The philosophical conception of the self in modernity has been dominated since the Enlightenment by a Cartesian dualism that isolates the individual in a nearly solipsistic inner world of rational contemplation. Descartes' famous cogito, ergo sum situates the self as a disengaged isolate at the center of perception, constructing and ordering the world of ideas and representations through its thinking activity. Under such a conception, being involves detaching the self from material existence in order to understand it for what it is: a merely instrumental extension of mental life that facilitates our survival but is itself inherently meaningless. Understandably, this conception raises the hackles of many thinkers, including Christians, in that it situates the thinking, disembodied self at the center of the universe. And while Descartes himself eventually suggests that his method of radical doubt leads to a greater understanding of the nature of God, the secular uptake of his thinking has ultimately led to the privileging of an antirealist philosophy that situates not only the self, but the entire universe, as the outcome of the noetic processes of a disembodied thinking self. In other words, the Cartesian self does not so much encounter the world as it creates it, which obviously causes problems within a Christian worldview.

But this disengaged rationality has been challenged from another quarter as well. Sigmund Freud effected what he considered the third and fatal blow to such narcissistic pretensions as those of self-evident rationality with his development of psychoanalytic theory. The first blow came from Copernicus, who informed us that the earth was not the center of the universe, even though our senses told us that the sun revolved around the earth, and not vice versa. Darwin shook the conceit that we are essentially different from the animals around us by positing a common ancestry. And fi-
nally, Freud introduced the unconscious, which in effect dethroned man as the uncontested master of his own rational faculties. Instead, our lives and our decisions, our loves and our hates, are more often the result of forces working elsewhere than in our conscious mind, and we are the dupes of those forces, rather than their master. Naturally, the simple formulation of "I think, therefore I am" cannot possibly take into account the myriad and unpredictable effects of the unconscious on our perception, our memories, our use of language, and our affective engagement with the world. Indeed, thinking, as Descartes conceived it, accounts for considerably less than half the story of our being in the world.

Because Cartesianism reflects such a profound estrangement from a physical and social reality distinct from ourselves, and because it forcibly ignores the effects of the unconscious and the body as even an archaic expression of our subjective mind, it has been discredited by postmodern critics. The cogito, ergo sum allows no room for irrational, or even pararational, engagement with the world. I would contend that the problem with Descartes' formula is that it is not a true or complete expression of being, and while untruths or partial truths can hold enormous sway for long periods of time and wreak all sorts of havoc, in the end, they necessarily fail. So what, then, is a better expression of the self's ontological status? French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan playfully quipped that in contemporary society, a better formula might be "I complain, therefore I am." We've all seen bumper sticker philosophy—"I eat," or "I drink," or even, as I saw on a baby T-shirt, "I nap, therefore I am"—which, though absurd, are nevertheless obviously the antithesis of Descartes' formulation in that they would define being entirely through the material rather than the mental. Hence, while antithetical to Descartes, they are no less Cartesian in their separation between mind and body. However, if we are to account as fully as possible for the way we live in the world in which we find ourselves, we need a formulation that takes into account the fact that we not only encounter a world, but that we act on it as well, in the modes of both passive reaction and active response, both reflective contemplation and affective engagement. In what follows, then, I'd like to suggest that the best way to think about the ontology of the self, what the self is, consists of the following: "I love, therefore I am."

This formulation doesn't simply critique and utterly abandon modernism's claims to individuality, agency, and rational autonomy, as postmodern critics such as Michel Foucault and Judith Butler have attempted. These critics of modern subjectivity treat the self as the mere effect of cultural power dynamics; the fact that we even think or talk about the self at all is a result of a cultural mandate for responsibility before a repressive law that, for instance, defines crimes in such a way as to require criminals (see Foucault 1979; Butler 1993, 1997). Structures require subjects to animate them, rather than the other way around. For such thinkers, the self is nothing other than the nodal point at which a number of independently functioning discourses—discourses of race, gender, ethnicity, class, and so on—come together. To a certain extent this is no doubt true; we are tremendously influenced by the experiences and valuations that our particular embodiment and material situatedness entail in the culture in which we find ourselves. Hence their critique is well taken, but it does not offer a positive response, nor does it locate a viable site of potential resistance or agency. For both Foucault and Butler, agency is only conceived in terms of one's ability to subvert the normative expressions of culture, and of course, subversion is neither creative nor productive in and of itself. Love, as we shall see, does not operate independently of the cultural power dynamics in which the subject is enmeshed, but it is also both productive of individuality and agential in its expression.

Just as the formulation "I love, therefore I am" does not abandon modernism nor collapse into postmodern critique, it does not retreat into what appears to be a new version of biological reductionism or determinism, a direction currently fueled by advances in neuroscience that indicate, for instance, that immoral and otherwise negative behavior is causally linked to malfunctioning brain chemistry, or that our understanding of the self will somehow be exhausted in the study of brain function. In In A General Theory of Love (2000), for instance, psychiatrists Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini, and Richard Lannon present the neuroscientific evidence of the mammalian limbic system, memory, and early attachment relationships that they assert establishes the neural location of love. According to their theory, any animal with a developed limbic brain and a history of attached mother-child behavior can and does love. While this book certainly presents a fascinating picture of the biological necessity of mammalian relatedness for the development of both mental and physical maturity, it does not meet the claims of its title to provide "a general theory of love." The attachment behavior that they illuminate, while providing a precondition for loving relationships, is not itself love, ontologically speaking, nor does it account for the complex role that language and fantasy play in human relationships and the development of the self (see also Stratton, this volume, on the distinction between love and attachment).

"I love, therefore I am" can thus be characterized as an attempt at an adequate understanding of the transmodern view of the self (see Vitz, Introduction, this volume). The claims of modernism cannot be simply and utterly dismissed, nor would we want to dismiss the individual's obvious
inclinations to willed rational and representational thought. However, two salient features of the self that have been systematically overlooked or discredited in Western philosophy—the self as embodied, the self as relational—need an account that is more far-reaching than the cogito allows. We love and are loved with our minds (both consciously and unconsciously), our bodies (both consciously and unconsciously), and our spirits, which comprise, in a psychoanalytically inflected Christian understanding, that part of us that is (or should be) in communion with God.

Defining Love

But in order for such a formulation as “I love, therefore I am” to be compelling, or to even take hold as more than a bumper-sticker slogan, we need to know what love is, and how it actively constructs the self. While love is the most potent and creative force in the world, it is probably the most undertheorized major concept in Western thought. When people do try to think or talk analytically about it (and I should note that I am excluding the poets, playwrights, novelists, and lovers who have written countless ballet-doux over the centuries, and limiting my discussion to what the various analytical discourses have to say about love) they tend to produce taxonomies, antinomies, classifications, attributes, manifestations, and hierarchies rather than straightforward ontological definitions. In fact, the trepidation of philosophers, scientists, and theologians to define love makes the Oxford English Dictionary’s attempt seem almost an impertinence. Nevertheless, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, love is “that disposition or state of feeling with regard to a person which (arising from recognition of attractive qualities, from instincts of natural relationship, or from sympathy) manifests itself in solicitude for the welfare of the object, and usually also in delight in his or her presence and desire for his or her approval; warm affection, attachment.” If I were to assemble in one room the theorists who have thought or written about love over the past three thousand or so years (and believe me I wouldn’t need a very big room), and read this definition, I imagine there would be a moment or two of agitated silence, followed by a wild eruption of objections: Is love primarily or necessarily a state of feeling, or is affect only one of its contingent manifestations? Do we love someone for his or her attractive qualities, or is there a gestalt that transcends qualities? How, exactly, do “instincts of natural relationship” give rise to love? Is attachment or warm affection synonymous with love? Can we talk about objects when we talk about love, or are objects more properly in the domain of narcissism or demand? Don’t some forms of love care little for the welfare of the object, especially if it is in fact considered at the level of object? And doesn’t love often cause something other than delight in the presence of the beloved?

What, then, is love? Since we are working at the intersection of trinitarian thought and psychoanalysis, we must look for definitions from both of those quarters for a full account of our topic, and, oddly enough, we find some agreement regarding the ontological nature of love. Paul Tillich and Sigmund Freud, though they came from two very different traditions and had very different life philosophies, both agreed that love is a force permeating animate nature that is directed toward unity. We’ll need to parse this definition in order to gain a full understanding of its implications: love as force, love as found throughout animate nature, and love as a striving for unity. We’ll start with the last bit: love as a striving for unity.

Love as a Striving for Unity: Between Psychoanalysis and Christianity

Tillich (1954) maintains that, while it is important and useful to distinguish between different kinds of material expressions of love, it is equally important to remember that in its ontology, “love is one” (27). Each of its qualities, from epithymia (desire), to philia (brotherly love or friendship), to agape (disinterested love for our fellow man) to caritas (love directed to and from God), are expressions of the same force toward the unity of something that is separated. Whereas Nygrens (1957), for instance, is at great pains to tease out the fundamental differences between agape and eros, and in so doing critiques Augustine for his synthesis of the two into caritas (although Augustine breaks his discussion down into the distinctions between caritas and cupiditas), Tillich emphasizes that all of love, whatever its explicit aim, implies this drive toward unity. Love seeks the dissolution of the space between existences. For Tillich, this striving for unity contains within it both the notion of an originary unity and a subsequent separation: “Love is the drive toward the unity of the separated. Reunion presupposes separation of that which belongs essentially together. . . . Therefore love cannot be described as the union of the strange but as the reunion of the estranged. Estrangement presupposes original oneness” (Tillich 1954, 25).

Obviously, Tillich’s original oneness must be understood as oneness of spirit; that is, it is metaphysical in nature. Our embodiment is, on the other hand, both material and our own; it is the space of the body that is marked out as distinct, incapable of union because, despite the rhetorical confusion of the pro-abortion forces, it was never originally one with anyone else’s body. Even in sexual relations, we never completely lose sight of
the distinctness of our own body, and we are aware that the oneness we seek can only be metaphorically expressed through sex. Tillich extends this embodied separateness to consciousness itself when he stresses that love can only be realized in the bridging of a gap between two “self-centered” beings; that is, he presumes an already self-conscious subject who reaches out in love to bridge the gap with another, equally self-conscious subject. Like most theorists of love, he focuses our attention on love between equals, that is, adult people who already have a strong sense of “self.” The questions that remain include how one becomes such a self-conscious subject, and wherein lies the original unity that the two self-conscious subjects are trying to reclaim. An answer to these questions seems to lie within a psychoanalytic theory of subject development that takes seriously the idea that we are made in the image of a trinitarian God.

Psychoanalytic theory, though it varies widely in its perspectives and emphases and has usually been (quite rightly) regarded as antagonistic to the claims of Christianity, serves an important purpose in that it reminds us that the prototype for understanding loving relations is not male-female, or friendship between equals, but parent-child. Even Christian thinkers often make the mistake of taking adult I-Thou love as the foundation upon which we should build our understanding of the self-in-relation, without considering the ways in which this self or its relations develop. Indeed, the Trinity has within itself this parent-child relationship. Furthermore, if we are to understand who we are with relation to the “I am,” then we have to think in terms of a love based on hierarchical assumptions that lead to development through identification with and idealization of a higher order of complexity.

In this contest, it is worth considering a few of Jacques Lacan’s innovations on Freudian theory as they help explain the functions of identification and idealization in the giving and receiving of love and how these facilitate the development of the self. Lacan takes issue with the way Freudian concepts have been taken up by ego psychologists; he accuses them of working out of the same Cartesian model that Freud himself claimed to have unsettled.

Lacan wants to trouble the very idea that the self can ever be adapted to the reality in which it finds itself, and that this maladaptation is precisely what leads to the necessity of love in the first place. Adaptation is the central focus and goal of ego psychology, and it is only when the self has achieved a certain developmental milestone that he or she can truly love another person, again reinforcing the notion that love is only possible between adults, and that it has no real bearing on the passage from child to adult. Even Freud at times capitulates to this view, most forcefully expressed by Fairbairn (1986), who writes, “The gradual change which thus occurs in the nature of the object-relationship is accompanied by a gradual change in libidinal aim, whereby an original oral, sucking, incorporating and ‘taking’ aim comes to be replaced by a mature, nonincorporating, and ‘giving’ aim compatible with developed genital sexuality” (77-78). In other words, given the proper environment, the child’s psychological development will successfully mirror his or her physical development, and the result will be an other-directed person able to give generously and love fully.

On Lacan’s account, however, such a goal of adaptation to reality, where love and pleasure can be fundamentally connected through development maturity, is not simply difficult or ideal, but structurally impossible for the self to attain. This is because, for Lacan, the subject—that is, the human being who accounts for himself through the use of linguistic signifiers such as I or his proper name—is an effect of the language he uses, and language and the body are of two heterogeneous orders, such that one cannot be adapted to the other. In Christian terms, the Word is responsible for the creature, and not vice versa. Our subjectivity, founded in language and yet profoundly alienated from its incarnational ability, seeks reunion with that creative Word, but we are unable to effect it on our own. Hence the self in Lacan is represented as a barred subject—a body subjected to but not completely subsumed by its own imago and its position in language. The fundamental gap between the subject and its imago is covered over by identification, but the gap between the subject and its world, or, to use Lacan’s terminology, the gap between the subject and the Other, between the symbolic and real, is covered over by love.

For Lacan the symbolic is the linguistically ordered system of law and meaning through which the subject structures reality and the self. The real, on the other hand, is that which resists symbolization. When we have attempted to account for some phenomenon in language, we may be sure that we have not captured it in its materiality, because the order of the real is precisely that which exceeds and escapes symbolic reference; more than that, it is inimical to such symbolization. This dualism is often dismissed by Christian thinkers as antirealist, but I think that in leaving room for a real that escapes totalization by human knowledge and linguistic endeavor, that in fact radically resists the notion of such totalization as even a possibility, Lacan seems to be one of the few thinkers of the twentieth century who takes sin—separation from God—entirely seriously as an irreparable (from the human side at any rate) break. It is not enough simply to posit that since we are made in the image of God, we will be capable of intellectual, creative, and loving activity as if the Fall never happened, or even to suggest that conversion unsets us to the point where our cultural and
ideological heritage and influence can be eradicated. Instead, Lacan’s concept of the subject structured by lack maps with uncanny precision onto the Christian notion of person separated from God by sin. Of course, Lacan’s atheism leads him to say that there is no Other of the Other, that there is no Presence that authorizes, finally and completely, both the symbolic and the real, and to think otherwise is merely a paranoid fantasy. But from a Christian perspective, one might go so far as to say that Lacan’s atheism rendered him unable to see the unconscious truth of his own discourse: that there is in fact an Other of the Other, and he has a name which we cannot speak, but which we signify as God. And while the subject comes into being through his or her interaction with the Other of the symbolic order, this Other of the Other is the foundation on which both the subject and the symbolic order depend for their existence. Profound in his alterity, this God nevertheless desires communion with his creatures, and our lack is most aptly understood as the self’s alienation from and desire to return to unity with God.

Thus far we have established that the Lacanian self is ontologically grounded in love, and that love should be understood as a force that seeks to reunite that which has been separated. We have distinguished our approach to the understanding of love as being grounded in the hierarchical sense of parent-child, rather than love between equals, the importance of which will become evident in the following section. Further, we have shown that a psychoanalytically inflected understanding of Christianity points us in the direction of understanding the nature of the unity that has been disrupted, namely, that it is a gap between the symbolic and the real. We will now proceed within the model we have established to articulate specifically the mechanisms by which love leads to the development of the self.

FROM INFANT TO SELF-CONSCIOUS SUBJECT

For Freud, life begins in a state of “oceanic plenitude” where one’s consciousness is not wholly distinct from one’s surroundings but rather is intimately tied to the psyche of the mother. Lacan posits the infant as an undifferentiated bundle of needs with no clear sense of the boundaries between self and other. He playfully refers to this infant as an “homunculus,” a little man and an egg running in all directions. Developments in infant observation research challenge this notion, suggesting quite strongly that infants do in fact distinguish themselves from others, and have a clear sense of the limits of their own bodies. But Freud’s or Lacan’s insight need not be troubled by this new information, for they suggest that this sense of unity is more a psychical than an actual state of affairs for the infant, based on a fantasized unity rather than an experiential one. The “mother” needs to be understood figuratively in this context; she is the (m)other, the first representative of the Other that the child encounters. As such, her constant (psychic) presence preserves in the child a sense of unity or continuity with the otherness that surrounds him, and her periodic (actual) disappearances facilitate his growing awareness of his separateness from that otherness. Hence the first movements for the newly self-conscious infant are regressive; they seek a return to the oneness they experienced with the mother, suggesting a first guise of love as a drive toward unity with the mother.

Freud recognizes this drive toward unity with the mother as only one direction that love understood as a force can take, and it is a dangerous one. In fact, the drive toward this type of unity is in the service of the death drive—that is, it is a regressive desire to merge with the mother, to return to an earlier state of psychic stasis and bodily satisfaction. Freud’s oedipal triangle, especially as developed by Lacan, is explicitly designed to prevent such merging: the father stands in the way of the child’s desire to be one with the mother. The father’s prohibition inaugurates the subject into the world of cultural and social substitutes for the satisfaction he or she once felt in being in a place of undifferentiated psychic unity with mom. But this points out a bothersome weakness in Freud’s account: If the mother is the site of needs met, and the father is perceived as nothing more than a threat, then why in the world would the child make the momentous choice to change allegiances, to sacrifice the warm cozy maternal relation for a profoundly cold and precarious position on the side of culture and the father? When a young child is threatened, chances are he’s not going to growl back but return instead to the safety of the maternal space. In Lacan’s gloss on Freud’s theory, we see that the paternal prohibition covers over the impossibility of returning to that presumably safe space, moreover, we see that the space of maternal unity is not necessarily safe at all, since it would entail our own annihilation as separate subjects. Love emerges in this scenario as first of all an unconditional demand for oneness with the mother, which is met squarely by its own impossibility and undesirability.

To illustrate how this works, we can see how in the well-known children’s story Where the Wild Things Are (1963), love is everywhere equated with incorporative cannibalistic desire. The kind of love that Max expresses in the first part of the book is melancholic, regressive, and consuming; the child seeks to reclaim the space of oneness that he feels he has lost by incorporating and cannibalizing the (m)other. “I’ll eat you up!” Max says to his mother. The mother responds to this aggressive impulse by taking away the thing that has guaranteed her presence, and hence, in the child’s eyes, her love, since infancy—food. She sends him to his room without sup-
per. Here, he constructs a fantasy jungle populated by wild things who also say to him, "WE'LL EAT YOU UP—WE LOVE YOU SO!" Clearly, this guise of "love" would lead to a certain kind of "unity" of the self and other—ingestion? digestion?—but it does not lead to the development of the self, and must be rejected, both by Max and by his mother.

Instead, Max must come to identify with his mother in a particular way, rather than trying to swallow her whole. When his mother sends him to bed without supper, he is angry. He responds by fantasizing a space where he is in charge. Both his anger and his assumption of control reflect his mother's actions; hence he is not trying to be one with her, but instead he is trying to be somewhat like her by identifying with a select few of her particular characteristics. This distinction of incorporating the other versus taking on her characteristics seems overly subtle until we look closely at how Max handles his wild things. Instead of imagining a scenario where he does in fact eat his mother or her surrogates, which would indicate a melancholic incorporation, he imagines that he himself is in danger of being eaten by these wild things that love him, and like her, he does not allow it. His process of mourning the loss of his mother involves identifying with one of her traits—her sternness—rather than attempting to become one with her, and losing himself in the process.

In the example of Max, it becomes clear that attempting to become one with the (m)other entails the regressive kind of love that constitutes the loss of the self, but that identifying with a single trait preserves the alterity of the other and helps the child to develop his own characteristics and abilities through imitation. This is the second direction love as a force can take, according to Freud. Though Freud does not develop his insights as fully as he might, Jonathan Lear, in his book *Love and Its Place in Nature* (1990), interpolates from what Freud does say to describe the way in which love acts as a force for individuation, and hence, development of the self.

**The Importance of the Lovable World**

Lear's account of Freud's insight begins with the notion that emotions are an archaic, embodied attempt at a rational orientation to the world. Freud found that in treatment, symptoms were relieved, not simply through the expression of emotion, but when the errant emotion found its proper object. In the case of Max, his mother doesn't deserve his aggression or his anger; once he turns his aggression toward its proper object—his own wild things—he can work it through and emerge refreshed. According to Lear, Freud later came to realize that this archaic rationality of emotion, directed at a lovable world, would necessarily lead a child to respond by loving the world back. In other words, love reflects our emotional orientation toward a world that somehow equally receives, reflects, and deserves our love. The notion of a lovable world is thus indispensable to Lear's gloss on Freud; hence the second part of our ontological definition that love permeates animate nature.

In this guise, then, we have to understand love's relation to the development of the self in its passive dimension. Before a child can invest his or her world with love, he or she must be on the receiving end of the loving attention of the Other. I use the definite pronoun and a capital letter to designate that these ministrations come from sites other than the mother or primary caregiver. If we believe that God is active in the world, then the loveliness of the world is a necessary, and not a contingent, feature of our experience, no matter what the relative adequacies of our caregivers. Julia Kristeva (1987), a French psychoanalyst and philosopher, posits what she calls an "imaginary father" who is active in all of us as we work to separate from the mother. When the child realizes, in the oedipal drama, that he cannot be one with the mother, he still only reluctantly capitulates to the demands and prohibitions of the symbolic order. Kristeva's "imaginary father," who is linked to Freud's "father of individual prehistory" has the characteristics of both mother and father, that is, he is loving, nurturing, and fully supportive of the child, but he is also powerful, even omnipotent. His presence makes it both safe and desirable for the child to separate from the mother, unlike the threatening, punitive father of Freud's original oedipal drama. In this "imaginary father," we have a way to think about the Holy Spirit's intervention in every person's life as a call to consciousness as a distinct individual and the inaugurator of a loving responsiveness to an already lovable world.

According to Lear, our emotional orientation to that world, despite being structurally archaic, nevertheless develops over time. Initially, the child can only invest his or her world with partial drive energies—forces that demand fulfillment or satisfaction at the level of bodily needs. It is precisely the movement between fulfillment and frustration that causes the world to have psychological meaning for him, that is, while the child reaches out to the world with his need, the world responds both only partially and, I would add, in excess. The world can only respond partially, because the drive contains within itself that regressive desire for the obliteration of separation, and because demands must always be expressed in language, which, as we have noted, always separates us from the real of our experience. But the world also responds in excess, because not only does the child receive care from the world, he also receives an anticipatory, as yet unrequited, profoundly complex love. There is nothing simple about the parents' love
for their child—it is embodied, present, hopeful, anxious, desiring, and imperfect. And it is not always, though it can be, incorporative. In other words, it does not seek simple obliteration of the separation between us. Instead, it desires our otherness. Parents long for the day when their child seems to recognize them, when their child will be able to talk to them. From the start, they afford the child the gift of a separate identity, even though the child doesn't yet have the skills to claim it. But it is nevertheless a gift, an act of excessive generosity. We love God, our parents, the world, because they first loved us. In other words, “I am loved, therefore I come to be.”

In particular, the world gives children the gift of an articulated system of differences that we have been calling the symbolic order. The real, because it resists symbolization, is a formless and inchoate space. Because the symbolic is ordered and rational, the child can come to be in it, can achieve a degree of psychic organization that enables it to become a self at all. One of the most important things the symbolic order gives to the child is its own body. Though it is difficult to posit a body that is not already inscribed and valued by language, we have to remember that the baby learns to mark his or her body through the caregiver’s attention to it. Thus the eyes, the mouth, and the genitals get marked from the beginning as distinct and privileged sites for the baby, and they remain privileged throughout life. Another way of saying this is that the subject’s body is given to him through the loving attention of the Other. The loving Other reaches into an undifferentiated muddle of needs and sensations and articulates a structure that becomes the bodily image of the child. Obviously, this is one of those sites where culture significantly mediates the relative lovableness of specific bodies through setting different values on different bodily imagoes, but the initial response of care for the body sets the fundamental course in the direction of love, even for those bodies that are culturally disprized.

**A Tale of Two Pigs**

Further concrete illustrations of the way love leads to the development of a self can be found in both *Charlotte’s Web* (1952) and the popular children’s movie *Babe* (1995). While the main conflict of both these stories can be considered in the light of a movement from the dangerous potentials of an incorporative type of unity to a nonincorporative love relationship, it would be ludicrous to follow Fairbairn (1986) in assuming that Babe’s and Wilbur’s development depends on developmental maturity proscribed by biological necessity. But just how will Wilbur and Babe move from being objects that persons would love to eat to being persons who love and are loved precisely for their status as persons? We see quite clearly in these two cases that infants start to become persons when someone loves them. Fern Arable, an eight-year-old girl with a clear sense of justice, objects to her father’s decision to kill a runt pig simply because it is too small. So her father gives her the pig to raise as her baby. Fern attends to the pig’s needs—feeds it, and makes sure it is warm—but she also loves it, that is, she identifies with its characteristics of smallness and vulnerability, invests it with her time and attention, and idealizes it. Likewise, Farmer Hoggett goes beyond attending to Babe’s needs into actions of love toward the pig. He invests time and attention in the pig, and eventually comes to idealize the pig as well. In so doing, Fern and Farmer Hoggett take their beloved pigs out of the realm of objects and invest them with a caring attention that renders them human.

Both E. B. White and the filmmakers of King-Smith’s story set up decidedly lovables worlds for their protagonists to inhabit. White lovingly describes the barn in which Wilbur comes to live, ending his two-page description by saying “It was the kind of barn that swallows like to build their nests in. It was the kind of barn that children like to play in” (14). Farmer Hoggett’s farm is breathtakingly beautiful, nestled in a peaceful green valley and impeccably maintained. In addition, both worlds are peopled with loving companions. When Fern has to sell Wilbur, he is at first unbearably lonely, disdained or ignored by the other animals, until he hears a small voice from above who says, “Do you want a friend, Wilbur? . . . I’ll be a friend to you. I’ve watched you all day and I like you” (31). Babe watches his mother get loaded onto a meat truck, but he is soon transported to the Hoggett farm, where he finds his place as surrogate son of the sheepdog Fly, and friend of the anorexic duck Ferdinand. Because of the loving attention that these two receive, they reach out in love to others. Wilbur is portrayed as open and childlike, loving and friendly even to the nasty rat, Templeton. Babe is a friend to all the animals who will have him and is described by the narrator as having an “unprejudiced heart.” Both of these characters find their places in the world through the mediation of characters who act as “imaginary fathers” with the power to shift the terms of the little pigs’ very existence. Charlotte’s Web is one of those sites where culture significantly mediates the relative lovableness of specific bodies through setting different values on different bodily imagoes, but the initial response of care for the body sets the fundamental course in the direction of love, even for those bodies that are culturally disprized.
FROM PASSIVE ACCEPTANCE TO ACTIVE INVESTMENT

The examples of Wilbur and Babe clearly show how love received enables a self to emerge. But how and why does the self move from a state of passively receiving the loving ministrations of the Other to actively reaching out to that Other in love? Lear points out that because the world responds only partially to the infant's needs, he or she must do something with his or her frustration, must metabolize it in some way. It is the frustration that causes us to act, and the excess of love in the response that provides the quality of the action. The world is always the world as it exists for me; Freud learned through his study of melancholia that the self is emotionally invested inwardly as well as outwardly, so that "psychic structure...is created by a dialectic of love and loss" (Lear 1990, 160). What is lost? As we have seen through Lacan's account, it is the sense of oneness with the real that has been figured or represented as the loss of oneness with the mother. How does the child respond? First, by consolidating his own ego as a defense against the loss of connection with the mother, and then by reaching out from that ego in loving investment toward the mother to regain the sense of lost unity. Insofar as she is a loving mother, he will, through his imitations of and identifications with her, gain the form of love, which we might call attachment, or more precisely, responsiveness, through that imitative behavior.

What the child learns very early in his interaction with his mother is that she has desires and commitments that have nothing to do with him. Her periodic absences, her distractions, the fact that she does not always respond immediately to his needs all indicate that she has interests elsewhere. This is in some respects catastrophic knowledge, but through a process of identifying with her desire, he can come to understand that there are things in the world that are desirable. As he follows her example by investing his libidinal energies into the world, which is another way of saying as he loves the world, he idealizes the objects that he invests. Love is metonymic in this way—we take a part or a quality and turn the whole into an idealized love object. But Lear reminds us that "because my love affair is with a distinctly existing world, I must be disappointed by it. A distinctly existing world cannot possibly satisfy all my wishes" (160). What happens then is that the child mourns the lost ideal image by incorporating some of its qualities into his own psychic structure. As Freud says, "When the I assumes the features of the object, it is forcing itself, so to speak, upon the it as a love-object and is trying to make good the it's loss by saying: Look, you can love me too—I am so like the object" (Freud 1961, 30). Because he is identifying with something outside of himself, the child becomes more than what he was, that is, he develops. When he then reinvests libidinal energy into the world, he does so from a more complex or developed psychic position, and hence encounters an ever-more complex world.

IMAGINARY AND SYMBOLIC IDENTIFICATIONS

But as we have seen, we must be careful of the kind of unity that we desire; love proceeds by way of identification and idealization but is not to be confused with these processes. Tillich's definition of love depends as much on its failure as on its continual striving to succeed. "Fulfilled love is, at the same time, extreme happiness and the end of happiness. The separation is overcome" (27). That is, love can only be love in its failure to close the gap between the self and other; otherwise it is not love, but a regressive and self-destructive fantasy.

In our discussion of Lacan, we identified two separate orders: the symbolic and the real. But he identifies a third order that operates in connection with these two, and that is the imaginary. Perhaps the most famous notion of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory is his concept of the mirror stage. At some point very early in a child's life, he will recognize his image in a mirror. At first, there will be a moment of alienating anxiety, but that is replaced, according to Lacan, with "the jubilant assumption of his specular image" (1977, 2). What happens in that moment is that the child has made an identification with that image; he claims it as a representation of himself. But what is more interesting is that the image does not match his bodily experience. Whereas the image is whole and coherent, he experiences his body as fragmented and disconnected. Whereas the image appears in control of itself, he feels as if his body escapes his control. Whereas the image is separate and distinct from other bodies, he feels at least partially connected, still, to his mother's body. Thus the image functions as an imago, an ideal image that he will hereafter strive to achieve.

It is important to realize that we don't only encounter these imagos in the mirror. Rather, once the mirror-stage has been achieved, imaginary identifications take place all the time; they are characteristic of our way of approaching the world. It's also important to note that this sort of identification is both a totalizing fantasy and a fantasy of totalization, that is, it covers over the gap between the symbolic and the real that we introduced earlier in two ways. First, the subject sees the image as complete in itself, as if what you see is all there is. Second, the act of identification covers over any gap between the image and the self; the self collapses into the image and says "I am he." This, obviously, represents two forms of unity, such that we might say, under Tillich's definition, that imaginary identification...
is an expression of love. As we noted earlier in our discussion of Freud, love tends to operate under a metonymic and idealizing logic. We see in part, but then we cover over the lack in what we see with an idealizing fantasy; that is, we construct an ideal with which we identify as a totality. The problem is that when we identify with something in this way, it can just as easily become our rival as our ideal; in either case, we perceive it to be like us, and in so doing we erase its otherness. Hence we cannot simply say that we love that with which we identify, since we have not fulfilled the first condition of Tillich's definition, that of separation. Insofar as the gaps are actually closed, that is, insofar as unity is achieved in this illusory way, we know that we are dealing with something other than love which depends for its proper existence not only on the striving for unity, but on the recognition of separateness.

Fortunately, Lacan indicates that one may not only identify in the imaginary, but also in the symbolic. Symbolic identifications do not involve totalizing logic, because it is precisely in the symbolic that we recognize the impossibility of totalization. Not only is there an unbridgeable gap between the symbolic and the real, the gap between creature and Creator, if you will, but there are also gaps and inconsistencies within the symbolic order itself—places where language and structures undermine themselves (for instance, what Lacan might call unconscious discourse and Christians might call revealed truth) and/or get undermined by intrusions of the real (for instance, what scientists might call anomalies and Christians might call miracles). Hence we can never believe in the totality of the symbolic order as we do in the imaginary. Thus, what we identify with is a single trait, a characteristic of the thing, rather than the thing itself. Imaginary identification consists in collapsing the space between the self and the other, rending the other the same, whereas symbolic identification involves the investment of the self into the other, locating specific points of connection but retaining the sense of the otherness of the other.

The investment of the self into the other as other is fundamentally different from the desire to incorporate the other, and it eventually leads to greater levels of individuation. When we identify at the level of the imaginary, we are mapping one illusory whole onto another—the distance between the self and the other collapses. This is yet another way to understand the proscription of the making of images in the second commandment. The logic of the imaginary is such that we take parts for wholes and then believe in the possibility of that wholeness, that we have captured the thing in its ideal essence. When we then proceed to cover over the distance that separates us through imaginary identification, we see the other as a version of the self, or as the self's rival. What is not maintained is the otherness of the other. Hence we could presume, in imaginary logic, to be like gods. But when we identify at the level of the symbolic, we have to take the gap between the real—the realm of experience and being—and the symbolic—the realm of language and structure—into account. Hence we can't swallow a person whole, but rather we identify with particular features or traits. We identify, precisely, with the other's status as incomplete and in need of further development.

This difference helps us understand that our love for God must operate under a symbolic logic. To produce an imaginary image of God is to produce an idol; hence it is forbidden as well as impossible, much like the desire to merge with the mother in the oedipal drama. This could render my appropriation of Kristeva's term "imaginary father" to designate our Loving Mediator an unfortunate one, unless we remember that this is only one frame of reference that we have for him, and that he permeates the real, the imaginary, and the symbolic all at the same time. He may access us from any of these positions, but we may only access him in the symbolic. Knowing that we can't totally or completely signify God, we nevertheless attempt to use our flawed human language to approximate his qualities. We idealize those qualities and seek to love him by identifying with and attempting to take on the characteristics of say, humility, forgiveness, forbearance, patience. But such totalizing qualities as omnipotence and omniscience are closed to us because they are, by definition, features of imaginary and not symbolic logic.

As paradoxical as it may seem, love, in its striving for unity, produces ever greater individuation and development of the self, as that self moves from receiving the love of the Other to reinvesting itself into the world. In the process, the self suffers the loss of love-objects as ideal, and builds its own ego from the bits and pieces that remain as the ideal shatters. Hence we strive toward unity while maintaining our separateness. In the sense that we are defined in both the separateness and the striving toward unity, we can affirm the transmodern self as the amo, ergo sum.
Chapter 3: The Role of Love in the Development of the Self: From Freud and Lacan to Children’s Stories


