lives of others, the improvement may have only a temporary effect, but people’s memories of it can last much longer. Finally, the effects of activities associated with the fourth kind of happiness can last forever. So for example, if you help someone to see their

transcendental and eternal dignity (and help them to orient their lives toward this more pervasive and enduring end), it could have an *eternal* effect.

The third criterion, “*deep*,” refers to the degree to which we use our intellectual, creative, and psychological powers to engage in particular activities associated with the four kinds of happiness. The first kind of happiness does not engage my higher creative intellectual and psychological powers to any meaningful degree. It is basically restricted to biological stimuli, kinesthetic stimuli, and material security and comfort. Activities associated with the second kind of happiness frequently engage both creative and intellectual powers in order to get ahead in the world, to receive a promotion, to be admired. They generally require an education. Activities associated with the third kind of happiness not only require the engagement of my creative and intellectual powers, but also entail the use of empathy and conscience. Finally, activities associated with the fourth kind of happiness engage all of the previous activities as well as the five transcendental desires and our sense of the spiritual-sacred.

From this we can conclude that, in general, Level 2 is more pervasive, enduring, and deep than Level 1, and Level 3 more than Level 2, and Level 4 even more than Level 3. Therefore, if we want to have a more pervasive, enduring, and deep life, we will want to pursue higher levels of happiness.

There is, however, a trade-off in pursuing the higher levels. We will have to give up the immediate gratification, intensity, and surface apparentness of the lower levels of happiness. As will be explained in the next chapter, this requires commitment, discipline, and good habits, because immediate gratification, intensity, and surface apparentness make Levels 1 and 2 hard to resist. They are like a “default drive,” because they are enticing, intense in their fulfillment, and immediately gratifying. Moreover, our culture promotes them as if are the only things worth striving for and can be completely satisfying and meaningful.

Most philosophers believe that the trade-off is worth it, because having a pervasive, enduring, and deep life is highly contributive, leaves a lasting legacy, and engenders love and faith – which make us genuinely happy. This kind of happiness does not feel the same as Level 1 and 2 happiness, but it is a positive feeling – a feeling of self-actualization, contribution, inspiration, dignity, belovedness, and relationship with God – and does not have attendant negative feelings of alienation, emptiness, and darkness (frequently felt in Levels 1 and 2 -- see Section II below).

It is important to understand that Levels One and Two are not negative and that every level of happiness is good and has its proper place. Level One motivates us to pursue the material security and comfort needed by us and our families. Level Two motivates us to pursue the education, achievements, status, credibility, and self-esteem necessary to be influential, win a hearing, put together a meaningful plan of action, be self-motivated and competitive, and thereby do something good or meaningful for our families, organizations, churches, communities, society, and even the kingdom of God. Level Three assures that we will pursue those good and meaningful goals and Level Four assures that we will pursue them for the world, the totality, the kingdom of God, and eternity.

Even though all of these levels of happiness are important, we have to prioritize them because, as you may have surmised, these different levels of happiness can interfere or even conflict with one another. Sometimes the pursuit of Level Two will require curtailing Level One satisfaction. For example, if I want to receive an education, I cannot sleep for twelve hours, and then go for a joy ride with my friends, and then go to a couple of different parties – day after day and night after night. Something negative is likely to happen to not only my learning but my test scores. If I want to get promoted, I can't keep coming to work at 10 am and leaving at 3 pm – others will likely outperform me (and my supervisors may take a dim view of it).

The same holds true for Level Three. If we really do want to make an optimal positive difference to our families, communities, churches, organizations, and culture – if we really want to make the world optimally better off for our having lived, then we cannot pursue ego-comparative satisfaction (Level Two) without limit. Anyone who is completely locked into the pursuit of status, winning, power, and control knows that we can become obsessive about them, and completely ignore Levels Three and Four. Nevertheless, Level Two is important in the pursuit of Level Three because achievement, status, power, and competitiveness can help us to be contributive.

Beyond seeking a more pervasive, enduring, and deep life, there is yet another reason for prioritizing Levels Three and Four over Levels One and Two. Namely, that when Levels One and Two become our dominant view of happiness (and we begin to think that they are the *only* things that make life worth living), we enter into an ever increasing darkness of emotional pain termed the “comparison game” and “existential emptiness.” We will take each in turn.

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When Level One and Two become so important that we implicitly believe they are the *only* real source of our happiness, and the *only* things that will make our lives worth living, we begin to define ourselves, our self-worth, career choices, success, friendships, and marriage choice in terms of this all important objective, which can lead to a host of very negative emotions.

As implied above, one of the four levels of happiness is likely to become more important than the others. We may not be aware of the ascendancy of one of these levels to the status of “most important,” but nevertheless we *unconsciously* treat it as such. When there is a conflict of desire, we will choose our dominant one – even when we are not conscious of it. We can choose career paths, friends, clubs, hobbies, values, ideals, and even spouses by using our dominant level of happiness as a criterion. So the first task that lies in front of us is to make our dominant level of happiness explicitly known to ourselves. If we do not know what makes us “tick,” we can't move ourselves into it or away from it. It controls us; we do not control it.

There is another reason to explicitize our dominant view of happiness – beyond self-knowledge and the freedom to control our destiny. It is summed up in an old philosophical adage

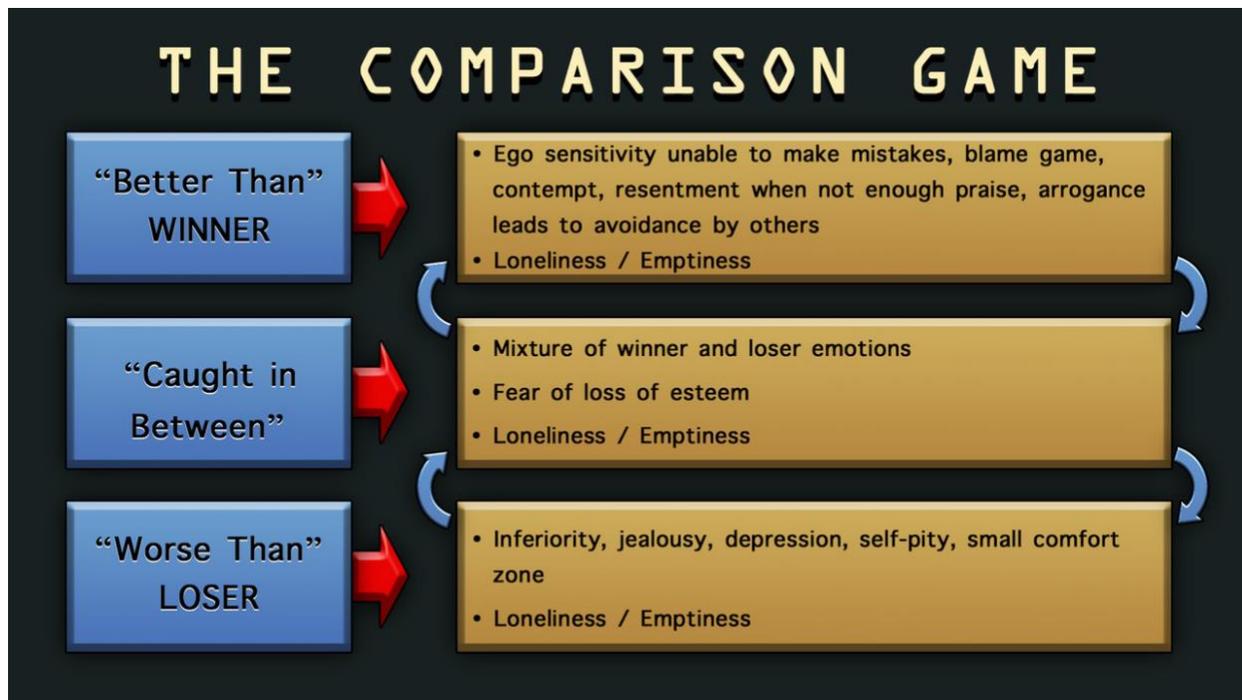
– our dominant view of happiness becomes our purpose in life and our purpose in life becomes our identity (who we make ourselves to be). All existentialist philosophers³⁷ concur that we have the power to define our essence – to infuse ideals, values, virtues, and meaning into our inner being. When we live according to this self-definition – day in and day out – it literally becomes who we are – and shapes the way we see things and the way we operate in the world.

As noted above, Level One and Two happiness frequently become the dominant view of happiness, because they are the most evident, immediately gratifying, and intense. Our culture embraces and promotes them with great enthusiasm. This means that the majority of young people are likely to become dominant Level One and/or Level Two by the time they are midway through high school. The process begins around the age of 10 or 11 when school becomes more competitive, parents become more anxious about comparative success, school environment encourages comparisons, and peer pressure begins to grow.

Many pre-teens begin to split the world into two parts – winners and losers (people who are above the norm and people who are below it). If these young people have no real sense of either Level Three or Level Four, they tend to classify themselves in one of three ways: (1) “*Winners*” -- Some strive to belong to a group that appears to be winning (at least in certain areas where they might excel). These groups begin to criticize (“dis”) groups that appear to be less competitive. (2) “*Losing*” -- Others who are not able to make it into an “in” group (or are not respected for academic, athletics, beauty, or other talents by peers or teachers) begin to have feelings of inferiority, and see themselves as “unpopular.” They either struggle to belong to winning groups (even at the cost of being “second class citizens” or they simply submit to their fate. (3) “*Caught in-between*” -- There is also a large group who find themselves perched between both groups – sometimes perceiving themselves to be “winners” and sometimes “losers.” These individuals frequently experience the negative emotions of both groups.

The above self-classifications have negative emotional consequences that continue far beyond adolescence, and are frequently exacerbated in young adulthood and middle age. As will be seen, the only way out is to move to either Level Three or Level Four – or both. The following diagram outlines the emotional conditions that accompany each of these three self-classifications.

³⁷ Soren Kierkegaard, a practicing Christian, was the first existentialist philosopher. He proposed that each individual is solely responsible for giving meaning and identity to life and living it authentically. This first principle of existentialism became the foundation for the thought of virtually all existentialists – including religious existentialists such as Gabriel Marcel, Carl Jaspers, Max Scheler, and Martin Buber as well as atheistic existentialists such as John Paul Sartre and Albert Camus.



There is no real positive result of the comparison game (dominant Level One-Two happiness or purpose in life). A brief profile of each of the three groups may prove helpful. Let us begin with those who self-classify as “losers” and then proceed to the “winners,” and finally to those “caught in-between.”

Losing

Those who classify themselves as “losers” generally have feelings of inferiority. They see themselves as being judged critically or negatively by many, if not most, of the people around them. Since this perception of negative judgment is viewed as rejection, these individuals tend to feel isolated and lonely. Inasmuch as they do not see any worth in themselves beyond a particular set of objectified talents or skills (such as intelligence, beauty, athletic ability, etc.), their feelings of loneliness persist and frequently turn into feelings of worthlessness.

Dominant Level One-Two individuals make the mistake of objectifying (thingifying) themselves because they have not yet discovered Levels Three or Four. With respect to Level Three, they do not see their personhood, personality, lovability, love of others, and empathy as being important. Indeed they might not even know about these ways of looking at or valuing themselves. Furthermore, because they have not yet reached Level Four, they do not see themselves as being valued and loved by God or having a transcendent and eternal dignity (a soul which is destined for unconditional love in God’s eternity). Their unawareness (or ignorance) of these other ways of looking at themselves (as lovable and transcendent mysteries) makes them default to a set of *things about* themselves – such as the clothes they are wearing, their natural beauty, their intelligence, athletic ability, their parents’ wealth, etc. This superficial self-classification plunges them into the comparison game, and they see no way out (if someone does not explain Levels Three and Four to them).

In their heightened state of loneliness (with accompanying feelings of worthlessness), these individuals can become depressed. Notice that this depression is not brought on by a chemical imbalance or the repression of early trauma, but rather by a superficial classification of self and life's purpose. The solution to this kind of depression may not require pharmaceutical remedies or long-term therapy,³⁸ but rather education and reorientation of the dominant view of happiness and purpose in life. As will be discussed below, this reorientation of the view of happiness and purpose can bring some immediate relief, and over the course of time, long-term peace and efficacy.

There are two other negative consequences of classifying the self as “losing.” The first is quite dangerous – self-pity. When lonely, depressed individuals (with deep inferiority feelings) begin to pity themselves, they can ironically enjoy their status as an outsider or outcast. This can elicit responses such as “I don't need anyone,” and “I don't care if anyone likes me – I can make it on my own.” Though this might at first seem like a healthy assertion of autonomy and self-esteem, it can frequently become the “*eros* of death.” Some individuals who are sinking into isolation and depression can begin to enjoy “toying with death or darkness” like an ultimate thrill game. This can lead to “cutting” or “excitement about suicide” which can become so enticing that it leads not only young people, but adults as well, to ultimate tragedy. The thought that “I have complete control over my death” or “I will show them that I can face my worthlessness” or “I will take the ultimate step that everyone wants me to take” can become unmitigated tragedy for parents and friends who are completely bewildered by the isolated person's self-destructive feelings. When people show signs of this intense devaluation of self (with accompanying “*eros* of death”), it is important not only to find therapeutic measures to help them, but also to introduce them to the world of Level Three and Level Four. This can make an enormous difference to their outlook on self and the world.

The final difficulty with the “losing” perspective is the progressive narrowing of our comfort zone. A “comfort zone” refers to the boundaries that we set up to govern the activities we will or will not pursue. If our comfort zone is rather large, we will feel empowered to pursue a whole range of activities – say, public speaking, writing, athletic pursuits, piano playing, travelling, adventurous activities, etc. However, if our comfort zone is narrow, we will experience feelings of fear and anxiety when pursuing new or challenging activities. This anxiety can be so profound that it manifests itself in constriction of the throat or stress related exhaustion or rashes. Generally, we do not allow ourselves to get to the point of heightened anxiety, and so we find ways of avoiding new or challenging activities. We make excuses for why we do not want to take a standardized exam to go to graduate school or why we cannot give a public speech or why we cannot take a trip, etc. We can even make these avoidance behaviors habitual, at which point it becomes less likely that we will break out of this narrow comfort zone.

³⁸ Some forms of depression and despair arise out of biochemical imbalances and the repression of traumatic memories. These kinds of depression generally require the help of a qualified psychotherapist. In this Volume, I am not dealing with these kinds of depression, but with the kind of depression arising out the comparison game and existential emptiness – what might be termed “existential depression.”

The solution to this problem is to help people make Levels Three and Four (instead of Levels One and Two) their true motive for action. If someone believes that their law school admission test score defines who they are (and that it will ultimately establish their dignity – or lack of it), then there is a good chance that they will “choke.” However, if they are moderately gifted, but are pursuing law school (and the law school admissions test) for purposes of supporting family, doing good for the community, making a difference to the kingdom of God, etc., then they can be free of the burden of objectified self-definition, and take the exam with the thought that “this is not going to make or break my life or my dignity; it is just a challenge that I need to deal with in order to get on with my life and aspirations.” Notice how the fear and anxiety surrounding the tasks begin to subside, and that we can begin to prepare for a test in a very objective and systematic way. The same thing holds true for public speaking, writing, athletic skills, etc. If we are moderately gifted, and we come at these challenges with Level Three and/or Level Four motivations, we are free to do what we want without allowing a lack of success to define us.

So what can we conclude about the losing perspective? First, all of the negative emotions discussed above – inferiority, loneliness, depression, self-pity, and narrow comfort zone – will very likely persist until we stop thingafying ourselves and defining our worth and purpose in Level One and Two categories. The most effective (and perhaps the only) way of doing this is to find new categories to define life and self – categories which are not reducible to things or ego-comparative qualities, but instead open upon our noble, loving, lovable, transcendent, and spiritual selves. In short, we have to move to Levels Three and Four.

Winning

It might seem at first glance, that the solution to the problems of losing would be winning. After all, one could then avoid inferiority, isolation, depression, self-pity, etc. However, further scrutiny reveals that none of these things can be avoided by being a winner. They all re-emerge in different ways through different routes. There can be no doubt that winners *initially* have it better than those who perceive themselves as “losers.” They can receive intense “ego highs” when they succeed, people praise them, and they perceive themselves as superior. However, as most perceptive winners notice, these “ego highs” are short lived and these positive feelings are frequently replaced by negative ones. Why does this happen?

Winners always run the risk of narcissistic behaviors, and many of them become full blown narcissists. As virtually every spiritual writer throughout history has recognized, “pride goeth before the fall.” The movement from “winning” to narcissism begins when “adulation and ego highs” become addictive. After a while, the winner compulsively pursues more and higher forms of adulation. This frequently requires building a façade, spending inordinate time and resources to give the right impression, and shamelessly chasing after praise.

Narcissists frequently find themselves trapped in a set of compulsive behaviors to get to higher levels of status, power, honor, and achievement so that they are not only admired, but virtually idolized by others, but this behavior runs many risks. First, in order to maintain the upward momentum toward idolization, narcissists have to engage in riskier behaviors. Frequently they have to exaggerate their accomplishments or engage in ethically questionable

behavior to achieve higher levels of success. History and literature are replete with examples of the fall of great characters who idolized themselves (and tried to get others to idolize them) – Narcissus, King Henry VIII, King Lear, Macbeth, Hitler, and Stalin, to mention just a few. These individuals not only find themselves in failure and despair, they cause great evil and suffering to the people around them.

Do all narcissists finish their lives in a tragic finale? Some do not, but all of them cause suffering and anguish to the people around them, who in turn emotionally withdraw from the narcissist. Recall from above, the distinction between the admired and esteemable self, versus the loving and lovable self. As narcissists pursue greater highs from the admiration and esteem of others, they engage in behaviors that emotionally isolate them, and they trade their loving and lovable selves for their esteemable (thingafied) selves. Eventually they become “affectively diminished” with almost no positive affection or emotion expressed by or given to them. They trade in their higher self (for positive relationships and doing good) for a mere shadow of their true selves – a reputation that elicits adulation. The real tragedy is that most of them do not recognize what they have done – what they have thrown away. They agree to be affectively lobotomized in order to get some trophies, and they consider it a great exchange.

Narcissists not only do harm to themselves, but also to the people around them. They hold “inferiors” in contempt, and when the victims no longer believe in the narcissist’s “intrinsic superiority” (and begin to avoid them rather than praise them), they become resentful, and want to hurt “the ungrateful little wretches” – “you should have told me how superior I am to you and how much better my life is than yours, but you thought you were something special – which you are not – and so I’m going to have to teach you a lesson – so that you will get back in your place, and give me the adulation I deserve!” This turns narcissists into destruction machines. They look for ways to insult, belittle, and undermine their victims. But they don’t stop there. They also try to undermine victims’ sources of dignity (beyond the narcissist), such as God, family, religious and cultural institutions. When narcissists have been taken out of the idolized center of their victims’ lives, they feel a severe loss, and they begin to attack every possible source of dignity that might have replaced them in the empowered inferior’s life. When narcissists lose dominion over others, they become quite destructive and in some cases (like Macbeth) evil.

Narcissism and anger frequently run hand in hand -- not only because of perceived loss of dominion and control (and resentment towards people who are not subservient enough), but also because of dissatisfaction and frustration with what they do not have. Most narcissists would like more (and need more) achievement, control, power, status, intelligence, perceived intelligence, adulation, and winning than they can ever get. Hence, they tend to take what they do have for granted and mire themselves in discontent for what they do not have. This produces not only discontent, but frequently frustration with one’s life and self, bringing to light the proverb, “I never knew a person who was grateful and unhappy, or a person who was ungrateful and happy.”

Furthermore, narcissists’ harsh standards of judgment frequently come back to haunt them. The biblical passage, “the measure with which you measure will be measured out to you” (Matthew 7:2) becomes a reality long before the final judgment. People who are impatient with others are frequently impatient with themselves; those who judge others harshly, judge

themselves in the same way. We have a strange proclivity for consistency, and the mood we strike around others becomes the mood we bring to ourselves and our lives.

Narcissists also suffer from ego sensitivity. They incur tremendous stress (and even nightmares) from the smallest public faux pas. I recall making a high school presentation, and mispronouncing the word “spectroscopy.” One of my classmates came up and said, “Spitzer, you pronounced the word *spectroscopy* as *spec*-tro-scopy three times, and now everyone believes you are much less intelligent than they thought.” I went home and played that tape in my mind at least a hundred times before I went to bed, progressively moving from humiliation to despair. I actually had thoughts of “giving up” in order to stop the stress. Now if a seventeen year old boy can have feelings of despair over mispronouncing a word, imagine what someone with fully developed narcissistic tendencies (and a stellar reputation) might feel like when ridiculed by someone for a comparable small mistake. This is not a happy life.

In sum, the life of a narcissist is not easy. It is filled with compulsive striving, façade making, praise chasing, ego-sensitivities, discontent, frustration, anger, contempt, resentment, and loneliness. Yes, there are lots of ego highs to counteract these feelings, but at the end of the day, there is always a shadow of despair and a destructive force that have a way of impressing themselves as a sense of foreboding in narcissists’ unconscious minds – for at the end of the day, they know they have only fabricated an illusion about themselves instead of building a worthy reality. However, there is a way out – Level Three and Level Four, which will be discussed below.

Caught In-Between

A sizable number of dominant Level One-Two individuals find themselves caught in-between “winning” and “losing.” They have what they consider to be “good days” (winning) and “bad days” (losing). They also have good moments and bad moments within any given day. And so, it is not unusual to see them fluctuating between inferiority and superiority, contempt and jealousy, anger and self-pity, ego highs and depression, and narcissism and fear of failure. Many of us will recognize having some success, exaggerating its importance in our lives, then experiencing a reality check (generally in the form of a judgment or snide remark), and then exaggerating the insult’s importance in our lives. We build up our highs and “build down” our lows in a kind of self-created manic-depression.

As if these emotional fluctuations were not enough, those who are caught in-between, find themselves in a perpetual state of fear of loss of esteem. They are aware that their “winning ways” are not permanent, and that their “average talent” is seen by potential critics and rivals. Since the esteem of others is “all important” to them, they have to be continuously concerned about managing every little *faux pas*, and creating a positive image for others to see. They spend an inordinate amount of psychic energy worrying about what others might be thinking, and they frequently stay awake at night obsessing about possible judgments of others (that often have no basis in reality). They worry that their true “mediocrity” may be exposed, and that they will lose what little esteemability they have. The source of these obsessions, once again, is a focus on the thingafied esteemable self to the virtual exclusion of the loving, lovable, and transcendent self, and the source of this restricted sense of self, in turn, is a dominant Level One-Two identity. We

will need to proceed to a consideration of how we might best reorient and refocus ourselves on Levels Three and Four to avert continued pain and self-destruction. Before we do this, we need to consider another significant consequence of the dominant Level One-Two identity, namely, existential emptiness.

Existential Emptiness

Our four fundamental desires are operative whether we acknowledge them or not. We still feel our desire to make a positive difference to others (because of our capacity for empathy and conscience) even if we don't acknowledge or act on it. Similarly, we still feel a desire for the transcendent and spiritual (because of the five transcendental desires and our awareness of the numinous) even if we refuse to believe in the transcendent.

These unfulfilled desires have a curious consequence – they make us feel empty. We don't simply *think* that something is missing, we *feel* a void within us. Sometimes people say that they sense a hole in the pit of their stomach. Some say that they feel hungry which leads them to mistakenly seek food or drink to assuage their desire. Others say that when they look at themselves in the mirror, the person looking back at them seems to be insignificant or a stranger. There are other symptoms of this emptiness – sometimes we feel that the world beyond ourselves is empty, dark, or cold. In all cases, we do not feel at home in ourselves, and in the world. Something we desperately yearn for is missing.

Why call this “*existential*” emptiness? Recall that existentialist philosophers believe that human beings are called to create their own meaning and essence, not only from their thoughts and beliefs, but also from their decisions and actions. When we neglect this most important of all life's projects, our psyche (our inner world) feels it acutely. It not only feels the unfulfilled desires for contribution and love (Level Three) and the unfulfilled desires for the spiritual and transcendent (Level Four), but also an unconscious sense of inauthenticity – of “wasting my life.” We not only miss the satisfactions of contribution, love, transcendence, and spiritual life, but our self-consciousness comprehends that we are only fulfilling part of ourselves, creating only part of our essence, and neglecting the most important parts of our potential being.

When this happens, we not only feel emptiness, but also guilt – the guilt of throwing our lives away, or perhaps better, of throwing *ourselves* away. We have a sense of great potential and destiny that we are ignoring or even destroying, and so we not only feel guilt, but angst – the angst of beholding the tragedy of wasting our lives and selves. “Existential emptiness” refers to this complex of self-alienation and self-negation.

No one can stand the panoply of these feelings (with their attendant thoughts of waste of life and self, inauthenticity, and being the pathetic character in a tragedy), and so we are presented with three major options:

1. We can seek a positive solution by moving to dominant Level Three and/or Four happiness.
2. We can take evasive action which will give rise to a restless heart (see below). Or,

3. We can simply give in to a sea of emptiness, and sink into depression and ultimately, despair.

Each one of these reactions to existential emptiness merits brief consideration.

As we shall see, the first solution is the only viable one. We cannot simply turn off a dominant Level One-Two identity by saying, “I’m not going to do this anymore – I’m really, really, really not going to do this...” When we try to stop doing something that has tremendous momentum inside our psyche, we find that after a short time, the very psychic energy we were using to stop our momentum turns against us and starts fueling the desire we want to suppress! For example, a person might think, “I’m not going to act like the center of attention anymore – it’s killing me and the people around me,” and for five minutes, have some success, but the moment he starts “insisting to himself” that he is not going to be the center of attention, the idea of being “the center of attention,” goes to the front of his mind, rekindling his desire for it. Thus, if we are to overcome dominant Level One and Two identity, we will have to *replace* it with dominant Level Three and Four identity. This will be fully explained below. For the moment, suffice it to say that this “replacement therapy” worked for St. Paul, St. Augustine, St. Ignatius Loyola, and a myriad of “dominant Level One-Two” men and women who later became great advocates for justice, love, faith, the common good, and the kingdom of God. Their biographies reveal the power of committing themselves to Levels Three and Four identity.

The second option, taking evasive action, is generally the most popular. When the self-alienation and self-negation of existential emptiness makes its presence felt within the psyche, many of us will try to block it out by increasing our pursuit of Level One and Two desires. “If two scotches won’t make me feel better, perhaps five will.” “I feel a sudden need to have another twenty pairs of shoes and three Armani purses.” “I don’t know why I have to eat the entire pepperoni pizza, but I’m famished – day after day.” “I look forward to turning on the internet to find any base pleasure to satisfy my cravings – I think three hours per day is appropriate.” “I know I just finished a cruise to the Caribbean, but I just saw a smoking deal for a cruise to the Mediterranean in a few weeks, and then a real interesting world cruise in a few months.” “I know I have done very well in my profession, but I am going to take a big risk, and leave the town in which my family is most comfortable, to take an even more prestigious job.”

Notice that these attitudes are not only the result of dominant Level One and Level Two happiness, but using that kind of happiness *compulsively* to avoid or cover over existential emptiness. They truly manifest Augustine’s recognition of his own journey to God – “Our hearts are restless until they rest in thee.”

Frequently the compulsive pursuit of Level One and Two happiness (to avoid existential emptiness) becomes reckless and self-destructive. The need to cover over our sense of emptiness, guilt and tragedy, becomes more and more acute, and we take greater risks – more alcohol, more drugs, more base pursuits on the internet, more ego-highs, more accumulation of possessions, more exaggerated claims about accomplishments, and even ethically questionable behaviors to keep the upward momentum going. Most of the time, these reckless behaviors catch up with us, and sometimes they cause us (and the people around us to implode). We can’t continue the reckless, evasive behaviors, and so we are confronted by only two options – either the positive

one (to move toward dominant Levels Three and Four) or the truly negative one (sinking into a sea of emptiness, depression, and despair).

What happens if we take the “low road”? It manifests itself somewhat gradually. We find ourselves wanting to sleep more, watch more television, play more games on the internet, spend more time at the club – etc. We always have a justification for this – “Sleep is restorative.” “That movie is a real classic, and by watching it for the fifth time it will really give me a new perspective on life.” “The internet games are helping my mental agility.” “The discussions I am having over the third martini at the club are helping me gain perspectives on world affairs.” Eventually the emptiness breaks through and has the bizarre effect of compounding the malaise that I feel. It soothes me as I sink into the depths of the abyss, and I find it more difficult to do anything for anyone – even the ones I love most. The depression is turning into despair, and if it is not treated, it could become tragic.

If depression is turning into despair, a good religious psychotherapist might be necessary to help move a person out of this downward momentum. This should be complemented with what I might call “level three and level four therapy.” This entails bringing a contributive identity to the surface of consciousness, and if possible, bringing a person to a church community and a committed relationship with the loving God (see below). It should be stressed that a person who has reached the stage of “giving up” (and speaks often of this) requires a fairly strong intervention from friends to move him toward assistance, contributive mentality, and faith.

The ideal time to help people move out of the comparison game and existential emptiness is before they begin slipping into depression and despair. The symptoms of dominant Level One and Two happiness are apparent – fear and jealousy, ego sensitivities and narcissism, inferiority and superiority, loneliness and emptiness – and the many compulsive manifestations of a restless heart. If we want to help people get off this road to self-destruction (and destruction of others), we do not have to be preachy or pushy, we can indicate to them that we have benefitted from reading a book about the Four Levels of Happiness, and describe the content to them – particularly the comparison game – in a personal way. If they are interested in the material, we can give a more complete explanation of the way out of the comparison game below (Chapter Four) and then share some written materials with them (perhaps from this volume or other materials on this subject). It is important to be personal and self-revealing in our explanation of this material, and to have follow-up discussions to help them find a path to Levels Three and Four before they hit “rock bottom.”

One last note before explaining a path out of our self-created hell. The pursuit of a dominant Level Three and Four identity should not preclude the pursuit of Level One and Two happiness, for we will still have needs and desires for pleasure--material fulfillment as well as ego-comparative fulfillment, however, we will have to find ways of allowing the higher levels of desire (which are most pervasive, enduring, and deep) to take a lead role in our lives, while putting the lower levels of desire-happiness in their “proper place.” We can treat Level Three-Four desires as our true end or fulfillment while making Level One-Two desires the *means* to

those ends. For example, we can use our material wealth and our reputations and status as a means of making a positive difference to our families, churches, communities, and culture.

However, we will want to be careful not to elevate Levels One and Two to ends in themselves, for this will assuredly give rise to the negative emotions of the comparison game, a resurgence of existential emptiness, and conflicts with Level Three and Level Four desires. By ordering our lives in this way, we can find a way through the pain and destructiveness of dominant Level One-Two identity and achieve higher levels of purpose and happiness. This is likely to be the most important choice (or set of choices) we will make in our lives.

Chapter Four

Getting out of the Comparison Game – the Move to Level 3

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Introduction

As noted above, the positive way out of the comparison game and existential emptiness is to replace dominant Level One and Two happiness with dominant Level Three and Four happiness. We will look at “Level Three replacement therapy” in this Chapter, and then turn our attention to Level Four in the next two chapters and in Volumes 18-20).

The order of discussion here is not meant to be the order in which the reader is supposed to use these methods. Some people will feel more naturally inclined to pursue Level Three methods first, and then Level Four, while others (like myself) are more naturally inclined to pursue Level Four methods first, and then back into Level Three methods. I would submit that *both* Level Three and Level Four are essential for moving out of a dominant Level One-Two identity. As will be explained in Chapters Five and Six, if Level Three is unaccompanied by Level Four, then our five transcendental desires will go unfulfilled and this will give rise to a new set of problems that might be called “*cosmic* emptiness, loneliness, alienation, and guilt.” Alternatively, if Level Four is unaccompanied by Level Three, then it can lead to a superficial faith which does not seek to make a contribution to people, the common good, and the culture – it is a faith without charitable love (*agapē*). Moreover, Level Three contribution and love reinforces Level Four faith while the grace of Level Four faith reinforces Level Three contribution and love.

As the reader might have noticed from the foregoing analysis, the problems of the comparison game can be linked to four viewpoints arising out of a dominant Level One-Two identity:

1. View of purpose in life,
2. View of others,
3. View of self, and
4. View of freedom.

If we naturally situate ourselves in a dominant Level One-Two identity (because it is like a default drive), then we will have to deliberately choose Levels Three and Four, and in order to do this, we must concretely specify what it is we want to look for in our life's purpose, others, ourselves, and our freedom. Recall that our dominant view of happiness determines what we are *looking* for, and this in turn, determines what we are *living* for (our life's purpose), and when we live for a particular purpose long enough, it becomes our identity (the definition we give to ourselves).

Before examining these four fundamental attitudes, we will need to explore how to effectively make a transition from a dominant Level One-Two to a dominant Level Three-Four attitude.

I.

A Three-Step Process for Transforming our Fundamental Attitudes

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There are two dimensions to the human psyche – the conscious mind (which is aware of what it wants to do) and the unconscious mind (which is not aware). Unconscious motives spring from instinctual preferences for pleasure (and the avoidance of pain), engrained teachings of parents and teachers (which were believed by us as children or adolescents), early formed habits (which are second nature), and various patterns of what might be termed “self-talk.” Without consciously thinking, the unconscious mind reacts to certain stimuli within the environment. For example, the smell of a good steak can move us to the dinner table. A person or an object can remind us of a traumatic past event, and a little child drawing a picture can remind us that our teacher said that we were incapable of drawing, and learning how to drive or ride a bicycle can become engrained behavior. Unconscious motivations can also spring from our dream world, and even states of relaxation.

When the unconscious mind is operating, we act without consciously thinking about it. For example, I might see a candy bar and have half of it completely consumed before I think “What am I doing? I don’t need the calories!” I might see something which my parents considered very dangerous – perhaps pharmaceuticals, cigarettes, or some behavior, and find myself avoiding it or repulsed by it – without ever having thought about it. I may have learned how to ride a bike when I was a child, and then after twenty years of not riding, hop right on one without even thinking.

With respect to self-talk,³⁹ I might be at the golf course having the best game of my life, and then suddenly find myself triple-bogeying the last five holes. How does this happen? Our unconscious belief about who we are and what we are capable of sets parameters for our behavior and performance. So, if my unconscious mind has the belief that I am a 100 golfer, and I am about to golf an 80, it is confused by the outstanding performance because this is not “who I *really* am.” As a result I get nervous trying to be someone other than what my unconscious mind

³⁹I have borrowed this term from Lou Tice of the Pacific Institute who popularized the research of Dr. Albert Bandura, an important cognitive psychologist at Stanford University who developed the theory of self-efficacy. See Tice 2003.

believes me to be, and I self-correct back to who I really am by golfing atrociously during the last five holes. Do we really want to do this? Not *consciously* – but our *unconscious* mind will try to correct back to what it believes we really are, which exerts a profound force on our capacity to act. People who learn early in life (generally from poor teachers) that they can't do math, will generally have problems doing math – unless they correct their unconscious beliefs. Similarly, people who are told they cannot spell, cannot speak in public, cannot shoot free throws, and cannot be taken out in public, will struggle with these activities until they correct their unconscious beliefs -- because their unconscious minds will infuse that belief into their psychic outlook, exerting a powerful force on their capacity to act.

So, what does all this have to do with moving from a dominant Level One-Two default drive to a dominant Level Three-Four identity? Everything, because it is not sufficient to *consciously* think about being Level Three-Four and *consciously* choose Level Three-Four; we must bring our unconscious minds into the thoughts and choices we consciously make. If we do not, our unconscious minds will correct our behaviors to conform to our old choices and habits – much like the golf game.

In the following four subsections (II – V) we will be giving lists of questions to help both the conscious and unconscious mind to refocus themselves from a dominant Level One-Two view to a dominant Level Three-Four view. If we attempt to answer the questions in the chart below immediately, our mind will surely draw a blank. If we have not been thinking about Level Three opportunities, we will not be able to *imagine* the possibilities and opportunities that will help to refocus us in the future. I would recommend the following gradual three-step process.

First, establish a 10-15 minute reflection time during your day when you are least likely to be distracted by the tasks and responsibilities of the day. Then take the list of questions in the diagram below to that “reflection session,” and simply familiarize yourself with the categories and the questions. If some answers occur to you – great! You can then make a little note on your sheet of questions. More likely, you will be involved in a process of introducing the questions not only to your conscious mind, but also your unconscious mind.

Even if you draw a blank when thinking about these questions you are doing something very important – you are stimulating your conscious and unconscious mind. Some of you may be familiar with Archimedes who was given the task by the king of Syracuse to determine whether a crown he had been given was made of real gold. Archimedes knew how much real gold weighed per ounce; what he did not know was the volume of the crown so he could make that determination. The crown, of course, was irregularly shaped, and Archimedes knew that the king would not appreciate him melting the crown into a sphere or a cube to which he could apply simple Pythagorean formulas, and so he was powerless for the moment to answer the king's query. Nevertheless, he pondered the challenge, and went about his daily routine of teaching, tutoring, and dialoguing with other teachers. Though he did not have a solution in his conscious mind, his creative unconscious was very active. Active about what? Looking for clues to spark his imagination.

Archimedes was unaware of this process because it was unconscious. Nevertheless after a few days, Archimedes found himself at the Baths of Syracuse, and as he sunk down into the tub

he noticed that the water was evenly displaced. It rose evenly in the tub enabling him to measure the change in volume.

Archimedes' unconscious mind was totally alert to the stimulus. Though he was not consciously looking for a solution while at the Baths of Syracuse, his unconscious mind was open and alert to any datum that could help him solve his quandary. When the water evenly displaced itself, Archimedes' unconscious mind grasped the importance of this clue. He shouted "Eureka! I found it!" and ran down the streets of Syracuse naked to proclaim his solution – the law of displacement.

This process will be familiar to those who have been perplexed by problems in science, mathematics, the world of commerce, and quite frankly, in any area of problem solving. It's simply amazing how many of us come up with these solutions in the shower (when we are relaxed) or just before we go to bed, or quite literally, in our dreams. We say, "The idea just popped into my head." But really our unconscious mind had been looking for it all along. So the first step of our process is to thoughtfully read over the list of questions below two or three times over a ten to fifteen minute period – for at least a month. If anything comes to mind, jot it down. Don't push it—let your unconscious mind go to work.

The second step begins with being attentive to the results, which your unconscious mind discovers. If the solution "pops into your head" during sleep, you might try to wake yourself up and write it down. If the eureka moment happens in the shower or some other relaxed state, you will want to get it down on a piece of paper within a few hours. When you are relaxed, the insights of the unconscious mind have a chance of poking through the barrage of responsibilities and administrivia that complicate our day. If we leave the insight unattended for too long, it will simply disappear, and like a beautiful sandcastle on the beach the waves of the workaday world will simply wash over it and take it away.

You might notice over the course of one or two months, that your list of questions (like the diagram given below) is starting to fill up with some short term, medium term, and long term aspirations and opportunities. When this occurs, prioritize your list of goals and aspirations, and put the following saying at the end of the list – "For this I came." This will turn your list of goals and aspirations into a statement of purpose and identity, and if you regard it as such in the future, it will help you follow through on the third step.

The third step consists in using the power of the imagination to turn our goals into reality. When the second step is completed, you will have identified a series of activities and goals enabling you to make an optimal positive difference in the short and long term. However a set of goals and proposed activities will remain fallow, if we do not identify the steps we need to take toward those goals, putting those steps on our calendar, and deliberately moving into action. But this process of moving from goals to action requires internal drive, emotion, and energy. We have all had the experience of making New Year's resolutions, a personal set of goals, or even a strategic plan for our business, only to subsequently realize that they were barely acted upon, and that they have simply fallen by the wayside. What happened? We did not have the emotional drive and desire to move our *thoughts* into action.

A general rule about moving thoughts into action may be expressed as follows: “imagination converts thoughts into beliefs; beliefs impart emotion into imagination; and emotion moves thoughts and imagination into action.”

Notice that thoughts by themselves remain abstract; they do not move us to do anything. Our plan can be very logical, systematic, comprehensive and ingenious, but by itself the thought simply remains a thought. So how do we convert a thought into action? We must infuse emotion into it. But how? By first using the power of reflective imagination. Dr. Alfred Bandura and other cognitive psychologists noticed that our *imagination of ourselves* accomplishing a plan leads ultimately to our moving that plan into action.

Notice that as we allow our imagination to expand, thinking about nuanced parts of the plan (such as who else would be involved in it and how we might achieve it), the more we begin to believe in it and the more excited we become. We begin to believe that our plan is a virtual certainty – that the future is now, and that our engagement in the plan will lead to inevitable success. Intertwined with these beliefs, is excitement and energy, which naturally leads to emotion. Let’s suppose we have a plan to start a Little League Team in our neighborhood. If we *imagine ourselves* inviting other people to the organizational meeting, finding a park to play in, training our team, and ultimately succeeding in integrating our team into the Little League network, we begin to *believe* not only in the plans achievability, but in our own ability to make the plan a reality. The more we *believe* in our ability to actualize the plan, the more *excited* we become about it (and the more excited we become, the more *internal energy* we catalyze). It is precisely this energy that is the “converting force” of thoughts into actions.

This use of imagination is not new. It has been used by coaches to get players to imagine themselves being successful at certain sporting endeavors, by Toastmasters to enable nervous or shy individuals to be outstanding public speakers, and by Norman Vincent Peale,⁴⁰ Lou Tice, and others to encourage everyone to use the power of imagination to actualize their goals. The reason why these techniques became so popular is because they work!

There is only one caveat to the above. We have to believe that we are capable of being efficacious. If we don’t believe in our own efficacy, then it will be impossible for us to begin the process of *imagining ourselves* calling the organizational meeting, finding a park to play in, training the team, etc. We will never allow the power of imagination to get off the ground. There is an adage in cognitive psychology that expresses this – “We will naturally move toward what we think we are worthy and capable of.” So if we truly believe that we are worthy and capable of starting the Little League team, we will have no problem imagining it, and once our imaginations are captivated by this project, we will move naturally and inexorably toward it.

Unfortunately, the converse is also the case. If we do not believe that we are worthy or capable of starting the Little League team, we will never imagine ourselves doing it, and if we don’t imagine it, we won’t believe it, and therefore we will never experience the excitement and energy that move our thoughts into action. We will be effectively in a state of incessant inertia.

⁴⁰ See Peale 2003.

Lou Tice spent an entire career trying to help people use Dr. Alfred Bandura's insights to transform people's *unwarranted* beliefs in their non-efficacy into a realistic belief in their capabilities. He speaks of our unwarranted self-imposed limits as "narrow comfort zones," "negative self-talk," and "screens in our reticular activating systems," and shows how we can use the techniques of affirmations and visualizations to overcome these self-negating belief systems. It is not my purpose to discuss these techniques here, but if some readers believe themselves to be incapable of bringing even simple plans to fruition, they may want to review some of these resources and techniques.⁴¹

We may now proceed to a discussion of each of the four fundamental attitudes connected with a transition from a dominant Level One-Two identity to a dominant Level Three-Four identity. The following chart gives an overview of the main ideas and beliefs in each of the four categories of attitudes – for a Level One-Two person and a Level Three-Four person.

There are four lists of questions (corresponding to the four fundamental attitudes) given below in Sections II - V. It is virtually impossible to pursue, let alone accomplish, all four transitions in our fundamental attitudes at the same time. Most people cannot even pursue two at a time. Each one of these attitudes entails a considerable amount of intellectual and affective knowledge (I.Q. and E.Q.) as well as psychic energy to pursue them. Nothing will be gained by biting off more than we can chew, and then giving up in discouragement when we are overwhelmed by our ambition.

I recommend that the reader pursue one fundamental attitude at a time, using the above three-step process for at least a three-month period. The order of the attitudes is important, because the second attitude is dependent on the first, and the third is dependent on the second, and so forth. In order to make a deep and permanent transition in each of these attitudes, we will need repeated exposure over the course of years; but that is not a problem, because we are talking about a lifetime project. Each time we effect a partial transformation in any one of the fundamental attitudes, we will decrease the debilitating emotions of the comparison game and existential emptiness. We will also increase pervasive, enduring and deep meaning in life, improve our relationships, and help others reach their highest potential.

⁴¹ See Tice 2003. See also Bandura 1997.

Four Fundamental Attitudes		
Attitude	Dominant Level 1-2 ("Default Drive")	Dominant Level 3-4
Purpose in Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pleasure • Material Accumulation • Ego Comparative Advantage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optimal contribution to family, organization, community, church, culture, society, and Kingdom of God
View of Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Bad News in Others • The Other is Over-against Me 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Others' cultural institutions, and church institutions have value and should be promoted if deemed good
View of Self	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Estimable Self • The "Thingamajig" Self 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Loving Self • The Lovable Self • The Transcendent Self
View of Freedom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom From • Getting what I want now • Avoid Constraint By and Responsibility to Others • Commitment is Negative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom For • Desire to get to the most pervasive, enduring, and deep meaning • Self-Sacrifice is Acceptable • Commitment is Positive

II.

First Fundamental Attitude: What Kind of Purpose in Life Am I Looking For? [Back to top](#)

As noted above, Level One-Two is our default drive, and so our conscious and unconscious minds will likely be looking for material and ego-comparative advantage. This generally comes in the form of a myriad of partially conscious questions – who is achieving more? Who has more status? Who has more control and power? Who has more wealth? Who is smarter? Who is winning? Who is more popular? The answers to these questions will incite a set of behaviors to gain material and ego-comparative advantage (as well as to disguise weaknesses in these areas).

If we are to break out of this outlook and the behaviors it incites, we will have to replace the first set of questions with another set of questions capable of reorienting our conscious and unconscious mind. The following four categories of questions are designed to help us focus in on the specific areas of life from which we derive purpose and identity. The first category helps us to focus on our closest relationships – with family and friends, the second category helps us to focus on the organizations in which we work or volunteer, paying attention to the various stakeholder groups – employees, management, customers, suppliers, and the organization itself. The third category helps us to focus on our community, culture, and society, and the fourth category helps us to focus on church and the kingdom of God.

Why break out our Level Three goals into so many different categories? We need specificity in order to make purposeful goals which will direct our imaginations, beliefs, emotions, and actions. If we do not separate out the goals for positive contribution to family,

friends, organization, community, religion, and culture, Level Three contribution becomes a complete blur. We cannot be intentional about a blur, and so the following process is needed.

What am I looking for? Purpose in Life

Category 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To my family? • To my friends and colleagues?
Category 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To my organization? • My organization's stakeholders (employees, management, customers, vendors, etc.)? • To the general welfare of the organization?
Category 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To my community? • To charitable and education institutions within the community? • To the culture? • To the society? • Through education, politics, etc.?
Category 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To my church? • To the Kingdom of God?

For This I Came

When this chart is filled in with goals and proposed actions, you will have finished the second step of the process. It now remains to move to the third step in which you *imagine yourself* taking the steps to get to your prioritized goals. As you do this, you will begin to feel the excitement and energy moving you naturally to what you believe you are worthy and capable of. As you act on your goals and aspirations, you will notice a *significant* diminishment in the negative feelings associated with the comparison game and existential emptiness, and in their place, you will create a new kind of energy and inspiration – leading to a new outlook, increased contribution to the world around you, and a deep sense of happiness. This feeling of happiness is different from the happiness brought by a great meal (Level One) or a compliment from your boss (Level Two), because this kind of happiness carries with it a sense of purpose and significance that the other two kinds of happiness do not.

So long as we act on some of the new opportunities arising out of a Level Three perspective, the diminishment of the feelings of the comparison game and existential emptiness will persist. Additionally, the newfound outlook, efficacy and happiness of Level Three will increase. Eventually it will become a habitual way of thinking – our dominant view of happiness, and ultimately, our purpose and identity in life.

As we become proficient in our contributive focus, we will need to prioritize and find ways of efficiently accomplishing multiple tasks without ignoring our families and friends and without burning out. The best way of learning how to accomplish this optimal legacy is to start doing it. After a while we find effective methods and we begin to seek out friends who are similarly committed to Level Three happiness, and this leads to a synergistic community of contribution.

Is Level Three enough? As we shall see below in Chapters Five and Six – it is not. At the very least, Level Four will contribute to the depth and efficacy of Level Three, but it is likely to do much, much more.

III.

Second Fundamental Attitude: What Am I Looking for In Others?

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A great French philosopher Gabriel Marcel once noted that you cannot look for both the good news and the bad news in others simultaneously. If you are looking for the bad news, it eclipses the good news. However, if you are looking for the good news, it puts the bad news into a larger and more positive perspective. Unfortunately, “looking for the bad news” is our default drive because it arises out of Level One-Two desire. If we are trying to gain material and ego-comparative advantage *over* others, we will not be inclined to look for the *good* news in others. We will look for the ways in which we are better than they are – screening out everything but the bad news in others. Furthermore, what is irritating, stupid, weak, and unkind, rivets us to itself because it is unpleasant. Thus it should not surprise us if we are naturally inclined to put the bad news in front of the good news, and even allow the bad news to eclipse the good news.

When we put the bad news in front of the good news, certain thoughts and feelings inevitably arise. First, we begin to see the other as problem instead of mystery.⁴² Viewing the other as “problem” constrains us to see the negative which blocks out the possibility of empathy (the beginning point of love).

Inasmuch as love begins with empathy, and empathy is virtually screened out by “looking for the bad news in the other,” we can conclude that love begins with looking for the good news in the other. As Marcel notes, if we look for the good news in the other, the appreciation and empathy we feel for the other will contextualize and diminish the bad news, opening the way to friendship and even self-sacrificial love.

We may now formulate our initial definition of “love.” An act of love has three stages: (1) An intentional act of looking for the good news in the other, which (2) leads to appreciation of and empathy for the other, which (3) makes it just as easy if not easier to do the good for the other as to do the good for oneself.

Try a little experiment for yourselves. Select a person who is close to you, say, a spouse, child, or close friend. Now, let your Level One-Two default drive have its way (without attempting to restrain it) so that you are focused on the bad news in that person. Notice that what is weak, unkind, insensitive, stupid and irritating comes to the forefront of your consciousness, and you feel impatient and aggravated. It will become apparent that this perspective is all-encompassing, literally blocking out the good news in that person. In addition to your anxiety level increasing, you will find that you see this person as a problem, and that you are inclined to

⁴²See Marcel 2001(a), especially chapters 6-10.

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dispense with *it*, fix *it*, or escape from *it*. The person has become essentially a thing, who is now powerless to elicit respect, empathy, and love.

As you are going through this process, attend to what the *other* person is thinking, feeling, and doing. It is very likely that she is becoming more defensive, distrustful, indignant, and resentful toward you. In the process of fifteen minutes, we can render empathy and love impossible – in the hearts of both people in the relationship. It is amazing that so many negative consequences can come from simply letting our default drives have their way – and submitting to the spell of “looking for the bad news in the other.”

Now try the reverse -- looking for the *good* news in the other. You will probably find this to be difficult at first, because Level Three and Four are not our default drives, and so we have to bring our contributive and transcendent sensibility to the foreground by an intentional act. When we do this, it becomes much easier to see the good news in the other.

Now, take out the chart given below, and begin to respond to its questions – what are the little good things that person tries to do? What are the great good things she aspires to? What are her delightful idiosyncrasies, gratuitous acts of kindness, natural empathy, principles and ideals, and transcendent desires (for perfect truth, love, goodness, beauty, and home)?

As you bring some of these characteristics into focus, notice that they begin to contextualize the bad news, and that your anxiety level (irritation and aggravation) begins to subside. As this happens, you will see the other in a new light – her goodness, lovability, and mystery are beginning to shine through, and as they do, you *naturally* empathize with it, making it easier to do the good for *her* than to do the good for yourself. One little shift in our intentional focus can yield amazing results – the difference between a negative relationship and a positive one; between mutual destruction and mutual complementarity.

When we first begin the process of bringing our contributive, empathetic and transcendent sensibilities to the fore, so that we can see the good news in the other, it is quite difficult, because we are accustomed to acquiescing to the spell of our default drive (looking for the bad news), and so we need to “start small.” Force yourself to find a few positive characteristics (amidst the sea of irritation and aggravation), then put a smile on your face (because physically smiling can actually help you change your psychic outlook), and then say something positive to that person – even if it seems small or trivial. You will soon sense your empathy cutting through the negative emotions, and then you will notice that the other person is gradually becoming responsive (though at first they may be suspicious). It is very difficult for most people (who are not experiencing a state of stress or depression) to respond to kindness with rudeness or callousness -- smiles elicit smiles and kindness elicits kindness. This breaks the cycle of the bad news leading to “mutually assured destruction,” and allows the possibility of growth in empathy and love in the near future.

Even though it is difficult to engage in this process initially, it becomes easier as we engage in it more. Again you will want to use the power of your creative unconscious and imagination to help you through the transition by using the three-step process given above.

WHAT AM I LOOKING FOR IN OTHERS?
What are the little good things they try to do?
What are their gratuitous acts of kindness?
What are their delightful idiosyncrasies?
What are the subtle and overt ways in which they offer friendship?
What are their values or principles?
What are the great good things they aspire to do?
What are the strengths they have that complement my own?
What are their spiritual or religious commitments?
How do they exemplify transcendent mystery? *In their pursuit of truth? *In their pursuit of love? *In their pursuit of goodness and justice? *In their pursuit of beauty and home?

First, review the questions in the following chart three times during your fifteen-minute contemplative period. Secondly, take a few weeks to allow your unconscious mind to answer those questions until you have answered most of them. Finally, imagine yourself seeing and acting upon the positive attributes in the other you have delineated, so that you will induce the belief and excitement that leads to empathy and ultimately, to love.

The Four Levels of Happiness are important in choosing our good friends and spouses. Individuals who are dominant Level Three and Four (or are seriously seeking these Levels) will want to look for a spouse who is similarly committed. If for example a dominant Level Three person marries a dominant Level Two person, there will be difficulties because they will frequently lack common cause and a true understanding of one another's motives. They may find themselves in conflict, wondering why the other is so negligent or heartless. They will teach different values to their children, and will have a different expectation of what life should bring and what true success should be. This can incite resentment and a growing separation from one another. Therefore, it is best for people to marry and select good friends on the same level of identity.

Another problem arises when two dominant Level One-Two individuals marry each other. There is a likelihood of difficulty arising out of internal competitions within the marriage, and the proclivity of each spouse trying to dominate the other. If this couple reaches common cause, they can slip into a "group comparison game," in which they strive to be better than other couples (instead of entering into community with them or helping them). If they see themselves as winners, they can become collectively narcissistic, and if they see themselves as losers, they can become collectively jealous, fearful and depressed. If they are caught in-between, they go

through the same swings as individuals, but their mutual reinforcement can exacerbate the negative feelings on both sides of the swing.

This does not mean that Level Three-Four people should not relate to Level One-Two people. They absolutely should, because these people are not malicious or evil – they are caught up in a lifestyle about which they have not reflected and which is likely to be causing them the negative emotions of the comparison game and existential emptiness. The best gift a Level Three-Four person has to give to a Level One-Two person is a pathway out of the comparison game, so a relationship with them can be both contributive and satisfying. Much of the time, committed Level One-Two people are not naturally attracted to Level Three-Four people, but when they are, it is a good indication that they see something in Level Three-Four people that they want for themselves. Hence, a relationship with them can lead them to the contributive and transcendent identity they are seeking.

Familiarity with the Four Levels of Happiness can help people on every level to better understand and communicate with one another. We will have a better sense of our own desires and commitments as well as those of people in different levels, and this cannot be bad for marriages, friendships, workplace, collegiality, relationships with employees, and even political negotiations. Most of us have heard of personality inventories (such as the Myers-Briggs Inventory), which enables better communication in virtually all of our relationships from family to workplace to community. However such personality inventories do not account for the prioritization of values, ideals, relationships, and transcendent identity. For this reason, studying the above four levels of happiness can complement personality inventories, and help to improve friendships, marriages, and leadership in the workplace and community.

IV.

Third Fundamental Attitude: What Am I Looking for In Myself?

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The third fundamental attitude concerns the way we look at ourselves. Notice that the way we look at others frequently forms our perspective of ourselves. If we look at others as problems again and again, we are likely to use that same criterion to assess *ourselves*.

Our view of life's purpose affects our view of ourselves. Recall from above that a dominant Level One-Two perspective tends to focus our attention on *things about* ourselves (what might be called the “thingafied estimable self”). In a Level One perspective, we define ourselves in terms of our external appearance – how we look and what we are wearing. In a Level Two perspective, we define ourselves in terms of our skill sets and utility functions, our intelligence, status and popularity, achievements, power, and control. These characteristics can be esteemed or valued, but they are really not loved. Sometimes we use the word “love” to refer to something we really appreciate and esteem, but in this context, I mean it in the technical sense defined above (where it is just as easy if not easier to do the good for the other as to do the good for oneself). Thus, we love *people* (with whom we have empathy, form relationships, and in whom we find a sense of complementarity and home), but we esteem *things* (either material things or objectifiable characteristics – such as intelligence, skill sets, status, etc.).

Thus, if we continually focus on the *things* about ourselves, it will block out our loving and lovable self, because the estimable self is much more tangible, concrete, and apparent. It comes into view very quickly and occupies our attention. However, characteristics associated with love (such as empathy, generosity, humility, compassion, and nobility) are often intangible, requiring *intentional focus* in order to be noticed.

A dominant Level One-Two perspective greatly appreciates and values the objectifiable and estimable characteristics, but ignores and even devalues loving and lovable characteristics. Thus the dominant Level One-Two person is not seeking a good friend or a colleague with whom to have common cause for a good beyond self, or a just, honest, or righteous person as a friend (in good times and in bad), but rather an attractive, successful winner whose attributes will be useful, and enhance reputation.

Recall that the perspective we used to judge others becomes the perspective we use to judge ourselves. If we ignore or devalue empathy, friendship, generosity, humility, compassion, honesty, and nobility in others, we will fail to pursue and develop them within ourselves, restricting our development to non-relational, non-interpersonal, and non-transcendent characteristics.

Martin Buber sees this as a reduction of self to our lowest level of being (what he terms the “I-it” level as distinct from the “I-thou” level and the “I-Thou” level).⁴³ By doing this we not only reduce ourselves to about 10% of our potential, but we de-personalize ourselves. We no longer think of our personhood, friendship, and presence as having intrinsic worth – and so we replace this intrinsic self-worth with mere *things* about ourselves. When we look at *who* we are, we do not think of loving, lovable, or transcendent characteristics, but only *what* we look like or *how* we compare to others. We have little sense of the goodness of our presence and friendship or the life we bring to relationships. Our self-valuation is grounded solely in our resume’, appearance, net worth, and skill sets -- a pathetic undervaluation of our true dignity and destiny.

In order to free ourselves from this prison of thingification and undervaluation, we will have to refocus our conscious and unconscious mind on the characteristics mentioned above. The following list of questions will help to do this when reviewed twice per day for several months.

⁴³See Buber 2010.

WHAT AM I LOOKING FOR IN MYSELF?
Relational and Interpersonal Attributes
Do I value and develop empathy for others? Do I value and develop humility (as an antidote to narcissism)? Do I value and develop compassion towards others? Do I value and develop loyalty to others? Do I value and develop patience, kindness, and gentleness towards others? Do I value and develop the quality of my personal presence and friendship? Do I value and accept others friendship and presence in my life? Do I value the above attributes as much as (or more than) my resume', appearance, net
Ethical and Virtue Attributes
Do I value and develop honesty and character in myself? Do I value and develop justice or fairness in myself? Do I value and develop a moral courage in myself? Do I value and develop ethical principles to which I am committed? Do I value and develop ethical ideals to which I am committed? Do I value and develop self-discipline?
Transcendent and Spiritual Attributes
Do I value and develop my awareness of perfect and unconditional truth, love, goodness, beauty, and being? Do I value and develop my relationship with God? Do I value and development my striving to be unconditionally loving (in imitation of God)? Do I value and develop my striving for unconditional justice and goodness

V.

What Kind of Freedom Am I Seeking?

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The fourth fundamental attitude concerns human freedom. It should come as no surprise that we greatly value our freedom and autonomy – to think and do what we desire, and to avoid constraint, encumbrance, control, or domination by others and life’s circumstances. Our view of freedom operates very much like our view of happiness – it can motivate us to pursue or avoid situations, courses of action, and certain people. It operates more subtly than our view of happiness because we often do not know *why* we are pursuing or avoiding a particular task, person, or path. Very often, it is our *unconscious* view of freedom which is causing us to act in ways that we might rationally believe to be unwise or even destructive. Sometimes our unconscious view of freedom acts so strongly that it screens out the data that our rational conscious mind considers to be wise or appropriate. Thus, our unconscious view of freedom can manipulate, undermine, and cloak our best interests, and it can make us afraid of a path that would lead to an optimally pervasive, enduring, and deep life. It can make us feel repulsion toward compassionate love, ethics, commitment, and faith (Levels Three and Four), and it can even make a regressive and self-destructive path look very attractive. Since our view of freedom

is such a powerful influence on our lives and actions, it is incumbent upon us to first rationally reflect on what we want our view of freedom to be, and then to try and align our conscious reflection with our unconscious mind. We will discuss each of these imperatives in turn.

Editor’s note:

There is an extensive discussion of the Four Levels of Freedom and the reflection questions pertaining to it in *Finding True Happiness*. pp. 103-108. See <https://www.ignatius.com/Finding-True-Happiness-P881.aspx>

WHAT KIND OF FREEDOM AM I LOOKING FOR?
Assuming that I am committed to making an optimal positive difference to the world and the kingdom of God with my time, talents, and energy, and that I desire the most pervasive, enduring, and deep purpose in life:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Do I feel more passion and excitement about my more pervasive, enduring, and deep goals than I do about satisfying my Level One desires and my egocentric desires?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Do I feel excitement and positive energy about making commitments toward my highest goals even though they may have some difficult or unpleasant dimensions (foreclosing options, overcoming obstacles, and “sticking with the plan”)?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ What kinds of activities hinder or undermine my pursuit of what is most pervasive, enduring, and deep — activities that are wasteful and beneath my true purpose in life?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Do I have enough positive energy about my highest goals to let go of these hindering or wasteful activities?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Am I willing to make sacrifices to have a truly meaningful commitment to someone or some ideal?
Please note that some Level One and Level Two activities are necessary and desirable — so we want to know the point at which Level One and Level Two activities become wasteful or undermine Level Three and Level Four activities. For example, it may be desirable for the purposes of recreation or rest to have a glass of wine or watch a movie, but at what point does drinking wine or going to the movies begin to hinder Level Two, Three, or Four?

VI.

The Benefits of Moving from Dominant Level One-Two to Dominant Level Three-Four [Back to top](#)

Bringing the viewpoints in the four above lists into our unconscious minds is a lifetime project. The more we review the questions on those lists (and use the above three-step process to respond to them), the more our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors will evolve towards Level Three-Four. Transformation can be very gradual, and so we should not expect to see immediate results, however, as many individuals who have worked on these lists for a few years have discovered, they have made significant and lasting changes for the better. They have more substance, more abiding commitments, deeper relationships, more positive contributions, a greater sense of purpose, and as a result they are happier!

How does this happiness manifest itself? As the process of transformation begins to take effect in both the conscious and unconscious mind, there will be a marked decrease in the negative emotions of the comparison game. Jealousy, fear of loss of esteem, inferiority, contempt, façade building, self-pity, ego sensitivity, resentment, excessive concern about what people are thinking, isolation and loneliness will begin to subside. More importantly, the deeper feeling of existential emptiness will lessen its grip, and be replaced by a sense of purpose, substantive identity, and spirit which inspires high ideals and common cause.

We will be respected not because we are better than others, but because we bring contribution, hope, vision, and joy to others and the culture – we will make life better for our corner of the world. We will not have to worry about whether someone is more intelligent than we are, so long as we use our intelligence to make a positive difference to others, the culture, and the kingdom of God. We will not have to be concerned with having greater status or position, so long as we use the status and position we have to optimize good among the people and institutions we touch. If people criticize us for comparative disadvantage, what does it matter? We are making the most out of what we have, and we can justify our lives accordingly. We will be free, committed, inspirational, and a powerful influence for the good in our part of the world. We are happier in this state, not only because the debilitating emotions of the comparison game and existential emptiness are subsiding, but also because the kind of happiness we are pursuing is more pervasive, enduring, and deep. What could be a better life?

VII.

The Level Three-Four Comparison Game

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One more point should be made about moving to Levels Three and Four, namely, the temptation to turn Level Three and Four pursuits into a Level Two comparison game. This occurs more frequently than might at first be imagined. We can become intoxicated by the pursuit of Level Three and Four objectives. They can bring so much purpose and substance to our lives that we begin to define ourselves in terms of our *list of accomplishments* – “I started these two organizations, wrote these two books, gave 15 major presentations, and went on three major television programs in the last year.” As we begin to define ourselves in terms of our list of accomplishments, we will see that our “estimable self” is becoming more important than our loving, contributive, and transcendent self (see Section IV above). As the list grows more important for defining our self-worth and identity, we will make humility, compassion, virtue, self-sacrifice, and empathy less important. The estimable self will begin to eclipse the loving, contributive, and transcendent self.

Now something truly insidious begins to happen. We begin to *compare* our achievements (on our all-important list) to those of others, and we begin to think, “My list is bigger than yours,” or “I’m doing more good than you are,” or “I am making a bigger difference to the kingdom of God than you are,” or “I am more important than the vast majority of others in the community, the church, and the culture.” The door is now open to full-blown narcissism (which is completely contrary to the Level Three and Level Four commitments we have made). We

begin to think, “How could the church live without *me*?” Or, “What would the culture do without *me*?” We have become an indispensable hero for community, church, and culture.

A cursory examination of cultural history reveals thousands of people who initially aspired to do good, then inflated their self-importance, and ultimately found themselves unhappy or even in despair. Much of the time, they are rejected by the very people who once admired them, and their heroic stature is undermined by their narcissistic drives.

How does this happen? As a person becomes increasingly impressed with how much more he is doing than others, he begins to see himself as more important not only in his organization or community, but also in the scheme of history, and even the scheme of salvation. This has the effect of driving him toward ever greater heights of narcissism while disdain (and implicitly belittling) those who are not nearly as important. He might think, “I don’t know how you can stand your paltry contribution to the world, but I guess you can, so that’s really nice for you.”

Slowly but surely, this person becomes affectively detached from the people around him. He no longer has any time or psychic energy to be concerned about people -- their well-being, suffering, goodness, and friendship. He really doesn’t enjoy people anymore, barely cracking a smile because he is so involved in saving the world. Eventually he does not seek to love or be loved by others, but only to be respected and admired by them. Strangely, the path to Level Three and Four has not led to a *diminishment* of narcissism, but rather an immense increase in it.

This attitude does not last for long because important as the work of this person might be, most people don’t believe that he is their indispensable hero or messiah. The more arrogant and contemptuous he becomes, the more they distance themselves from him, and the more he feels acute loneliness amidst his superiority and indispensable role in salvation history. He begins to resent people for not elevating him to the status of president or pope, and contents himself with the knowledge that he is superior, and that everyone else is simply jealous. Ultimately this leads to self-pity, depression, and then to insipient despair.

How can we avoid this temptation to become promethean or messianic when we are successful in our pursuit of Level Three and Four purpose? In a word – love. Letting one person matter, making time for the little needs of a child, calling a person who is in need, and simply listening to someone who is suffering interrupts the plunge into narcissism. We can use the second list (our view of others) as a tool to deepen love, and move away from narcissism.

The first two lists above are complementary. The first list (our purpose in life) orients us toward *doing* something positive beyond ourselves, while the second list (our view of others) orients us toward *being with* others. By itself, the first list has an “Achilles heel,” because it can cause successful people to accumulate accomplishments (and then attribute self-worth to that list). However, the second list can avert the fatal weakness of the first list by focusing us on the unique goodness, lovability, and mystery of the other. It orients us to enter into relationship with that other irrespective of whether the other can advance us in our accomplishments, or provide adulation to our hungry egos. When we see the good news in the other, and empathy occurs, the other has intrinsic value, and the relationship has worth independent of any other goal or

aspiration. Simply enjoying the other, spending time with the other, listening to the other, going to a movie, and recreating with the other gives value to life, because “being with” is a good in itself. If we keep a balance between the first and second lists – between doing good and being with – between contribution and empathy, we have built a line of defense against the Level Three-Four comparison game.

Is the loving defense enough? Speaking for myself, I cannot say that it is. I have too many ways of rationalizing my way out of genuine love in order to immerse myself in my list of accomplishments. The only *cure* for me has been my relationship with the Lord. My prayer life gives me a heightened awareness of God’s love, and my relationship with Him calls me more and more to my authentic self. He invites me to serve Him by showing me His loving way which enables me to let go of my list of accomplishments and to follow him in *His* way of service – the way of His Son, who had time to be with sinners, the poor, and the weak; who enjoyed his relationships with the simple and the powerful; who listened to the cry of the poor as well as “the wise of this world;” and who sacrificed his life to bring us love. My relationship with the Father and the Son points me in the right direction, calls me to responsibility, and then gives me the grace to try to see others as he sees them, and to try to love others as he loves them – not out of a sense of duty, but out of a sense of delight and respect for the unique and eternal glory in which He has created us.

This grace is my ultimate line of defense against the narcissism of the Level Three-Four comparison game, for as my relationship with God grows, my love of others (despite my compulsive tendencies to concentrate on the highest level of accomplishment) becomes a little more authentic – a little less self-serving, a little less comparative, and a little more truthful to my non-messianic, non-promethean reality. In a way, my relationship with God (Level Four), complements the empathy arising out of my relationship with others (made possible by looking for the good news in the other). In my life, love of God increases love of neighbor, and love of neighbor in turn, increases my love of God.

We might conclude by asking whether Level Three can be enough for optimal happiness, purpose, dignity, and destiny. As the reader may have inferred from the foregoing paragraphs, it is not – at least for me. In Volumes 1 and 2 we gave an overview of the considerable evidence for God and a soul. We saw the high likelihood that we are transcendent beings – not only from our capacity to survive bodily death (from near death experiences), but also from our five transcendental desires, and our connection to the Divine Being through the numinous experience and our love of the sacred. In the next Chapter we will examine what happens to us when we put off or ignore Level Four desires and capacities in our lives. We are likely to experience yet another set of negative feelings – another dimension of existential emptiness called “cosmic emptiness, alienation, loneliness, and guilt.” However, there is a way out – a little leap of faith toward the loving God who is inviting us into a relationship with Him now that leads to an unimaginably beautiful eternity with Him and others.

Chapter Five

Overcoming Cosmic Emptiness, Loneliness, and Alienation – the Move to Level 4

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Introduction

We now begin the journey toward Level Four happiness and purpose in life. If we follow experience, and our love of the sacred, we can begin to probe the entryway into the domain of the transcendent. One way of doing this is to look for additional clues about our transcendent nature. Section I will reveal several new clues -- not so much positive ones (as we saw in Volumes 1 and 2), but negative ones that turn out to be positive.

Throughout the rest of this chapter, we will combine the positive and negative clues that reveal two dimensions of the call of the transcendent – the interior call and the exterior call (the call of the transcendent from our experience of the world around us). Since the multiple dimensions of the interior call have been discussed above, we will concentrate on three primary manifestations of the exterior call, and how they connect with our interior call (Sections II.A – II.C).

The reader might be asking, “Does the call of God really have so many different dimensions? Isn’t this a little complicated?” Couldn’t He have just spoken to us interiorly and said, “I am God, and I’m calling you to Myself, and here is a miracle to prove that it is really Me,” and then *kapowee* – you are transformed into the person of your dreams – a miracle! Would that it were that simple. God has to contend with one huge mitigating factor – human freedom.

Fyodor Dostoyevsky presents a cogent explanation of this divine dilemma in *The Brothers Karamazov*. In it, the protagonist, Ivan, tells the story of “The Grand Inquisitor,” in which Jesus comes back to the world at the time of the Spanish Inquisition. The Grand Inquisitor has him imprisoned immediately and he begins the interrogation of Jesus by asking, “Why didn’t you dazzle them with a miracle to validate your message? Why didn’t you take power when you had the chance?” The Inquisitor goes on to respond for Jesus, “You did not want to deprive man of freedom and rejected the offer [the temptation of the devil to turn stones into loaves of bread which could be a miraculous sign of Jesus’ Sonship], for what kind of freedom is it, you reasoned, if obedience is purchased with loaves?” The Inquisitor reasons further, “Is human nature really of a kind as to be able to reject a miracle, and to make do, at such terrible moments of life, moments of the most terrible fundamental and tormenting spiritual questions, with only a free decision of the heart?” Finally, the Inquisitor answers his own question, “You did not come down from the Cross when they shouted to you, mocking and teasing you: ‘Come down from the Cross and we will believe that it is you.’ *You did not come down because again you did not want to enslave man with a miracle and because you thirsted for a faith that was free, not miraculous.*”⁴⁵

⁴⁵Dostoyevsky 2003, pp. 322 - 344.

As will be seen in the forthcoming volumes, God truly “thirsts for a faith that is free.” God will not force us, compel us, or even push us into faith – He wants us to respond to His call with freedom and love. So He operates with clues in both the inner domain of our hearts and souls (the interior call), and in the outer world around us (the exterior call). If we carefully probe these clues, we will see his loving and inviting hand – or perhaps better – heart, and if we respond to it, it will lead to the adventure of grace announced by the silence of Jesus in Dostoyevsky’s “The Grand Inquisitor.”

I.
Is Level Three Enough?
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As the reader may have surmised, Level Three will not be able to satisfy us because we have transcendent awareness and desire that calls us beyond what Level Three can offer. As noted in Volume Two, our five transcendental desires for perfect truth, love, goodness, beauty, and home will continue to affect us whether we acknowledge them or not. We will still want to know everything about everything even if we abandon the pursuit of truth; still desire perfect love even if we think it does not exist; still desire perfect justice and goodness even if we have been disappointed by people’s conduct and the judicial system; still desire perfect beauty even if we believe it is unattainable; and still desire perfect home even if we believe that there is nothing beyond us but emptiness and darkness.

It seems that we have been created for transcendent life and fulfillment, and if Plato and the many schools of transcendental philosophy are correct, then God (perfect truth, love, goodness, beauty, and being) is the source of our transcendental awareness, desire, and nature. We might infer that through our transcendental desires, God is giving us a gigantic clue about who we are and what will make us ultimately happy.

In Volume Two (Chapter Three) we discussed Rudolph Otto’s numinous experience, and noted there that our feeling of mystery-tremendum-fascination-energy has in it a feeling of being called or being invited by the “Wholly Other” to seek more or go deeper. We also noted that this primordial numinous experience gives rise to an intuition of sacredness as distinct from the merely profane (the irreducible fundamental ground of “*homo religiosus*”—“*religious man*” according to Mircea Eliade). Our sense of the numinous and our intuition of the sacred are what make us desire and pursue religious revelation and community. Without religion (revelation and church community), we feel radically incomplete – that we are separated from our ultimate dignity and fulfillment—that we are ignoring our life’s most important call—that we have preferred a controllable shadow land over an uncontrollable light. Eliade uses this to explain why most people (84% of the world according to the 2012 Pew Survey) are religious today and why nearly 100% of people were religious only a century ago. He goes on to predict that those who forsake their religious nature (and call) will *feel* an overwhelming sense of loss, an unfulfilled yearning for companionship with the Numinous (Divine), and as a result, find themselves in a profound state of unhappiness. Once again, we may discern a clue not only about what will make us happy, but also the path to get there—that is, to follow the call of the numinous, sacred, and divine within us.

Otto's and Eliade's elucidation of our interior call—and the unhappiness that comes from ignoring or forsaking it—has been confirmed by a 2004 study published by the American Psychiatric Association. Dr. Kanita Dervic and ten other psychiatrists, attempted to measure differences in the psychological state and well-being of the religiously affiliated vs non-religiously affiliated people – eliminating other extrinsic factors that could cause such states (such as economic, educational, and parental differences/advantages as well as stressful life events and clinical reasons for depression). They discovered that non-religiously affiliated people had significantly higher rates of suicide, depression, impulsivity, aggression, familial tensions, and substance abuse by comparison with the religiously affiliated. They concluded (in their own words):

Religiously unaffiliated subjects had *significantly* more lifetime suicide attempts and more first-degree relatives who committed suicide than subjects who endorsed a religious affiliation. Unaffiliated subjects were younger, less often married, less often had children, and had less contact with family members. Furthermore, subjects with no religious affiliation perceived fewer reasons for living, particularly fewer moral objections to suicide. In terms of clinical characteristics, religiously unaffiliated subjects had more lifetime impulsivity, aggression, and past substance use disorder. No differences in the level of subjective and objective depression, hopelessness, or stressful life events were found.⁴⁶

In sum, there is significant interior evidence of our call by a numinous, sacred, divine, “Wholly Other” to follow and pursue a life of transcendence, spirituality, and holiness, which is necessary for ultimate dignity, fulfillment, completeness and happiness. This interior evidence is corroborated by the data of the 2004 study of the American Psychiatric Association. Are there other clues to this Divine call to ultimate fulfillment, completeness, and happiness? Indeed there are – and they constitute a strong point of agreement between religious and atheistic existentialist philosophers.

These philosophers have elucidated four *negative* “cosmic” feelings (“cosmic” states of being) that religious existentialists (e.g., Soren Kierkegaard, Gabriel Marcel, Max Scheler, Karl Jaspers, and Martin Buber) have associated with God's call -- *cosmic* emptiness, alienation, loneliness, and guilt. Atheistic existentialists (such as Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Franz Kafka) acknowledge these “cosmic” feelings, but since they deny the existence of God, conclude to life's absurdity.

It should be noted that none of these atheistic philosophers has given any *objective* rational argument against God's existence—though Sartre attempted to give an argument based on his *subjective* apperception of absolute freedom (a view that most philosophers deny). As explained in Volume One (Chapter Four, Section I), it is *impossible* to give objective evidence for God's non-existence. Evidence can only be given *for* God's *existence* (such as the evidence from Lonergan's proof, the metaphysical proof, the Borde-Vilenkin-Guth proof, entropy, and medical studies of near death experiences).

⁴⁶ The statistical analysis for this conclusion may be found in Dervic et al. 2004. pp 2303-2308.

This absence of evidence is borne out in the works of these atheistic existentialists, for their denial of God is grounded solely in *subjective feelings and opinion* – mostly coming from their interpretation of suffering and the meaninglessness of human life. Ironically, part of that sense of life’s meaninglessness and absurdity comes from their awareness that without a supreme being that can grant eternal, peaceful and loving resurrection, suffering cannot be ultimately redeemed or explained, and life cannot be given ultimate meaning. Notice the circularity of these arguments: “I feel that there is no God because suffering cannot be explained, and suffering cannot be explained because I assume that there is no God.”

In sum, both religious and atheistic existentialist philosophers agree that we have deep and pervasive feelings about the meaninglessness of life without God, but they interpret these feelings quite differently. Religious existentialists view them as a call by God to enter into relationship with Him for ultimate meaning, dignity, happiness, authenticity, and fulfillment.⁴⁷ Atheistic existentialists – who believe that there is no God, on the basis of the above circular argumentation – view these feelings as a part of life’s absurdity.⁴⁸

We must now give a description of these deep and pervasive feelings of meaninglessness that come from ignoring or rejecting religion and relationship with God. Recall the empirical basis for the correlation between non-religious affiliation and unhappiness in the American Psychiatric Association study given above (see Dervic 2004). Recall also the predictions of Mircea Eliade (based on Rudolf Otto’s numinous experience) about the radical unhappiness, incompleteness, and unfulfillment of those who deny their religious nature (“*homoreligiosus*”). The existentialists’ exploration of the deep and pervasive feelings of meaninglessness without God will help to explain these studies and predictions, for they are all dimensions of the same reality – human beings that have been created with a sense of ultimacy and perfection that can only be satisfied by God – confirming St. Augustine’s insight “For Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.”⁴⁹

So what are these deep and pervasive feelings of the meaninglessness of life without God? We might classify them in four general categories – cosmic emptiness, cosmic loneliness, cosmic alienation, and cosmic guilt. In order to understand these “cosmic” feelings/states of being we will want to return for a moment to the analysis of existential emptiness given above (Chapter Three). Recall for a moment that this kind of emptiness is connected with alienation, loneliness, and guilt.

These feelings have two distinct contexts – a “*this worldly*” context and a *transcendent context*. With respect to the “*this worldly*” context, emptiness feels like an absence of purpose *in this life* (not having Level Two or Level Three goals and aspirations); alienation feels like we

⁴⁷ It can be reasonably argued that St. Augustine in his *Confessions* was the first Christian existentialist – indeed perhaps the first existentialist. He expresses his awareness of God’s call in his deep and pervasive feelings of “meaninglessness without God” in his famous phrase, “For Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee” (*Confessions*, Book I.1).

⁴⁸ Franz Kafka’s *The Trial* best exemplifies this absurdity, but Sartre also proclaim it loudly in *Nausea*, and Camus in *The Myth of Sisyphus*.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

don't fit into or are rejected by people or institutions in this world; loneliness feels like an absence of family, friends, and colleagues; and guilt arises out of doing harm to a person or group of persons.

These four feelings are qualitatively different in a Level Four context. Before examining them, we need to define the term “cosmic.” This term is used here with one of its common connotations -- “infinitely or inconceivably vast,” which implies “the totality of being.” Thus “cosmic emptiness” is a feeling that there is *nothing outside* of us except emptiness, darkness, and coldness; “cosmic alienation” refers to a feeling of not fitting into or not having a real place in the *whole* order of things; “cosmic loneliness” refers to a sense of being alone in the *totality* of things; and “cosmic guilt” refers to a feeling of living beneath our true calling and responsibility in the *cosmic* struggle between good and evil.

These four feelings are perceived as negative because they indicate a radically incomplete state of being, and suggest not only that something is missing, but also that “what is missing” is essential to our happiness, completeness, purpose, and fulfillment. We feel this essential incompleteness in a way similar to the loss of vision or hearing – we are not only inconvenienced by our loss of mobility and autonomy, but we feel like we are not our whole selves.

We will now examine each of these four feelings briefly. Let's begin with *cosmic emptiness*. For Kierkegaard and other religious existentialists, this feeling arises out of an absence of purpose, not in the immediate world around us, but in the totality of being. This is manifest by an overriding sense of *boredom* present even amidst a beautiful family, a successful career, material comforts, terrific friends, and just about everything a person could want in this world. The boredom keeps telling us that there should be something more – yet it does not seem to be apparent in the *natural world*. Lippitt and Pattison state Kierkegaard's position as follows: “It is the existential experience of inner emptiness found in boredom's directionless vacuum that is the decisive spur to Kierkegaard's later analyses of human despair.”⁵⁰ Boredom is an indicator of inner emptiness, which eventually manifests itself as “being surrounded by nothingness, darkness, and coldness.” The longer we submit to the emptiness, the closer we come to despair.

Atheistic existentialists, such as Camus and Sartre, exclude the possibility of transcendental fulfillment, meaning that these feelings of emptiness cannot be overcome. This makes life absurd and despair inevitable (see the circular argumentation to this conclusion given above). However, religious existentialists believe that this cosmic boredom and emptiness is *not* a pure negative, but rather a call (or perhaps better a neon sign) beckoning us to go beyond (transcend) a merely superficial purpose in life. This call beyond superficiality leads to a domain of spiritual, transcendent, and eternal purpose.

For religious existentialists, the feelings of boredom and emptiness amidst a great family, terrific career, etc. provoke us to ask, “How can this be? Everything is going great in just about every aspect of my life – How can I be feeling boredom, emptiness, and even insignificance – why do I feel the anxiety of overlooking or losing something of ultimate significance?” Thus, for these philosophers, cosmic boredom and emptiness is God's way of provoking us to search for

⁵⁰ Lippitt and Pattison 2013, p. 84

our true purpose, dignity, and destiny (which is spiritual, transcendent, and eternal) -- and not to settle for “terrific success” in the domain of finitude, mortality, the conditioned, and imperfect.

Emptiness is perceived to be not only in the outer world, but also in our inner world. Sometimes we look at ourselves in the mirror and know that the eyes (the windows to the soul) staring back at us have in them a void or darkness or coldness. It can shock us or make us dizzy seeing this vapid stranger in the mirror. We don't want to entertain the thought of our nothingness or insignificance for too long, so we move away from the mirror, play some music loudly, or think about the urgent concerns of the day. We might think to ourselves for a second, “That was weird,” but we try to ignore it. If we experience this interior emptiness and insignificance day after day, it can give rise to malaise and quiet desperation. We may turn to our friends and family to fill the inner emptiness, but it persists because it is not the kind of emptiness that can be filled by a finite and imperfect being, but only a being of absolute and ultimate significance. The emptiness we sense in our mirror image is the absence of transcendent significance, and until we allow ourselves to be filled with it, the emptiness will persist along with the malaise.

We may now consider *cosmic alienation*. Alienation from the vantage point of “this world” (Level Three), generally signifies “not having a place in” or “not being at home in” our family, friends, workplace, community, or the culture. This sense of being an outsider not only brings with it loneliness (see below), but also an absence of worth or respectability – a sense of “not being welcome.”

Cosmic alienation has many of the same attendant feelings, but it does not arise out of “this worldly” contexts. It is not unusual for people to feel perfectly at home with family, friends, community, and culture, yet still feel a pervading sense of not being at home or not being welcome or being an outsider. If such a person is reflective, she is likely to ask, “Why do I feel a lack of acceptance or welcome, a sense of being left out of my home, when I have a wonderful family and friends as well as an agreeable community and culture?” She might notice that her feeling has a much more general context than the specific context of family and friends – “I feel out of sorts with everything; not at home in the totality of things; an outsider in the whole cosmos.” Even if she turns to her family, friends, and community for a greater sense of “home,” she will not be able to shake the pervading sense that a more general or transcendent home is missing. She is at home in small and intimate contexts, but not at home in the biggest context of all.

Atheistic existentialists would interpret this as yet another sign of the absurdity of life and the inevitability of despair, however religious existentialists see it as God's invitation to move more closely to our ultimate home – the transcendent, perfect, and eternal home. If we do not respond to this invitation, the feelings will persist, and they can produce a sense of purposelessness, malaise, and cynicism about life. Yet these feelings need not do this, for they can incite us to search for the ultimate and the transcendent which can lead us to our ultimate home.

We may now turn to *cosmic loneliness*. Religious existentialists also believe that the human person is interpersonal. When we are not in relation to others, we feel like a mere fraction

of ourselves. The more we are in relation to others, the more we experience ourselves, and the deeper our relationship with others, the deeper our experience of ourselves. Other people make us come alive, reflect us back to ourselves, and give us significance in our relationship with them. The more we invest ourselves in others, the more others invest themselves in us. This brings with it love, meaning, and well-being. When we are deprived of the presence of others, we lose this sense of significance, love, and well-being – and along with it, most of our sense of self. It is almost like someone has torn away a part of our being.

The Jewish existentialist philosopher, Martin Buber, noticed that our interpersonal personhood has, as it were, two layers – the “this worldly” layer described above (which he terms “I-thou”) and a transcendent and absolute layer (which he terms “I-Thou”).⁵¹ For Buber, our being not only anticipates and desires other human beings, but also an ultimate and absolute interpersonal Being. Our being is conditioned by the need for both a concrete person and an absolute person.

Buber’s insight is not as difficult as it might seem. Have you ever had an acute feeling of loneliness in the midst of a family get-together or at a wedding reception in which you felt the presence of your family and friends in a joyful and positive way? If so, you might have thought, “This doesn’t make any sense – I’m loved by family and friends, life is going well, there is a pervasive sense of joy, and yet I feel that something or somebody is missing – somebody really important.” You are aware that you are feeling lonely, but you don’t know for whom. You try to enter more fully into conversations, connect with certain family members and friends, but to no avail; the feeling of “missing someone important” persists.

The Catholic philosopher and theologian Karl Rahner provides some insight into this peculiar experience. He contends that God creates us in relationship to Himself from the first moment of our existence.⁵² If we enter into this relationship with Him, we will feel normal (and sometimes “supernormal”); however, if we ignore our relationship to the Creator, we will feel what was termed “cosmic loneliness.” This relationship with the Creator is so intimate and fundamental it is like a relationship with our parents. When we enter into it (let them into our lives, make them significant for us, and enter into their lives) we feel normal, but if we ignore this relationship and close ourselves off to our parents, we feel an acute loneliness -- even if they do not ignore us in return.

If Rahner is correct, then no human relationship will be able to take the place of this transcendent one. Continuing to ignore it makes the loneliness more acute. The autobiographies of many holy people recount how their encounter with the transcendent in prayer or in a church community brought them out of this state of loneliness into a reality they had not even imagined. St. Augustine’s prayer as he crosses this threshold expresses the moment well:

⁵¹ Buber has three layers of personhood – “I-it” (corresponding to Levels One and Two), “I-thou” (corresponding to Level Three), and “I-Thou” (corresponding to Level Four). See Buber 2010.

⁵² Rahner contends that when God creates us in relationship to Himself, He already creates the condition under which we can enter into that relationship: “God’s self-communication as offer is also the necessary condition which makes its acceptance possible.” Rahner 1982, p.128.

Late have I loved you, Beauty so ancient and so new, late have I loved you!
Lo, you were within,
but I outside, seeking there for you,
and upon the shapely things you have made
I rushed headlong – I, misshapen.
You were with me, but I was not with you.
They held me back far from you,
those things which would have no being
were they not in you.
You called, shouted, broke through my deafness;
you flared, blazed, banished my blindness;
you lavished your fragrance, I gasped; and now I pant for you;
I tasted you, and now I hunger and thirst;
you touched me, and I burned for your peace.⁵³

St. Augustine, for years had ignored a relationship with God by supposing that the fulfillment of worldly desires would bring true happiness. Yet a feeling of emptiness and loneliness within him kept revealing his incompleteness (and his lack of true purpose and happiness). It is only when he takes his leap of faith that he experiences a moment of complete satisfaction – resting in the unconditional love of a “beauty ever ancient, ever new.”

We may now look at the phenomenon of *cosmic guilt*. In Chapter One above, we discussed the effects of conscience, one of which is an intense feeling of alienation when we have done something that we believe to be evil. Yet guilt goes beyond alienation from specific intentional activities. Philosophy and literature are replete with examples of a generic sense of guilt, the source of which at first seems ambiguous (e.g. Dostoyevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* and Kafka’s *The Trial*). Though there are many theories about this, one important one was mentioned above with respect to underliving our life, underrating our potential, and underestimating our dignity and destiny. It is a sense of wasting our lives – not living up to our full potential, and letting our true purpose slip through our fingers.

Recall that even if we do not pursue one or more of the various levels of happiness, we still desire them, and that unfilled desire leaves us with a sense of yearning. Yet because we are reflective beings, we do not simply yearn for the Third or Fourth Levels of happiness, we have an underlying sense that we are not living up to our potential, that the most important parts of life are passing us by, and that we have ignored or shirked one of our most important responsibilities. This feeling of guilt can occur not only to a dominant Level Two person (see Chapter Two), but also to a dominant Level Three person who has not yet pursued Level Four. Even though such individuals get tremendous satisfaction from their relationships with and contributions to others, they also feel that there is something missing, and that they are responsible for this missing element in their lives, and so they have a cosmic sense of guilt.

At this juncture, cosmic guilt and cosmic loneliness become intertwined, because the feeling of letting life pass by seems to involve a Personal Being. We seem to be ignoring not just an immense opportunity or a path to transcendence, but a Personal Being who wants to give this

⁵³ Augustine 1991 Bk X.27, p 296.

to us. We have a sense that this Personal Being deserves our response and awaits our response,⁵⁴ and if we do not give a response we feel the above-mentioned guilt of ignoring a parent or a best friend – who wants to help us.

There is another dimension of cosmic guilt intermeshed with the one mentioned above. We not only feel a responsibility to make the most out of our lives, and to respond to a Personal Being who wants to help us to that goal, but also a responsibility to help in what was termed “the cosmic struggle between good and evil” (see Volume Two, Chapter Three, Section IV). Recall that Carl Jung implies that we feel an involvement in a cosmic or spiritual struggle which goes beyond our concrete existence. Modern myths of cosmic struggles between good and evil – such as *The Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter*, and *Star Wars* – reflect this common belief. As was explained in Volume Two (Chapter Three), we feel a responsibility to help the side of cosmic good and to fight the side of cosmic evil in a transcendent struggle that imbues our daily lives.

We sense that we are immersed in that struggle – whether we acknowledge it or not, and so when we ignore this cosmic dimension of our lives, we feel like guilty bystanders – who suspect that there is evil going on in the house next door, but ignore it because we do not want to become involved in a struggle. Even if we are not religious people, we can sense the presence of evil – in people’s contemptuous words, in the milieu of hopelessness and anxiety, and in a culture that undermines principles and love. We have an incipient sense of an adage popularly attributed to Edmund Burke – “all that is required for the triumph of evil is for a few good people to remain silent.”⁵⁵ When we remain silent to the evil we sense, we feel alienated from our purpose in life and implicitly believe that we are letting other people down -- that we are not stopping “the evil next door.” The nuances of this will be taken up in the next volume when we consider the presence of evil in the world, our innate awareness of it, and our call to struggle against it.

Cosmic guilt, like cosmic emptiness, alienation, and loneliness, can be suppressed as we move about in our daily lives. However, as can be seen, there is an interior penalty for doing this – a radical sense of letting down self, others, and a transcendent Personal Being that will not be suppressed.

Conclusion. The above four feelings can manifest themselves together. If this multidimensional feeling is left alone, it can give rise to a belief that happiness, fulfillment, and completeness are not possible – that emptiness and darkness are more prevalent than fullness and light, that alienation is more powerful than empathy, and that loneliness is more powerful than relationship. It has been described by various existentialists as “sickness about life,” “dread about the future,” “anxiousness about self,” “fear about losing self,” and “guilt about shirking our responsibility to self, others, and a transcendent Personal Being.”

⁵⁴ See Volume Two (Chapter Three, Section III) for the discussion of John Henry Newman’s contention that conscience has a personal-dialogical character. For him, the Personal Being is God who is at once authoritative and forgiving – just like a good father. See Newman 1961 pp 103-120.

⁵⁵ Though this phrase is the most quoted among those attributed to Edmund Burke, he did not really write it. It probably is a paraphrase of another one of his sayings: “When bad men combine, the good must associate; else they will fall one by one, an unpitied sacrifice in a contemptible struggle.” The shortened paraphrase attributed to Burke may have been inspired by Plato who wrote, “The penalty good men pay for indifference to public affairs is to be ruled by evil men.”

As noted above, religious existentialists have seen these negative feelings (and states of being) as something positive, because they lead us to our true nature, true home, true relationship with the Divine, and therefore to our true selves. However if they are to have this positive effect, we must make a decision to move toward the transcendent domain to which they are pointing – what will be called, “a little leap of faith.”

Before discussing this leap of faith, we can conclude with the thought that Level Three is not enough for our happiness and fulfillment. Our five transcendental desires and the four feelings of cosmic emptiness, alienation, loneliness, and guilt collectively indicate that we want something more and that there is something more. Religious existentialists recognize that we could never have either the five transcendental desires or these four negative feelings if God were not present to us. Inasmuch as He makes Himself known to us as our fulfillment, we feel empty when we are not in relationship to Him; inasmuch as He makes Himself known to us as true home, we feel alienated when we are not at home with Him; and inasmuch as He makes Himself known to us as ultimate love, we feel alone when we are not in relationship with Him.

We do not have to blindly believe the interpretation of religious existentialists about these feelings; there is considerable warrant for believing their interpretation from contemporary physics, logic, and philosophy of mathematics,⁵⁶ a transcendent soul capable of surviving bodily death from near death experiences,⁵⁷ and the *unconditional* love of God manifest in Jesus Christ.⁵⁸ This evidence is so substantial that it merits at least an investigation, if not a first step in a journey toward a transcendent Personal Being.

The loving God will always respect our freedom – He will not force or push us on the journey to faith. The taste of perfect home, love, truth, goodness, and beauty is an invitation, not an ultimatum, and so we must follow through with an act of belief and trust in the One who has created us for perfect fulfillment with one another in Him. Before discussing this little leap of faith, we need to briefly explore how God’s invitation comes to us through the outer world.

In Volume Two (Chapter Three) and above in this Section, we discussed God’s *interior* call to us, and now we turn to His invitation manifest in the world around us (His exterior call).

II. The Exterior Call of the Transcendent

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⁵⁶ See Volume 1 (Chapters One and Two) of this *Big Book*. See also the evidence and proofs in Spitzer 2010, pp 14-102 (For the evidence for God from physics) pp. 110-143 (for a metaphysical proof of God’s existence), pp. 144-176 (for Lonergan’s proof of God) pp. 177-215 (for a proof of the creation of past time from philosophy of mathematics).

⁵⁷ See Volume 2 for a comprehensive treatment of the evidence for a transphysical soul from medical studies of near death experiences, the five transcendental desires, the interior presence of God, heuristic notions, Gödel’s Proof, .and the hard problem of self-consciousness.

⁵⁸ See Volumes 3& 4

I will discuss three primary dimensions of the exterior call of the transcendent:

1. Church Community (Section II.A),
2. Transcendent Beauty (Section II.B), and
3. Philosophical and Theological Wisdom (Section II.C).

There are many other dimensions to the exterior call. For example, suffering can call us to transcendence – we could be addicted to drugs and alcohol, and turn for help to a 12-step program which could lead us to a higher power. We could also be grieving the loss of a family member, and hear the words of a consoling friend who might introduce us to a church community. There is no end to the ways that suffering can lead us to God which is why suffering is one of the primary vehicles toward God (even though it leads many away from God). The difference between choosing or rejecting God in times of suffering arises out of our interpretation of suffering and our capacity to recognize God’s guidance in it. This difference is so important that it is treated throughout the whole of Volume 19.

Evangelization is another vehicle through which the exterior call of the transcendent occurs. Again this could happen in a myriad of different ways – conversations with friends, missionary activity, reading a bible in a hotel room, watching a television program, etc. When people respond positively to evangelization efforts, they do so because they have already detected various aspects of the interior call -- the five transcendentals, the numinous experience, and the negative feelings of cosmic emptiness, alienation, loneliness, and guilt. If they had not been aware of and desired the *interior* call of the transcendent, the exterior call would be meaningless. They would have no movement of the *heart* toward the transcendent but only a movement of the mind – e.g. seeing the necessity for a creator in logical proof or physical evidence, etc. A movement of the mind only leads to the conclusion of a proof – it does not get to a *relationship* with the transcendent. Thus, a relationship with the transcendent comes from a connection between God’s interior and exterior call.

There are dozens of other ways in which the exterior call of the transcendent is manifest, but the following three are very typical. The mission of believers is to help people see the interior call and introduce them to the exterior call so that a relationship with the transcendent can occur. This introduction to the exterior call can generally be facilitated by pointing the way to a church community, transcendent beauty, and philosophical-theological wisdom.

II.A Church Community

Many people grow up in a religious household in which family members attend church services. The more their family attends those services, the more likely their children will begin to feel at home in the church community. However, frequency of attendance is not the only cause of “being at home” in a church community. It also helps for children to feel welcomed and for adolescents to assent to the primary doctrines and moral precepts of the church. When all or most of these factors are present, children and adolescents begin to sense themselves being within a transcendent or spiritual home. This is quite different from being at home with one’s family

because this home is laden with spiritual presence. The sense of home is not limited to a physical or familial domain; it is a distinctive awareness of being at home with God or at home in the *totality* of things.

The sense or feeling of cosmic emptiness, alienation, and loneliness (discussed in Section I) often play a part in deepening our relationship with a church community. Some people who were raised in a religious household but fell away will frequently return to their childhood religion to alleviate these negative feelings, and some people who were not raised in a religious household, or felt alienated from the religion in which they were raised, will begin a search for the spiritual or religious to discover what is missing – transcendently missing – in their lives.

They will seek out books or conversations about spiritual or theological wisdom. If this search leads to a church community, the sense of cosmic emptiness, alienation, and loneliness diminishes considerably, and if they actively follow up on their spiritual commitment with prayer, worship, study, virtue, and service, they become progressively more “at home” with God and the totality of things around them.

Let us return to the child or adolescent who feels at home in a church. As noted above, when these individuals feel accepted by the church community and in substantial agreement with its doctrines, they receive what might be called a *grace* (a positive intervention from God through which they feel at home with Him). Children and adolescents do not produce this experience on their own. Most of the time they are not even looking for it. It simply happens to them within the context of their church community.

Sometimes this grace experience is fully evident, but most of the time it is like a supernatural presence that remains a little below the surface of consciousness. The child or adolescent is aware that God is there, and when experiences of cosmic alienation or loneliness occur, they freely call upon God to help them. This interaction with God can increase throughout adolescence, leading to a remarkably strong relationship with God. If they pray, worship, and study theology, they can make this relationship more explicit. Most of these individuals do not experience profound existential anguish, abandonment, or despair. However, if young people do not nourish their faith, the implicit character of it can allow the relationship to slip into the background, and the feelings of cosmic emptiness, alienation, and loneliness then begin to emerge. These feelings can also emerge when adolescents reject their childhood faith either out of apathy or skepticism.

The problem of skepticism and apathy generally requires the third dimension of the “exterior call” – philosophical and theological wisdom (see Section II.C). It includes the kinds of evidence discussed in the preceding Volumes One and Two.

Speaking for myself, I grew up as a Catholic with my mother who went to Mass every day. The Maryknoll priests at Sacred Heart Church were exceedingly welcoming to me. I was very interested in my catechism classes, and I did not experience doubts about God, Jesus Christ, or the Church until I went to high school.

During my grade school years, I had a profound sense of being at home with God. I remember many different heightened experiences of this – once at a Christmas party during my fifth grade catechism class, another time at a Good Friday service, and several times when serving Mass at the parish. Looking back upon these experiences, I am quite certain that I did not give them to myself. These graces were unexpected and quite beyond me. As a child, I did not reflect much on this. I contented myself with the conviction that “God was with me and helping me.” But then as I entered high school some doubts began to manifest themselves. Fortunately, when those doubts emerged, I was able to experience the other two manifestations of the exterior call – an experience of transcendent beauty and philosophical and theological wisdom. These vehicles gradually lifted me out of my doubts to an adult faith which has continued to grow to this day.

Were it not for the Church, I don’t think I would have been able to make sense out of the interior call which I felt as a child, or the feelings of cosmic emptiness, alienation, loneliness, and guilt I felt as an adolescent. I would have had no source for finding the philosophical and theological wisdom I needed to respond to my apathy and skepticism, and I would have found myself in a transcendental wasteland – not knowing where to turn for answers or spiritual fulfillment – much like St. Augustine prior to his conversion. Thanks to some excellent catechists and priests, I did not have to endure the long and difficult journey of St. Augustine. The Church community, its teaching, its blending of faith and reason, and its manifestation of the spiritual world (in mass, church architecture, and spiritual practice) provided a myriad of bridges and shortcuts to the transcendent domain that facilitated my journey considerably.

I am by no means the only one for whom the Church has given evidence and explanation for the interior call of the transcendent. Every church community provides this vital function – explaining why over 84% of the world’s population not only believes in God, but affiliates with a religion.⁵⁹ This would make church communities worldwide the most powerful manifestation of God’s exterior call. Powerful as a church community is in manifesting God’s exterior call, it touches only the surface of a church’s potential. As seen in Volume Six, church communities have the potential to broaden and deepen our relationship with God through worship, learning, and service. This breadth and depth launches us into the transcendent life which is by its nature unconditional and eternal.

II.B Transcendent Beauty

Though many of us think of beauty as something pleasing to the senses such as natural beauty, beautiful music, art, or architecture, it cannot be restricted to this domain. It is also manifest in the domains of the mind and heart. Mathematicians frequently talk about the overarching beauty of mathematical intelligibility. Physicists are struck by the majesty of the universe or the elegance of fundamental equations. Beauty can be jointly appealing to the mind and the heart. Poets, dramatists, and novelists revel in the beauty of perfect metaphors, symbols, and turns of

⁵⁹ According to the 2010 PEW Center’s *Landmark Study on Religion and Public Life*, 84% of the world’s population (in 230 countries and territories), identify with a religious group. This encompasses 5.8 billion religiously affiliated adults and children out of a world population of 6.9 billion.

phrases. But the beauty of literature is not limited to the sound and sense of expression; it is also found in the goodness, love, and virtue of characters and relationships.

Beauty, whether it be found in nature, physical forms, mathematics, physics, poetry, literature, art, architecture, music, or individual people all have a way of pointing upward toward a transcendent beauty. Beauty not only elevates the soul, it points to our spiritual nature and even to its origin in an absolutely beautiful Being.

Beauty and the Transcendent

Plato recognized this elevating and transcendent quality of beauty and expressed it as a hierarchy – moving from the beauty of nature, art, and the senses, to the beauty of love, institutions, and laws, then to the beauty of mathematics and sciences, and finally to the beauty of transcendence and the Divine One. He states it this way in the *Symposium*:

He who would proceed aright in this matter should begin in youth to visit beautiful forms; and first...to love one such form only.... [S]oon he will of himself perceive...that the beauty in every form is one and the same...and will become a lover of all beautiful forms; in the next stage he will consider that the beauty of the mind is more honorable than the beauty of the outward form. ...until he is compelled to contemplate and see the beauty of institutions and laws, and to understand that the beauty of them is all of one family, and that personal beauty is a trifle; and after laws and institutions he will go on to the sciences, that he may see their beauty, ...and at last the vision is revealed to him of a single science, which is the science of beauty everywhere. ... He who has been instructed thus far in the things of love, and who has learned to see the beautiful in due order and succession, when he comes towards the end will suddenly perceive a nature of wondrous beauty...a nature which in the first place is everlasting, not growing and decaying... but beauty absolute, separate, simple, and everlasting, which without diminution and without increase, or any change, is imparted to the ever-growing and perishing beauties of all other things.⁶⁰

So what is beauty? It is a transcendental quality inherent in sensory objects, intelligible objects, minds, people, love, goodness, and the divine. This quality is intrinsically attractive, and draws us to itself, and when we appreciate it, it enhances us, fulfills us, and brings us to a *higher* sense of reality. As Plato suggests, the beauty of visible and audible forms leads us beyond itself. It draws us out of ourselves and points to a higher reality. As we become more educated, we see the beauty of goodness and intelligibility – we revel in the goodness of laws and the judicial system and the precise symmetry and elegance of mathematical forms.

Natural Beauty

⁶⁰ Plato 1993, 210a-211b.

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Natural beauty can point profoundly beyond itself, leading many to the doorstep of the transcendent (e.g. Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau). Beauty does not have the power to push us into the frontier of the transcendent, but only to draw us close to it. If we want to cross the frontier, we must choose to do so through what will be called “a little leap of faith” (see Volume Six). Therefore, some individuals come to the frontier and simply stay there – content to rest in their sense of the transcendent inherent in it. However, they do not choose to pursue the transcendent any further, and so they do not enter into a relationship with it. Many of these individuals subscribe to a spiritual naturalism.⁶¹

Some individuals do not stay on the frontier, but feel the invitation of the transcendent to go further, and enter into a relationship with it that can frequently be mystical. These individuals have chosen to live a Level Three purpose in life, and have some acquaintance with a religious tradition. The American poet, Annie Dillard exemplifies this. In *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (that won a Pulitzer Prize in 1976) she shows how her experience of nature opens upon a transcendent God. Her acquaintance with the Christian mystic, Julian of Norwich, led to her later mystical work *Holy The Firm*.

Beauty also leads Level Four individuals to a felt connection with God. Since most Level Four individuals have made a little leap of faith and entered into a relationship with God, beauty (whether it be manifest in nature, music, architecture, art, poetry, or literature) reveals *God's* beauty. In doing so, it connects the believer passionately, insightfully, excitedly, and even ecstatically to beauty's divine source. The Jesuit poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins, frequently tells of this experience. In one poem, “The Windhover,” he is caught up in the flight of a falcon, which at once manifests beauty, valor, mastery, achievement, and loveliness, and in this experience he becomes passionately connected to God, “whose fire breaks a billion times told lovelier.” Natural beauty within his Level Four framework causes him to fall more deeply and passionately in love with the Creator:

I CAUGHT this morning morning's minion, kingdom
Of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding
Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding
High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing
In his ecstasy! Then off, off forth on swing.
As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl and gliding
Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding
Stirred for a bird, -- the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!
Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here
Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!....

⁶¹In general, “spiritual naturalism” refers to a naturalistic philosophy (without a belief in a deity or the supernatural) that has a transphysical or spiritual dimension in it. There are many western and eastern forms of this general belief, including religious naturalism, dualist pantheism, some forms of Taoism and Buddhism, and some forms of paganism.

Beauty can also induce a direct mystical connection to God, which manifests itself in a sense of glory-unity-joy-love-sacredness-home. C.S. Lewis describes this experience, which took place while he was in a garden next to a flowering currant bush:

As I stood beside a flowering currant bush on a summer day there suddenly arose in me without warning, as if from a depth not of years but of centuries, the memory of that earlier morning at the Old House when my brother had brought his toy garden into the nursery. It is difficult to find words strong enough for the sensation which came over me; Milton's 'enormous bliss' of Eden (giving the full, ancient meaning to enormous) comes somewhere near it. It was a sensation, of course, of desire; but of desire for what? Not, certainly, for a biscuit tin filled with moss, nor even (though that came into it) for my own past---and before I knew what I desired, the desire itself was gone, the whole glimpse withdrawn, the world turned commonplace again, or only stirred by a longing for the longing which had just ceased. It had taken only a moment of time; and in a certain sense everything else that had ever happened to me was insignificant in comparison."⁶²

Notice that Lewis' experience began with a natural scene (in a garden), but the source of its beauty pulls him toward its joy-unity-home, and as it does, his heart yearns for more, but when the experience is withdrawn he is left only with a compelling memory and an unfulfilled desire for beauty itself.

I have had several experiences similar to those of Lewis – particularly during my eight day retreats. On one particular retreat I had been praying for three or four hours from scripture, and I could feel a state of consolation (a felt closeness to and love of God – see Volumes Eighteen and Twenty coming over me. I went for a nature walk on the retreat property, and I could see God's loving and creative hand in every leaf, bird, color, and flower. I was struck by the power of being pulled closer to the source of the love that had created these things. Then something quite strange happened – I became a natural poet. I could not help myself. Every word and thought came out in metaphor, meter, and rhyme – as if the love of God's created hand in beauty had awakened his love within me which found its highest expression in the beauty of poetry – beauty awakening love and love awakening beauty. The experience lasted for over two hours while I walked along the trails of this property.

I had no doubt about who was behind this nexus of catalytic beauty and love within me. It most assuredly was not me. My sisters, at that time, affectionately referred to me as aesthetically challenged, and I certainly had no proclivity for poetry (I even resisted studying it), but the experience of that day changed everything – transcendent beauty galvanized my interest in virtually every other kind of beauty. I went from the top to the bottom of Plato's hierarchy of beauty. God's beauty not only awakened me to his presence, but also to the rest of the aesthetic domain.

Sacred Beauty

⁶² Lewis 1966, pp 22-23.

As the entire history of spirituality indicates, there is something intrinsically beautiful about the domain of the sacred. It draws us to itself in a different way than other beautiful objects, and when we appreciate it (contemplate it) it pleases, fulfills, and enchants us, and most importantly, it brings us into the very heart of divine beauty—into the heart of God.

Many of us have had experiences of being moved by a beautiful church, sacred music, liturgy, and sacred art—which all initially appeal to the senses, though they point beyond themselves. However, there are many other spiritual beauties in the same vein as Plato conceived them—beyond the senses.⁶³ For example, there is something beautiful about scripture, theological ideas, the mystical life, the history of the church, the living tradition, the social encyclicals, the lives of the saints, spiritual literature, spiritual poetry, and the unity of all of these things. Notice that the aesthetic dimension goes beyond simply enjoying a good theological idea or a good spiritual poem. There is something in all of these manifestations of theology and spirituality that points beyond them – to the sublime beauty of God who is the source and the end of them all. That is why there is something intrinsically fascinating, enchanting, fulfilling, and life-enhancing about transcendent beauty.

Virtually every culture throughout human history has recognized the beauty, enchantment and fulfillment of the spiritual and the sacred. For this reason, religion was placed at the center of society, culture, and even the state.

Transcendent beauty can come in all the forms mentioned by Plato – sensorial forms, moral and ideal forms, and intellectual forms. It can also come from the beauty of holy people and groups of people, and of course, it can come from the beauty of prayer, liturgy, traditions, churches, and a mystical connection with God.

The outward beauty of religious art, architecture, music and ritual can move us and catalyze the interior call within us. Our sense of the numinous, the sacred, and the five transcendentals can be activated by entering Notre Dame Cathedral or listening to Bach's mass in B Minor – or by something much simpler – by hearing a Quaker hymn or seeing a miniature statue of Jesus. When the exterior call of religious beauty connects with the interior call of God's presence in us, we can be moved to a deeper interest in or fascination with the transcendent.

Spiritual and religious ideas can also incite an experience of sacred beauty. I recall reading Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* for the first time in college, and finding myself interested and influenced by the content of his thought. Yet this intellectual interest does not capture the full experience. I felt myself drawn into the faith and spiritual depth of this man, into the God he loved, and into the God who loved him. There was something *beautiful* about his life, his love of God, and his involvement in religious history that infused itself into the intellectual content I was reading. My version of the *Summa* was a tattered old second hand version which I had bought from a used bookstore for one dollar per volume, and yet I recall looking at it as if it

⁶³ One of the prime expositors of spiritual or theological aesthetics is Hans Urs Von Balthasar. He has actively promoted this vehicle to transcendence in his journal he founded (with others) – *Communio*. His most comprehensive work is *The Glory of the Lord* (Seven Volumes). See von Balthasar 1983-1991.

had the beauty of a cathedral and a history of holiness embedded in it – it not only interested me intellectually; it fascinated me aesthetically, and moved me spiritually.

Sacred beauty can be manifest beyond glorious and awe-inspiring forms (beautiful cathedrals, symphonic masses, frescoes and paintings, sacred liturgy, and spiritual ideas); it extends to simplicity and stillness – the walkway of a Carthusian Monastery, the smile of Mother Teresa, a simple crèche scene, a deed of kindness, or a deed of noble self-sacrifice. These kinds of beauty do not generally inspire awe and mystery, but rather the presence of God embedded in sacredness and joy. We sometimes sense warmth emanating from the cold corridors of a monastery, transcendent joy in the smile of a mystic, and a sense of transcendent fulfillment in witnessing courageous goodness and faith. These forms of beauty are not as immediately apparent as awe-inspiring architecture, art, music, and liturgy. They are hidden from our physical eyes, but are apparent – even surface apparent to the eyes of faith.

The beauty of holy people is remarkably powerful. Malcolm Muggeridge talks about his encounter with a very simple, weather-hardened Mother Theresa of Calcutta whose actions with the poorest of the poor manifested what he called in his title “*Something Beautiful for God.*” It was at once the beauty of her actions toward the poor, the beauty of her genuine love for them, the beauty of seeing Christ in them, the beauty of her defiance when he tried to suggest that it didn’t make much difference amidst the sea of poverty in India, the beauty in her eyes, and the beauty of her spiritual discipline. It was at once a simple and complex beauty, but it pointed to the love of God manifest in genuine loving action. It galvanized the heart of this former socialist reporter, and led him to religious conversion.

I saw another manifestation of this simple spiritual beauty that occurred while watching the television coverage of Pope Francis during Advent. He accepted an invitation from a group of townspeople who had invited him to look at their live nativity scene. When he arrived, the smile on his face spoke volumes, and it evoked a smile from everyone else – they knew he really loved them. At one point a young woman rushed up to him with one of the live lambs from the nativity scene, and said to him, “You should put this lamb on your shoulders like the good shepherd,” to which he responded, “Let’s give it a try and hope that he doesn’t get too nervous.” I was profoundly moved. The whole scene was beautiful – addictively beautiful – the smiles on people’s faces, the Pope saying, “Let’s give it a try,” and most importantly, the realization by these people of the profound dignity and lovability they had in the eyes of this man who was communicating the love of God. I immediately thought of the end of Gerard Manley Hopkins’ poem, *Kingfishers*:

I say more: the just man justices;
Keeps grace: that keeps all his goings graces;
Acts in God’s eye what in God’s eye he is –
Christ – for Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men’s faces.

The Effects of Transcendent Beauty

Everybody's spiritual path is different, and I don't expect that many readers will have the same kind of experience as mine. Some readers will undoubtedly recognize the dimension of transcendent beauty but perhaps not in the same ways as I did. Be aware of what is happening to you in special moments – in liturgy, the Church, the lives of the saints, the mystical life, contemplative prayer, spiritual books, social encyclicals, holy people, spiritual ideas, philosophical and theological wisdom, monastic traditions—or a myriad of other dimensions of the sacred.

If you allow yourself to be drawn into the beauty of the sacred, it will open upon a deeper and broader journey. Perhaps you will be moved to daily prayer, or to a retreat, or to a call to teach or serve. Notice that when you allow yourself to be drawn in to the life of the sacred, the Lord responds even more intensely – with an invitation to even deeper things. You will find yourself becoming transformed in humility, holiness, and compassion, because you will have a deeper awareness of who God is in His beauty, glory, and love.

II.C

Philosophical and Theological Wisdom

God's exterior call can also be manifest in philosophical and theological wisdom which seeks to know the ultimate – ultimate causes, grounds, principles, meaning, dignity, and destiny. Individuals who are moved by these great questions and ideas frequently find their way to a God who is perfect and unconditional truth love, goodness, beauty, and being. When these individuals find sufficient rational evidence for this ultimate divine principle, they allow their interior call to be awakened and felt. They frequently subordinate the interior call of God to a rational certitude about His existence, causing their interior call to remain dormant until their rational needs are satisfied. However, when they find sufficient evidence for God, they frequently become the most ardent and articulate proponents for a life of transcendence and the Fourth Level of happiness.

Two prominent examples of this mode of transcendent awakening are Jacques Maritain (scientist and philosopher -- 1882-1973) and Mortimer Adler (philosopher and editor of *Britannica's Great Books of the Western World* -- 1902-2001).

Jacques Maritain and his wife Raissa were extreme advocates of scientism at the Sorbonne in Paris. When they discovered that it did not hold out any prospect for explaining human existence, they made a pact to commit suicide within a year if they could not find any deeper meaning beyond scientism. Fortunately, they attended the lectures of Henri Bergson who not only critiqued scientism but also philosophically established the existence of the Absolute. Through the influence of Charles Peguy, they became Catholics, which led them to Jesus Christ, Christian virtue, and mystical beauty. Jacques Maritain became one of the leading philosophers of his day – blending the thought of contemporary science, art, politics, and culture with Thomistic metaphysics. Raissa became a well-known mystical writer.

Mortimer Adler had a similar intellectual awakening to God and transcendence. He grew up in a family that had no particular religious proclivity. He was introduced first to the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas, and was very impressed by St. Thomas' metaphysics —

particularly the proofs for the existence of God (on which he later expounded in his well-known work *How to Think about God: A guide for the Twentieth Century Pagan*). He was also impressed with St. Thomas' epistemology and approach to virtue. Eventually he began to appreciate St. Thomas' theology, but it took him a long time to acknowledge the truth of Christian revelation (though he deeply recognized the need for it). Once he did this, he began to see the *mystery* of God, and became fascinated with both theology and the spiritual life. He converted to the Episcopalian faith in 1984 and then in 1999 he became a Catholic. He authored over fifty books, was the editor of Britannica's *Great Books of the Western World* and was a major influence on religious thought and metaphysics in the United States.

This exterior call to the transcendent (through reason and wisdom) arises out of the search for something more meaningful than materialistic, naturalistic, and utilitarian philosophies. It frequently leads to systematic metaphysics and logical proofs for the existence of God (and occasionally scientific evidence for a Creator). These proofs are articulated by a variety of contemporary sources—such as Etienne Gilson,⁶⁴ Jacques Maritain,⁶⁵ Mortimer Adler,⁶⁶ Alvin Plantinga,⁶⁷ Bernard Lonergan,⁶⁸ William Lane Craig,⁶⁹ and myself,⁷⁰ to name just a few. These thinkers use six major intellectual approaches to God -- metaphysical proofs,⁷¹ cosmological proofs,⁷² scientific evidence for a creation of the universe,⁷³ scientific evidence for fine-tuning of universal constants (teleological proofs),⁷⁴ evidence of survival of self-consciousness after bodily death from near death experiences,⁷⁵ and moral proofs for the existence of God (e.g. Kant and Newman).⁷⁶

This approach to God lends itself to what John Henry Newman called “an informal inference.”⁷⁷ Newman believed that certitude increased according to the quantity and quality of evidence converging on the existence of God. So for example if a thinker identified highly probable proofs or evidence from all six of the above sources (metaphysical proofs, cosmological proofs, etc.) then the conclusion about the existence of God would not rest on one or two sources

⁶⁴ Many of Gilson's books concern St. Thomas' philosophical approach to the existence of God including his metaphysics of the pure act of existing through itself. See for example Gilson 1957.

⁶⁵ See for example Maritain 1962.

⁶⁶ See for example Adler 1991.

⁶⁷ See for example Plantinga and Wolterstorff 1991. See also Plantinga and Tooley 2008.

⁶⁸ See for example Lonergan 1992, Chapter 19 (pp. 657-708).

⁶⁹ See Craig 1979. See also Craig and Mooreland 2012.

⁷⁰ See Robert Spitzer 2010(b). See also Spitzer 2013.

⁷¹ See the two metaphysical proofs in Spitzer 2010 (b) Chapters 3 and 4. See also Lonergan's proof from the complete intelligibility of being in Lonergan 1992 Chapter 19. See also St. Thomas Aquinas' proof (put into contemporary form) in Spitzer 2013, Chapter 6. See also Plantinga and Tooley 2008.

See also Chapter One of this *Compendium*.

⁷² See Spitzer 2010 (b) pp 177-215, Adler 1991, Craig 1979, and Craig and Mooreland 2012, Chapter 3.

⁷³ See Spitzer 2010 (b) pp 14-46 (and note the references for the Borde-Vilenkin-Guth proof as well as the entropy evidence for a beginning of the universe); see also Craig and Mooreland 2012, Chapter 3, and also Barr 2003 Chapters 6 -7. See also John Lennox 2010, 2011 (a), and 2011 (b); see also Ian Markham 2010.

⁷⁴ See Spitzer 2010 (b), Chapter 2 (and references to Davies, Penrose, and Polkinghorne), and Craig and Mooreland 2012 Chapter 4. See also Lennox 2011 (a).

⁷⁵ See Volume 2 (Chapter One) and the peer reviewed studies cited there.

⁷⁶ See Spitzer 2010 (b) Chapter 8; and Craig and Mooreland 2012 Chapter 7. See Newman 1961 pp. 103-120.

⁷⁷ See Newman 2013 pp. 189-215.

alone, but on all six. Thus if one or two sources had to be modified or corrected, the conclusion about God would be relatively unaffected. Furthermore each kind of proof reveals a different aspect about God, and so these multiple sources of evidence increase both certitude and knowledge of God.

When intellectuals, such as Adler or Maritain, become convinced of the veracity of the existence of God, they generally become interested in the consequences of this for their lives. This leads them to an investigation of the nature of created reality, the existence of the soul, and then to happiness, virtue, and purpose in life.

The study of happiness, virtue, and purpose raises the question of the adequacy of logic and philosophy alone to respond to deeper theological questions about God's activity in the world, His involvement in our suffering, His desire to guide us, and the kind of life He is ultimately calling us to.

A brief encounter with these deeper questions shows the intrinsic limits of reason alone. Some typical questions are -- Does God love us or is He indifferent to us (as Aristotle thought)? Does God redeem our suffering? Is there a heaven? Does God answer prayers? Does God guide us? If these questions are to be answered, God will have to reveal himself to us, and tell us about the domain beyond the merely rational. Reason must be complemented by revelation.

Does God reveal Himself to us beyond the domain of our reason? If He does, then He will have to do so in a way that can be understood by human beings immersed in an historical context. Awareness of this provokes thinkers like Maritain and Adler to ask if there is a genuine source of God's revelation in human history. Is it to be found in a religion? In Christianity? If so, they need to verify that this religion is a true source of revelation. Generally these thinkers use reasonable criteria to establish this—what source of revelation covers the widest range of evidence? Which one is the most systematically and theologically complete? Which one is consistent with reasonable precepts of justice, love, the good, and the common good? Which ones are inconsistent with these precepts? Such investigations range from John Locke's *Reasonableness of Christianity*,⁷⁸ to William Lane Craig's *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*,⁷⁹ Alvin Plantinga's *Warranted Christian Belief*,⁸⁰ Jacques Maritain's *Integral Humanism*,⁸¹ John Henry Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*,⁸² and Karl Rahner's *Foundations of Christian Faith*.⁸³

Once these thinkers identify a source of revelation, they tend to move toward an experience of transcendent beauty (described above) which brings them into a relationship with God. Eventually they join a church community through which their relationship with God and their sense of the moral and spiritual life becomes complete.

⁷⁸ See Locke 2000.

⁷⁹ See Craig 2003.

⁸⁰ See Plantinga 2000.

⁸¹ See Jacques Maritain 1974.

⁸² See Newman 2005.

⁸³ See Rahner 1982.

Even if the pursuit of philosophical and theological wisdom is not an entryway into the life of faith, it can be an important component of faith for those who might have come to it through a church community or transcendent beauty. I was one of those individuals. As explained above, I began as a child with being at home in a church community and then proceeded in college to transcendent beauty. Yet in college, I truly longed for an intellectual justification of my faith. Though I was in a relationship with God (and experienced the presence of God), I sought out intellectual justification for myself as well as for those who asked me to give convincing rational evidence for my religious interest. Fortunately, I became acquainted with some early developments in singularity theorems and then later I accidentally discovered a metaphysics class in which logical proofs for the existence of God were being discussed. I walked in to the class midway through, and tried to debate the professor (who supported the proofs) on the very possibility of proving God. I truly doubted that this could be done. The professor told me to take the class the following semester.

I followed his advice, and it had a remarkable impact on my faith life. The class became a launching pad to the philosophical investigation of other topics related to God and faith, and I found myself combining my former interest in scripture and theology with my newfound love of philosophy. It was precisely the kind of complementarity I needed. At this point, my mind was liberating my heart, and my heart in turn was liberating my mind. I became so transfixed by this grand vision of philosophical theology, that I decided to back away from my plans to become a corporate attorney, and began to audit every class I could in philosophy and theology. I was now enchanted by God in spirit, heart, and mind – at once at home in a church community, immersed in transcendent beauty, and convinced and enlightened by the evidence of philosophy and science. I turned my attention to the Church, for I wanted to know everything about this institution that had brought God and Christ into my life spiritually, aesthetically, and intellectually.

III. Conclusion [Back to top](#)

So what can we conclude at this point about the Fourth Level of happiness? Like the other three kinds of happiness, it arises out of certain inner capacities and desires. We saw that Level Two happiness arises out of self-consciousness which causes us to desire autonomy and comparative advantage, sometimes leading to egocentricity and narcissism. We also saw how the Third Level of happiness originates in our capacity for empathy and conscience, which orient us in the opposite direction of ego-comparative advantage – toward making a positive difference *beyond* ourselves.

We now see that Level Four happiness arises out of three dimensions of God's interior call -- (1) our five transcendental desires for perfect and unconditional truth, love, goodness, beauty and home, (2) our awareness of the numinous and the sacred, and (3) an interior relationship with a transcendent Personal Being which is so fundamental that ignoring it can lead to cosmic emptiness, alienation, loneliness, and guilt.

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These three dimensions of God's interior call can be catalyzed and explicitized by His exterior call through a church community, transcendent beauty, and philosophical and theological wisdom. The more we enter into these three exterior dimensions the more explicit will be our awareness of the transcendent Personal Being and our transcendental nature. How do we enter more deeply into the transcendent domain? There is only one way – we must *choose* to follow the call of the transcendent by making a little leap of faith. This choice means *acting* on the call we have received which can be done by participating in a church community, seeking a deep understanding of spiritual wisdom and God's self-revelation, entering into a life of prayer, trying to live according to God's goodness, and helping others to see their true dignity and destiny.

When we act on our choice to enter into a life of transcendence, God will invite us to experience Him in ever deeper ways. He will also provide grace, guidance, protection, and inspiration on our journey with Him so that we will be able to reach our most pervasive, enduring, and deep purpose in life, reach new depths of authentic empathy and love, constructively contend with suffering, help others to cope with suffering, and at the end of our lives, leave a legacy of transcendent, eternal, and loving goodness. In addition to this, we will have eternal life with all those who have also joined the pilgrimage to our true home.

This is a journey worth taking. It will have trials as well as rewards, experiences of hatred as well as love, encounters with evil as well as goodness – it will be an adventure of grace. We can be sure that if we trust in the God of love, he will never allow us to be defeated by our trials and experiences of hatred and evil; He will bring us safely to the home we yearn for – with Him and with our special legacy emblazoned in His heart for all eternity.

It now remains to investigate the spiritual dynamic in which we are immersed *per force* by the transcendent and spiritual nature given to us by the Creator who made us in His own image and likeness. This will first involve a close look at the reality of spiritual good (the Holy Spirit, the angels, and the communion of saints), and spiritual evil (Satan and his evil spirits) – Volume 14. We must then look at the tactics of the evil spirit and the eight deadly sins that allow him influence within our lives and destiny (Volume 15). This prepares the way to investigate moral conversion (Volume 16), personal ethics (Volume 17), and social ethics (Volume 17). If we can proceed on the path to moral conversion through the grace of the unconditionally loving God and the guidance and community of the Catholic Church, our transcendent happiness will be brought to fruition.

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