

SELFLESS LOVE AND HUMAN FLOURISHING:

A THEOLOGICAL AND A SECULAR PERSPECTIVE IN DIALOGUE

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**Trinity College  
Doctor of Philosophy in Theology – Michaelmas Term 2011/12**

**Short abstract**

The point of departure of this thesis is derived from a modern tendency to create a dichotomy between selfless love and human flourishing. Modern attempts to liberate the human being from heteronomous oppression and the moral norms promoting this have sometimes led to the conclusion that selfless love is harmful to human flourishing. Such a conclusion has gained momentum also through modernist re-conceptualisations of the self as an autonomous but empty consciousness which must guard itself against determination by the other. In effect, significant thinkers have replaced the notion of selfless love with a call for self-assertion over against the other, as key to the individual person's well-being.

This has been matched by Christian dismissals of the individual's pursuit of human flourishing. In the face of modern insights into the 'desirous' nature of the human being, modern Christian theology has equally struggled to sustain the tension between the traditional Christian notion of selfless or self-giving love and human beings' desire to affirm themselves and to find personal fulfilment in this world. Strands of Christian theology have, for instance, affirmed a self-surrendering love at the cost of dismissing the individual's worldly desires entirely.

In this thesis, I outline this situation in modern thought and its problematic consequences. With a view to discerning whether selfless love and human flourishing can be re-connected, I then undertake close studies of the theologian Paul Tillich's and the moral philosopher and novelist Iris Murdoch's conceptualisations of the self and of love.

As I will argue, Tillich's and Murdoch's engagement with modern thought leads them to develop accounts of the self, which correspond with understandings of love as both selfless and conducive to human flourishing. On the basis of their thought I thus argue that selfless love and human flourishing can be understood as interdependent even today.

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**Long abstract**

One of the indispensable components of Christianity is its concern with eternal salvation. However, modern theology in particular knows that Christianity must also rectify what some have regarded a one-sided emphasis on eternal life, that is, that Christianity must concern itself also with the flourishing of the human being in this world. Yet it is also in the modern epoch, and since the nineteenth-century in particular, that theology has been increasingly confronted with understandings of human flourishing which stand in tension with traditional Christian moral concepts. Developments in psychology, philosophy, and socio-biology for instance led to a heightened awareness of the extent to which the human being is governed by self-interested instincts and desires for greater freedom, power, and individuality. In combination with modern elevations of the natural and with assertions of human autonomy, these insights have promoted a perception that the individual's impulses and desires must be, at least partially, emancipated from moral norms which appear to compromise or suppress them, in order that they can rise to the surface. Nietzschean philosophy and Freudian psychoanalysis have thus sought to encourage the human being's will to power and the rationality of the 'ego' as critical catalysts for the well-being of the individual.

Both proponents and critics of such a perspective on the individual's self-fulfilment in the world have perceived this picture to sit uneasily with Christian notions such as 'Your will be done' (Mt 6:10), and the kind of other-centred, self-giving love implied in the Biblical call to love of neighbour and enemy (Mt 22:39, Mt 5:43-48).

Nietzsche in particular has, for instance, portrayed as dishonest and harmful those injunctions to love the other selflessly, to give oneself to them, or to surrender to them. Such moral norms are dishonest in that they rely on a distorted picture of who the human being is; they are harmful in that they, consequently, deceive the human being about who she is and how she can flourish. The argument goes that traditional moral norms like selflessness lead to a suppression of those vital life energies which enable the human being to develop her full potential, to thrive and to flourish. Instead, they foster weakness and irresponsibility.

My thesis addresses this apparent tension between selfless love and human flourishing. More specifically, it seeks to answer the following question: in what sense can selfless love still be understood to be compatible with, even necessary for, the flourishing of both lover and beloved? It is my argument that both the disjuncture between selfless love and human flourishing and a potential association of selfless love and human flourishing correspond with, and are founded in, conceptualisations of the human self. I will thus pursue the question of selfless love and human flourishing by considering not only different accounts of love, but by examining also the nature of the self.

My enquiry centres on the accounts of the self and of love put forth by the theologian Paul Tillich and by the moral philosopher and novelist Iris Murdoch. Both these authors perceive the dissociation of selfless love and human flourishing to have problematic repercussions for their respective disciplines, thus indicating that the question of selfless love and human flourishing is of relevance both to a Christian and a non-Christian worldview. Both Tillich and Murdoch develop their ideas in engagement with the Christian and Platonic traditions and with those contemporary strands of

thought which are critical of these traditions, and both effectively make significant contributions to overcoming the divide between selfless love and human flourishing.

The assertion that love as understood in Christianity stands in the way of human flourishing has, so I will argue in this thesis, been reinforced by the kind of re-conceptualisation of the human self proposed in Sartrean existentialism. In fact, both Tillich and Murdoch are in constant dialogue with Sartre's thought, as will become clear as the thesis proceeds. After an introduction outlining the structure and aims of this thesis in Chapter 1, the first substantial part of the thesis, consisting of Chapters 2 and 3, is concerned with accounts of the self and of love which have furthered the dissociation of selfless love and human flourishing, beginning with Sartre's view of the self.

## Part I

With a focus on questions of consciousness and the self, Chapter 2 sketches the views leading up to French existentialism and then focuses on Jean-Paul Sartre's account of the self. Sartre's assertion that the human self is, in and of itself, 'nothing' but absolute freedom, that it is a developing project to be freely filled with self-determined values, has left the human being more vulnerable to 'the other'. Where the human self is not the specific self-contained substance commonly associated with Cartesian thinking, but at once autonomous and open to definition, the individual must be all the more careful to avoid being defined and, indeed, enslaved by the other. Sartre argues that any external influence necessarily compromises the absolute freedom of the human self and, thus, its very being. It seems that Christian notions of selfless, self-giving, or surrendering love must thus be rejected as destructive.

It is appropriate to analyse Sartre's anthropology in this way because both Tillich and Murdoch develop their own thinking in particular reference to his ideas. As I will

argue, Sartre's relevance to this thesis is further increased insofar as Tillich's and Murdoch's use of Sartre indicates that his notion of the absolutely free but empty self poses not only a challenge to the notion of selfless love, but can also serve as a resource for a re-conceptualisation of selfless love. This chapter, which ends with a first discussion of Tillich's and Murdoch's responses to Sartre's anthropology, forms the first part of the foundation of this thesis.

Completing the foundation laid out in Chapter 2, I move in Chapter 3 from issues of the self to conceptualities of love in modern thought. In reference to the conceptuality of eros and agape, I address the relationship between love's different aspects. I begin with brief examinations of portrayals of love in Plato and the New Testament, and then consider early attempts at unifying the different emphases made in these sources. The focus of this chapter then lies on the modern tendency to create a polarity between self-assertive and self-surrendering love—a polarity which I will argue to be instrumental to the dissociation of selfless love and human flourishing.

I illustrate the modernist dichotomisations of love by way of sketching Friedrich Nietzsche's, Sigmund Freud's and Jean-Paul Sartre's perspectives on love on the one hand, and Søren Kierkegaard's, Anders Nygren's and Simone Weil's views on love on the other. Having chosen these thinkers for their provocative radicality and consistency, and using their perspectives on love primarily as heuristic devices, I do not purport to capture the nuances of their thought but provide merely an overview of their most striking claims. I conclude this chapter with suggestions regarding the causes underlying the modern tendency to dichotomise the different aspects of love, with a discussion of the problematic repercussions of this tendency, and with some remarks on my present approach in seeking to counter these divides in the context of selfless love and human flourishing.

## Part II

The second, and core, part of this thesis mirrors the sequence of Chapters 2 and 3 on the self and on love: in the space of four chapters, this part closely examines first Paul Tillich's thought on the self and, building on this, on love, and then Iris Murdoch's account first of the self, and then of love.

In Chapter 4 I show that Tillich understands the human self as a reality marked by a desire and capacity for freedom and individuality. As I argue, Tillich arrives at this conclusion through drawing on Sartre's, Nietzsche's, and Freud's perspectives on the dynamic life force inhering in the human being. Correspondingly, Tillich takes seriously these thinkers' concern with the individual's emancipation from enslaving forces. I also show, however, that Tillich challenges these thinkers in their attempt to attain such emancipation irrespective of the reality which grounds the human capacity for greater freedom. It is Tillich's understanding of the polar relation between the drive for freedom and self-transcendence and the conditioning and constraining ground of this drive which, I will argue, leads him to suggest that the human being can attain her individuality only through participatory relationship with what lies outside her, which she is distinct from yet belongs to.

Tillich's consequent sense that the human self is a reality whose flourishing qua individual depends on active participation in her transcendent ground constitutes the foundation of his account of love. As I will show in Chapter 5, Tillich's understanding of love, which is based on his understanding of the self, is selfless in a two-fold sense. It is based on a recognition that the human being has no self in the sense of a self-contained, objectifiable reality; and, it is selfless insofar as it consists in a turn towards the finite other in whom the transcendent source of the self's reality is encountered. This selfless love is compatible with, and conducive to, human flourishing because it is a function of

the very nature of the human self, and because it does not deny the needs and desires of the individual but can be effective only where it emerges out of, and incorporates, these. It is a selfless love simultaneously grounded in and transforming the erotic dimension of the human being. Notwithstanding the accomplishments of Tillich's account, the chapter will close with some remarks on those features of his thought which compromise the association of selfless love and human flourishing.

With Chapter 6 I move from Paul Tillich to Iris Murdoch and her account of the human self. In conceptualising the human self, Murdoch, too, simultaneously draws on and criticises the proposals of Sartre and Freud in particular. As I will show, this leads her to understand the self as a desirous reality both distinct from, and properly related to, a transcendent Other, the Good, which is encountered in finite others. I further argue that she, similarly, attributes to the self an element of stability as well as of instability: the self is substantial and thus possesses at least a degree of self-being but is required, by its very substance, to allow itself to be pervaded by transcendent Good. Despite her different metaphysical presuppositions, Murdoch thus also understands the self to be simultaneously individualised and relational. Not unlike Tillich, Murdoch also finds the human being prone to self-deception, and to denying her necessary relatedness—even dependency on the other—in particular.

In Chapter 7 I analyse Murdoch's understanding of love, arguing that this is a direct function of her notion of the self. Murdoch's sense of the simultaneous distinctness and relatedness of the human self leads her to reject the notion that human flourishing can be attained single-handedly, such as through direct self-assertion. I argue that Murdoch, too, ties human flourishing to a love which can be described as selfless in a twofold sense. Love is necessarily intertwined with the recognition that the human being lacks a self in the sense of a self-contained whole, and consists in the individual's

orientation and attachment to transcendent Good as encountered in the world. As I will argue, this selfless love consists in an integration of Eros and attention that does justice to the individual's desire to flourish while also accounting for her tendency to self-deception about how individual well-being is best attained. With slightly different emphases than Tillich, Murdoch thus also helps overcome the dissociation of selfless love and human flourishing traced in Chapter 3, without simply rejecting the modernist insights into the self discussed in Chapter 2. The chapter will, again, close with some points of criticism.

### Part III

The final, and concluding part of this thesis, consists in Chapter 8. This has two parts. First, Tillich's and Murdoch's proposals are summarised, and evaluated in relation to Sartre's account of the self, as examined in Chapter 2, and in relation to the modernist polarisations of love examined in Chapter 3. This part of Chapter 8 concludes with a summary of Tillich's and Murdoch's respective strengths, differences, and unresolved issues. For all their strengths, Tillich's and Murdoch's accounts of selfless love are, I will argue, compromised by their failure to fully endorse reciprocity in love. This is intertwined with a failure to fully do injustice to the personal nature of the human being, and to their corresponding desire, need, and potential for communion. It also corresponds with a neglect of the role the beloved plays in the fulfilment of the lover's self, and with a retention, instead, of an element of self-sufficiency that is at odds with their insight into the inherently relational nature of the human self.

After summarising these concerns, which stand in the way of re-connecting selfless love and human flourishing, I make three constructive proposals for resolving them. These include, firstly, an emphasis on mutuality in love—that is, on the reception as well as the gift of love, and on love's culmination in reciprocity. I, secondly, argue that

selfless love can be considered conducive to human flourishing only if it is connected with an emphasis on the oneness of Good. Good, I argue, must be conceived of as a shared reality, which affects, connects, and unites lover and beloved. Finally, I propose that selfless love can most legitimately be understood as conducive to human flourishing where the transcendent reality both Tillich and Murdoch ground it in is—*analogically speaking*—understood as personal, and, thus, as capable of entering into a reciprocal love relation itself.

These proposals serve to build the kind of participatory metaphysic which I, finally, argue to be the necessary foundation for a defence of selfless love as truly conducive to human flourishing. By this I mean a metaphysic, which gives an ontological foundation to the notion that individual distinctness and social relatedness can coincide, and which implies that the fullness of human being is a matter of communion *as well as* individuality. Such a metaphysic constitutes, I argue, the necessary foundation for selfless love because it implies that in turning towards the other in selfless love, the human being is not leaving behind, or indeed denying, her self but acting in accordance with, and thus to the benefit, of her own, as well as the other's, self.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS OF MAIN SOURCES

**Paul Tillich**

Systematic Theology Volume I	<i>ST I</i>
Systematic Theology Volume II	<i>ST II</i>
Systematic Theology Volume III	<i>ST III</i>
Love, Power and Justice	<i>LPJ</i>
The Courage to Be	<i>TCB</i>
Morality and Beyond	<i>MB</i>
The New Being	<i>NB</i>

**Iris Murdoch**

Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals	<i>MGM</i>
Existentialists and Mystics	<i>EM</i>
The Sovereignty of Good	<i>SoG</i>
The Sandcastle	<i>TS</i>
An Accidental Man	<i>AM</i>
Under the Net	<i>UN</i>
Henry and Cato	<i>HC</i>
An Unofficial Rose	<i>UR</i>
The Unicorn	<i>TU</i>
The Nice and the Good	<i>NG</i>
A Fairly Honourable Defeat	<i>FHD</i>
Nuns and Soldiers	<i>NS</i>
The Time of the Angels	<i>TA</i>
The Book and the Brotherhood	<i>BB</i>

**Jean-Paul Sartre**

Being and Nothingness	<i>BN</i>
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## Chapter 1 – Introduction

In Iris Murdoch's novel *The Unicorn*, the self-absorbed Effingham Cooper has the revelation 'that with the death of the self the world becomes quite automatically the object of a perfect love'.<sup>1</sup> Effingham, it seems, comes to see love as interdependent on a kind of selflessness. This is surely a provocative suggestion. Since the modernist era,<sup>2</sup> and its concern with the individual, her autonomy, and freedom, associations of love with selflessness have become suspect. A selfless kind of love has increasingly appeared to brush over the needs and desires of the individual lover, and thus to endanger her personal flourishing. This impression has, as I will argue, been fostered also by modernist challenges to traditional concepts of the self. In the twentieth-century in particular, the substantial, unified self envisaged by Descartes has increasingly been replaced by a fragmented, decentred self, unsure of its identity. This new sense of self appears to further compromise the validity of connecting love with the 'death of the self', and to underline, instead, the need to actively build up and shape the self.

In this thesis, I intend to re-consider the validity of selfless love—that is, its compatibility with human flourishing. I do so with recourse to the thought of the theologian Paul Tillich (1886-1965) and the moral philosopher and novelist Iris Murdoch (1919-1999), both of whom closely engage with, but also criticise, the thought of their modernist contemporaries. Since I will show that selfless love can be conceptualised only in reference to the self, the core of this thesis consists in analyses of Tillich's and Murdoch's accounts both of the self and of love. These will be preceded by examinations of some of those accounts of the self and of love which, I will argue, have

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<sup>1</sup> Murdoch, *TU*, pp.167, 173.

<sup>2</sup> In the following, and throughout this thesis, I am using the terms 'modern' and 'modernity' for the period beginning with the Enlightenment, and 'modernism' and 'modernist' for the late nineteenth and twentieth century movement to which Sartre may be judged to belong.

contributed to the perception that selfless love and human flourishing are at odds with one another.

Although my argument will lead me to question certain modernist views of the self in their radicality, I do not, in re-considering selfless love, seek simply to invalidate modernist critiques of Cartesian notions of the self. Instead, I follow Tillich's and Murdoch's attempt to discern how the human self might be conceptualised in ways which accommodate modernist perspectives on the self and its desire for individual well-being without simply dismissing the notion of selfless love. In doing so, I am not engaging explicitly with modernism as a movement of thought, but with figures of modernism, such as Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), whom I, together with Tillich and Murdoch, consider a paradigmatic representative of the modernist movement.

### **1.1 Selfless love and human flourishing**

As will become fully apparent throughout my analyses in this thesis, I understand selfless love as a love that is unselfish in its motivation and centred not on the subject but on 'the other', whom I primarily understand as analogous to the Christian notion of the 'neighbour', but who can also be a non-human being or an object in the world. Selfless love as I understand it is thus a notion close to the Christian tradition and its injunctions to lay down one's life, to pick up one's cross and to love one's neighbour.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, the term 'selfless love' is also evocative of the modernist assertion of a lack of a self in the sense of a stable, unified and self-sufficient reality. This is relevant to the present discussion because such deconstructions of the Cartesian self have further promoted criticisms of other-centred love. As will become apparent in my analyses of Sartre especially, the replacement of the substantial self by voluntary acts of freedom tended to correspond with an assertion of individual autonomy, which appeared to be compromised by acts of loving surrender. As I will further show, the modernist notion

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<sup>3</sup> e.g. Jn 15:13; Mk 8:34f; Lk 14:27; Lk 10:27.

that the human self is an uncertain and elusive reality was sometimes also seen to leave the self more vulnerable to external impositions and abuses and, thus, fostered a self-protective, controlling approach towards the other. Both these perceptions let selfless love appear as a threat to the flourishing of the human individual. I will be using the term ‘selfless’ love, then, to indicate not only self-giving love, but a love practised in full awareness of the lack of a contained, object-like self.

Though aware that Christian understandings of human flourishing extend beyond the natural or this-worldly dimension (such as in the notion of the afterlife), it is in a this-worldly or immanent sense that I consider human flourishing in this thesis.<sup>4</sup> This accords with modern interpretations of the Christian proclamation that through fellowship with Christ God’s Kingdom is already being built in this life, while also reflecting my present aim to engage with non- and indeed anti-Christian thinkers.<sup>5</sup> A special focus will be given to the flourishing of the loving subject, which critics and defenders of selfless love have, respectively, been protective and dismissive of. I consider such worldly flourishing to include “external goods” and “goods of the body”, and also ‘goods of the soul’ such as a development of one’s potential for creativity, love, and friendship.<sup>6</sup>

My decision to examine the relation between selfless love and human flourishing is partly influenced by the fact that it is in this context that the conflict between

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<sup>4</sup> My concern with human flourishing is topical not least in regard to the current ‘level of popular interest in [...] happiness, well-being and the good life’ pointed out by Harriet Harris. (Harriet Harris ‘Ambivalence over Virtue’ in Garnett et al (eds.) (2006) *Redefining Christian Britain: post-1945 Perspectives*, SCM, London, p.217). Harris cites the recent works of Alain de Botton, Richard Schoch’s *The Secret of Happiness: Three Thousand Years of Searching for the Good Life* (Profile Books, 2006), Nicholas White’s *A Brief History of Happiness* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2005) among others as reflective of the contemporary concern with the fullness of human life. One could add Sissela Bok (2011) *Exploring Happiness: from Aristotle to Brain Science*. Yale University Press, New Haven; and a forthcoming book by Simon Burnett (2012) *The Happiness Agenda: a Modern Obsession*. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. Lk 17:21, Col 1:13, and kingdom parables such as Mk 4: 26-32, Mt 6:10. As David Ford argues in the context of an analysis of the letter to the Ephesians, the New Testament promises faith in the died and risen Christ to effect ‘a transformation of notions of communication, of event, of human community, of ordinary living and of God’, resulting in what Ford calls a ‘new, singing self[f]’ (David Ford (1999) *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed*. CUP, Cambridge, pp.117f). As will become further apparent, I will argue precisely the transformation of human relationships to be a central precondition for human flourishing.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Pope (2007) *Human Evolution and Christian Ethics*. CUP, Cambridge, p.149.

traditional conceptualisations of love and the modernist, deconstructed self comes to the fore. As I show in the third chapter of this thesis, the late nineteenth-century is characterised by a clash, perceived by theologians and secular thinkers alike, between self-assertion and self-surrender, to put it starkly. The perception that selfless love stands in the way of the human being's flourishing *qua* individual, lives on. Psychoanalytic thought, at least in its popularised form, with its propagation of notions such as self-forgiveness, self-realisation, self-fulfilment, and, hence, of orientation to self, has pervaded our social imaginary; Christian, feminist and other liberation thinkers in particular continue to struggle with notions like selfless love as potential threats to the needs and wellbeing of the human individual.

A feminist argument potentially weakening the notion that selfless love is compatible with, and even conducive to, human flourishing has for instance been that excessive humility can constitute an immoral form of self-indulgence and that 'squander[ing] [one's] distinctive personal abilities' is sinful.<sup>7</sup> Feminist claims that men tend towards 'pride' and 'will-to-power' while women more commonly fall into '[...] dependence on others for one's own self-definition', and that the woman's 'sin' is that of 'underdevelopment or negation of the self', further enforce the severe accusation that, in encouraging selflessness, Christianity has encouraged the sinfulness of, and hence neglected, or even prevented the conversion and salvation of, women.<sup>8</sup> Daphne Hampson, for instance, has argued that the 'autonomy' and realisation of the female self are goods endangered by Christianity.<sup>9</sup> In a similar vein, theories linking illnesses such as anorexia to the conceptuality of Western culture and, indeed, of Christianity may be

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<sup>7</sup> Barbara Hilkert Andolsen 'Agape in Feminist Ethics', *The Journal of Religious Ethics* Vol.9, No.1 (1981), p.74.

<sup>8</sup> Valerie Saiving Goldstein 'The Human Situation: A Feminine View', *The Journal of Religion* Vol.40, No.2 (1960), p.109.

<sup>9</sup> Sarah Coakley (2002) *Powers and Submissions. Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender*. Blackwell, Oxford, p.3; Andolsen, *Agape in Feminist Ethics*, p.74; Daphne Hampson 'Autonomy and Heteronomy' in Daphne Hampson (ed.) (1996) *Swallowing a Fishbone?: Feminist Theologians Debate Christianity*. SPCK, London.

taken to imply that ideals of love as selfless or self-sacrificial are psychologically, morally and indeed physically harmful.<sup>10</sup>

Questions of gender and women's liberation are not, here, addressed as such. The view that a clash between selfless love and human flourishing is problematic nonetheless constitutes one of the central premises of this thesis. This is because, although Christianity traditionally understands love primarily as other-centred, it *also* claims to value human flourishing. Fromm's verdict that 'Christianity has missed the real key to human fulfilment' because '[...] its ideal of life is incompatible with the free development of man' is, no doubt, a damning indictment from a Christian perspective.<sup>11</sup> With respect to selfless love, it means that the validity of such love depends on its compatibility with the flourishing of the human subject. If selfless love obstructs the freedom and flourishing of the human subject, then Christianity itself can no longer endorse this as a truthful kind of love. Yet the prevalence, in the Christian tradition, of what I am calling selfless love implies that Christianity cannot legitimately dismiss the notion of selfless love without thorough consideration of the compatibility of selfless love and human flourishing in the face of modern thought on the self.

Following Iris Murdoch, I also propose, however, that the question of the viability of selfless love is not merely an inner-Christian concern. Where secular thought simply does away with the notion of selfless love, it risks imprisoning the human being within itself and implicitly encourages the human individual to understand herself in un-relational and, thus, self-isolating terms, thereby falling back into some of the Cartesian

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<sup>10</sup> See e.g. Caroline Giles Banks "'There is No Fat in Heaven": Religious Asceticism and the Meaning of Anorexia Nervosa', *Ethos* Vol.24, No.1 (1996). Banks also points to research by Bemporad and Rately and their account of 'the anorectic's sense of moral superiority derived from the endurance of painful abnegation and relinquishment of gratification of desires; self-control is praised, while any form of indulgence is disapproved' (Banks, p.121; cf. Jules Bemporad, John Rately 'Intensive Psychotherapy of Former Anorexic Individuals', *American Journal of Psychotherapy* Vol.39, No.4 (1985)). Without denying more problematic ascetic strands in Christianity, David Jasper's latest book constitutes a warning against attempts to read particularly the ascetic and mystical Christian tradition as opposed to the body, powerfully arguing, instead, that this tradition is pervaded by a deep eroticism of the body which typically eludes our contemporary understanding (David Jasper (2009) *The Sacred Body. Asceticism in Religion, Literature, Art, and Culture*. Baylor University Press, Waco.)

<sup>11</sup> As quoted by Daniel Day Williams in (1968) *The Spirit and the Forms of Love*, Nisbet, Welwyn, p.194.

pitfalls modernist (and, indeed, postmodernist) thinkers rightly seek to leave behind. Alternatively, a sheer dismissal of the possibility and fruitfulness of selfless love provokes a call for the deconstruction of natural human impulses to turn towards, and care for, the other as in fact selfishly motivated—a temptation some neo-Darwinians have surrendered to.<sup>12</sup> As such, it implies a failure to take seriously human experience and desire.

## 1.2 Aims

I have noted that the modernist clash between selfless love and human flourishing remains both relevant and problematic. It is for this reason that I seek, in this thesis, to explore how selfless love can be understood as conducive to, even necessary for, human flourishing without simply dismissing modernist understandings of the self as an unstable and developing reality. Although I will eventually argue for a particular understanding of ‘selfless love’, which does make selfless love compatible with both human flourishing and the modernist understanding of the self, I embark on the following discussion without any a priori principles in mind about the validity of selfless love. I do not, moreover, wish to suggest that selfless love is a *prima facie* and sufficient way to human flourishing. I do not presume to offer an exhaustive or necessary definition of selfless love but to develop one possible definition of selfless love on the basis of analysing various thinkers’ accounts of the self and of love. For reasons of space, and in line with my two main interlocutors, Tillich and Murdoch, I by and large do not consider the validity of selfless love through recourse to concrete moral scenarios, but through analyses of the nature of the self and what this implies for the

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<sup>12</sup> e.g. Michael Ghiselin (1974) *The Economy of Nature and the Evolution of Sex*. University of California Press, Berkeley; Richard Dawkins (1978) *The Selfish Gene*. Granada, London; Richard Alexander (1987) *The Biology of Moral Systems*. Aldine de Gruyter, New York. By contrast, even Adam Smith recognised a genuinely caring aspect of human ‘nature’ when he opens his main work with the observation that ‘[H]ow selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it’ (Adam Smith (1759) *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. A. Millar, London, p.1).

individual's relationality and for his flourishing. This furthermore reflects my view, implied also in Tillich's and Murdoch's accounts, that insofar as selfless love can be considered fruitful for human life, it must be understood not as a specific action but as a spiritual and emotional posture, the outward manifestations of which can vary and depend on the situation and needs of the beloved as well as on the capacities of the lover. The thesis will indicate that the problem of selfless love is in large part one of holding together the social relatedness and individual distinctness of the self without denying the instability of the self.

### **1.3 Approach and structure**

Following my hypothesis that the meaning and consequent validity of selfless love depends in large part on the nature of the self, this thesis is structured around alternate discussions of the self and of love. While the core of these discussions consists in four chapters on Tillich's and Murdoch's accounts of the self and of love, it begins with a brief analysis of existentialist approaches to the self and of Sartre's account of the self in particular. This is because Sartre's assertion of a fluid, developing self epitomises the modernist reaction against Cartesian understandings of the self and because Sartre's thought illustrates how such a conceptualisation of the self can, as already indicated, lead to the kind of polarisations of self and other, which have been a major cause of modernist rejections of selfless love. Even more to the point, this thesis opens with a discussion of Sartre's account of the self because he is one of the most significant interlocutors chosen by Tillich and Murdoch, and an important influence on both these thinkers.

The chapter on Sartre's account of the self is followed by a chapter briefly outlining accounts of love that are particularly formative for Tillich and Murdoch. These concern those of Plato, the New Testament authors and Augustine. In an illustrative

fashion, I then go on to sketch the modern polarisation between a supposedly ‘self-centred’ and ‘other-centred’ love (often referred to as ‘eros’ and ‘agape’) among both non-Christian and Christian authors. My focus here is on Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud and Jean-Paul Sartre on the one hand, and on Søren Kierkegaard, Anders Nygren and Simone Weil on the other.<sup>13</sup> These thinkers are chosen for their relevance to Tillich’s and Murdoch’s respective projects, and for the relative radicality of their thought. I use their ideas as heuristic devices, or with a view to fostering greater clarity in my own argument, and do not, therefore, propose to give comprehensive, or especially nuanced, accounts of their thinking. Concluding with a brief assessment of the reasons for these modern polarisations of love and with some references to existing attempts to resolve these oppositions, this chapter completes the foundational structure of the thesis.

I then embark on the core of this thesis, a study of Paul Tillich’s accounts of the self and of love, and, following this, of Iris Murdoch’s accounts of the self and of love. My decision to approach the question of the validity of selfless love by bringing into conversation thinkers from different disciplines and different foundational assumptions (Murdoch being a self-professed atheist) is intended to reflect the above-mentioned fact that both the clash between selfless love and human flourishing and the problematisation of this clash are issues not unique to Christianity, but brought about and promoted both by theologians and by secular philosophers. The inter-disciplinary angle of this thesis is moreover intended to express the fact that Christian thinkers must take seriously and respond to challenges brought against their tradition from outside it, and must incorporate meritorious insights into the Christian tradition; equally, non-Christian thinkers making alternative proposals are bound to be influenced by Christian presuppositions, and, as Murdoch recognises, must respond to, and will be likely to

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<sup>13</sup> Classifying Weil as Christian is, of course, a schematic over-simplification. Yet in her perspective on the human self and on love, she shares important affinities with Kierkegaard and Nygren, and it is these affinities (and not her prospective status as a Christian writer), which interest us here.

benefit from, moral and anthropological problems as articulated by the Christian tradition.

Tillich's and Murdoch's approaches to, and accounts of, love and the self are particularly suited to the present endeavour. An army chaplain in the First World War, Paul Tillich began his career in an environment in which self-denial and self-sacrifice were politically demanded. In sermons on the battlefield the young Tillich backed this theologically, commending soldiers to welcome the opportunity to imitate Christ's love to the last.<sup>14</sup> His growing awareness, however, of the extent to which human beings are plagued by doubt and despair arguably sensitised him to the need for understanding Christian love in terms more explicitly affirmative of the human being and his flourishing. Accordingly, his thought on the nature of love reflects his attempt to avoid the world-denying stance Nietzsche, Fromm and others accused Christianity of, and to develop, instead, an understanding of love that includes and enlivens that human 'life-power' which he identifies as spirit and which he freely associates with Nietzsche's and Schopenhauer's 'will to power', with Freud's 'libido', and, though unaddressed here, with Bergson's 'élan vital'. Accordingly, Jeanrond is right to note that 'Paul Tillich [...] already emphasised fifty years ago the [ongoing] need for theology to rediscover the erotic nature of the human being in all its depth and ambiguity, so as to regain also a piece of biblical realism "after this was for so long obscured by several layers of idealistic and moralistic self-deception about the nature of man"'.<sup>15</sup> According to Jeanrond, Tillich proposes to do so through renewed attention to, and integration of, eros, agape and philia. I will come to find that Tillich in fact pays insufficient attention to the mutuality

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<sup>14</sup> See e.g. Paul Tillich (1993) *Frühe Predigten (1909-1918)* Ergänzungs- und Nachlassbände zu den gesammelten Werken VII (ed. by Erdmann Sturm). Walter de Gruyter, Berlin (see e.g. 'Von der Kraft Gottes', 'Meine Gnade soll nicht von dir weichen', 'Vom Opfer für die Brüder und der Freundschaft Gottes').

<sup>15</sup> My translation; Werner Jeanrond 'Der Gott der Liebe: Entwicklungen des theologischen Liebesbegriffs bei Plutarch und in der frühen Kirche' in Plutarch (2006) *Dialog über die Liebe: Amatorius* (Herwig Görgemanns ed.). Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, p.293 (Tillich quote in Tillich, *LPJ*, p.117).

expressed particularly by philia love but that he does indeed contribute much to an integration of eros and agape and, with this, to a viable account of selfless love.

The above already indicates the relevance of Tillich's thought to the present enquiry. It must further be added that while there is anything but a shortage of literature on Tillich, his understanding of love and its role in the establishment of the self has not been fully explicated.<sup>16</sup> Recent perceptions that modernist (and postmodernist) deconstructions of the identity, unity and stability of the human self give a picture which does not exhaustively illuminate and govern human experience<sup>17</sup>, further provoke and arguably warrant a return to a thinker such as Tillich, who engages with and adopts much of modern thought while also challenging it to the effect of both transcending and outliving the modernist movement.

While Tillich aims to establish a more unambiguously life-affirming account of love, Iris Murdoch is concerned with recovering love—and particularly selfless love—as a moral and philosophical category in the first place. Although rejecting the notion of God and accepting 'much of the criticism of traditional metaphysics', she finds that the decline of metaphysics has led contemporary philosophers to fail to make sense of the ordinary human being's experience of a unified self and to overlook the moral significance of love.<sup>18</sup> Murdoch observes that contemporary analytical philosophers' concern with outwardly visible phenomena has resulted in a failure to recognise the moral import of the individual's inner disposition. Their empiricist and behaviourist tendencies lead philosophers such as Stuart Hampshire, A.J. Ayer, Gilbert Ryle and Richard Hare to overlook the role a person's vision and the orientation of his desires play for his ability to even perceive reality. While this provokes Murdoch's attraction to

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<sup>16</sup> Irwin does treat Tillich's account of the erotic but not Tillich's account of love as a whole (Alexander Irwin (1991) *Eros toward the world: Paul Tillich and the theology of the erotic*. Fortress, Minneapolis).

<sup>17</sup> See e.g. Timotheus Vermeulen, Robin van den Akker "Notes on Metamodernism", *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* Vol.2 (2010), and the webzine 'Notes on Metamodernism' (<http://www.metamodernism.com/>, accessed on 27/12/2011).

<sup>18</sup> Murdoch in Michael Levenson, 'Iris Murdoch: The Philosophic Fifties and *The Bell*', *Modern Fiction Studies* Vol.47, No.3 (2001), p.559.

continental philosophy, and particularly to Sartrean existentialism and its attention to the significance of human consciousness, she will ultimately also judge this continental perspective to be wanting. In her departure from such, in principle welcome, alternatives to Descartes's understanding of the self, Murdoch seeks to develop a contemporary moral philosophy which accounts for the extent to which the very reality of the human self is dependent on its relationship to a transcendent reality encountered in worldly others. As we shall see, this endeavour leads her, too, to argue for a selfless love, which integrates the erotic dimension of the human being, and which is constitutive of the self.

There have been various commentaries on Murdoch's attempt to develop a moral ontology centred on the notion of love and based, significantly, on a re-affirmation of the self.<sup>19</sup> Yet the question of how she considers love, true selfhood and, with this, human flourishing to hang together has received relatively little attention.<sup>20</sup> At least in part, this is perhaps due to the fact that Murdoch portrays love as geared precisely towards an '*un*-selfing'; she shuns direct discussions of human flourishing, and her most explicit concern is not with the true, but with the sinful self, which implies precisely a disjuncture between love and the self. That Murdoch not only draws much attention to these ideas, but, as I will show, also envisages a redeemed self which emerges out of selfless love, already indicates the extent to which her thought, too, transcends, even subverts, modernist (and postmodernist) assumptions, such that her thought remains highly topical today and relevant to the present enquiry.

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<sup>19</sup> See e.g. Christopher Mole, 'Attention, Self and *The Sovereignty of Good*' in Anne Rowe (ed.) (2006) *Iris Murdoch: A Reassessment*. Palgrave Macmillan, London; Frank Baldanza, 'Iris Murdoch and the Theory of Personality', *Criticism* Vol.7 (1965); Maria Antonaccio 'Imagining the Good: Iris Murdoch's Godless Theology', *Annual Society of Christian Ethics* Vol.16 (1996); Heather Widdows (2005) *The Moral Vision of Iris Murdoch*. Aldershot, Hampshire; Samantha Vice 'The Ethics of Self-Concern' in Rowe, A. (ed.) (2006) *Iris Murdoch: A Reassessment*. Palgrave Macmillan, London.

<sup>20</sup> One of the latest studies on Murdoch's morality (Rowe, Horner, *Iris Murdoch and Morality*) does not for instance list the term 'eros', so central to Murdoch's morality, in the index and gives little attention to Murdoch's understanding of 'love'. That an examination of the connection between love and selfhood in Murdoch's work is timely is further underlined by the plethora of recent literature on Murdoch's morality, which indicates a second wave of Murdoch studies. See also Simone Roberts, Alison Scott-Baumann (2010) *Iris Murdoch and the moral imagination: essays*. McFarland & Co., Jefferson. Sabina Lovibond (2011) *Iris Murdoch, Gender and Philosophy*. Routledge, London.

Tillich and Murdoch have not, to my knowledge, been read in conjunction with one another. A number of factors invite such an undertaking. Tillich's famously correlative method was geared precisely towards bringing into dialogue, and bridging the gap between, religious and what might be called secular thinking. In accordance with his own interest in non-Christian thought, his theology lends itself to, and calls for, dialogue with a secular writer. Murdoch is particularly suited to such a conversation insofar as she, unlike some non-Christian writers, is herself strongly interested in religious thinking, to the point of acknowledging that her thinking continually veers in a theological direction.<sup>21</sup> Although Murdoch never concedes more than symbolic references to God, her interest in, and sympathies for, theological thought are indicated by the contents of her library,<sup>22</sup> and by her repeated references to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Don Cupitt, Karl Barth and, indeed, Paul Tillich. In turn, contemporary Christian philosophers and theologians such as Charles Taylor (whom Murdoch taught), Stanley Hauerwas, and Alasdair MacIntyre hold her work in moral philosophy in high regard.<sup>23</sup>

The fact that much of Murdoch's philosophical writing took place only after Tillich's death explains why Tillich appears to have been unfamiliar with Murdoch. Yet the references Murdoch makes to Tillich are of such significance that they constitute perhaps the main incentive for reading Murdoch and Tillich in conjunction with one

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<sup>21</sup> See e.g. Peter Conradi (2001) *Iris Murdoch. A Life*. Harper Collins, London, p.456. See e.g. Donald MacKinnon (1975) *The Problem of Metaphysics*, CUP, Cambridge. While Robjant is right to argue that Murdoch can in no way be regarded as a Christian writer, her claim that she talks as a 'Christian fellow traveller' nonetheless indicates her significant affinities with Christian thought (David Robjant 'As a Buddhist Christian; The Misappropriation of Iris Murdoch' *Heythrop Journal*, Vol.52, No.6 (2011); Murdoch, *MGM*, p.419).

<sup>22</sup> Murdoch's library, which includes a breadth of theological works, can in large part be accessed at the Iris Murdoch archive at Kingston University. Her amicable rapport with theology was arguably roused by her early encounters with the Oxford Christian moral philosopher Donald MacKinnon.

<sup>23</sup> Charles Taylor 'Iris Murdoch and Moral Philosophy' in Maria Antonaccio, William Schweiker (1996) *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago. (see also Charles Taylor (1989) *Sources of the Self. The Making of the Modern Identity*. CUP, Cambridge); Stanley Hauerwas 'Murdochian Muddles: can we get through them if God does not exist?' in Antonaccio, Schweiker, *Search for Human Goodness*; Stanley Hauerwas (2001) *Wilderness Wanderings: probing twentieth-century theology and philosophy*. SCM, London; Stanley Hauerwas, Alasdair MacIntyre (1983) *Revisions, Changing Perspectives in Moral Philosophy*. University of Notre Dame Press, Southbend; Alasdair MacIntyre (2004) *The Unconscious. A Conceptual Analysis*. Routledge, London, p.1; Alasdair MacIntyre 'Review of E. Dipple's *Iris Murdoch: Work for the Spirit* (Methuen, London, 1982)', *London Review of Books*, 3-16 June 1982.

another. At the beginnings of two chapters of *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, Murdoch quotes Tillich on the regard of the ontological argument, which both consider to point to ‘the unconditional element in the structure of reason and reality’, and on the errors of ‘heteronomous subjection and autonomous rejection’.<sup>24</sup> Significantly, Murdoch also ends the same work, which can legitimately be described as her magnum opus, with reference to Tillich’s notion of ‘ultimate concern’, and agrees with him that ‘our experience of the unconditioned and our continued sense of what is holy’ is at the heart of the human condition and in need of being addressed philosophically.<sup>25</sup> As will become apparent, Murdoch’s references to Tillich are not only expressive of significant parallels between them, but are also highly relevant to the question of the viability of selfless love.

Perusing her archived copy of Tillich’s *Systematic Theology* enhances the impression that Murdoch not only engaged with Tillich’s thought in some depth but that this engagement lies at the root of some of the parallels of their thought.<sup>26</sup> Murdoch’s, at times, extremely dense underlining of Tillich’s text indicates her interest in Tillich’s attempt to avoid the extremes of heteronomy and autonomy, in his claim that ‘an awareness of the infinite is included in man’s awareness of finitude’, and in his observation that both Augustine and Kant use their point about ‘the unconditional element’ present ‘in every encounter with reality’ to establish an unconditional being.<sup>27</sup> In a similar spirit, Murdoch sympathises with Tillich’s interpretation of Anselm’s ontological argument, and with his insistence that the unconditional cannot be understood as ‘a highest being called God’.<sup>28</sup> Tillich’s discussion of these matters is heavily underlined in Murdoch’s copy of the *Systematic Theology*, and reflected in her writings. The underlining and markings in sections on love indicate that these, too, were

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<sup>24</sup> The relevant chapters are ‘The Ontological Proof’ (Murdoch, *MGM*, pp.391f) and ‘Descartes and Kant’ (Murdoch, *MGM*, p.431). See also Murdoch, *MGM*, p.381.

<sup>25</sup> Murdoch, and Tillich in Murdoch, *MGM*, pp.511f.

<sup>26</sup> Murdoch owned the separate three volumes published in 1973, 1975, and 1976 respectively. An inscription of hers at the front of volume I suggests she read this in 1979.

<sup>27</sup> See Tillich, *ST I*, pp.83-92 and p.206 in Murdoch’s edition.

<sup>28</sup> See again Tillich, *ST I*, pp.206ff.

closely read by Murdoch. She for instance summarises in the margin Tillich's claim that love includes libido, philia, eros and agape, and underlines that agape must be the 'criterion' for the other loves, that it 'affirms the other unconditionally', and that it does so 'because of the ultimate unity of being with being within the divine ground'.<sup>29</sup> She equally underlines Tillich's claims that 'love does not destroy the freedom of the beloved' and that 'basically, however, one's love to God is of the nature of eros'.<sup>30</sup> In the slightly less closely read Volume II she notes, among other things, that Tillich brings existentialism and depth psychology together.<sup>31</sup> In some endnotes to volume I of Tillich's work, Murdoch relates these ideas to Simone Weil and her emphasis on the 'need for education: art, stillness, looking'. As will become apparent, all of these points of Tillich's are mirrored in Murdoch's own thought and will form central aspects of my subsequent argument regarding selfless love and human flourishing.

On a more basic level, both Tillich and Murdoch are aware that if traditional mores such as selfless love are to be held on to, they must be shown to be existentially relevant to people. As one commentator on Murdoch puts it, 'our relation to traditional moral sources, including the idea of the Good, is no longer simply a function of a publicly established order of meaning but is subject to personal resonance'.<sup>32</sup> Coupled with the fact that, as Taylor observes, Murdoch bemoaned the extent to which 'Anglo-Saxon moral philosophy has tended to see morality as concerned with questions of what we ought to do and to occlude or exclude questions about what it is good to be or what it is good to love', this insight leads both Tillich and Murdoch to refer to a broad range of disciplines and methodologies.<sup>33</sup> In particular, it leads them to draw on the engaged approach to the human being found in existentialism and psychoanalysis. This is because both these forms of thought show a regard for the individual's inner life and revive

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<sup>29</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, pp.282, 280.

<sup>30</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, pp.282, 281.

<sup>31</sup> The perhaps most ecclesial Volume III of Tillich's *ST* appears almost unread.

<sup>32</sup> Antonaccio, 'Imagining the Good', p.242.

<sup>33</sup> Taylor, 'Iris Murdoch and Moral Philosophy', p.3.

discussions of the nature of the human self or subject. As will become apparent, both Tillich and Murdoch perceive in particular Sartre's portrayal of the self as a project in life, to open up a new space for thinking about selfless love. At the same time, both Tillich and Murdoch will be found to criticise significant aspects of Sartrean existentialism and psychoanalysis, such as these movements' neglect of the existential human being's moral and spiritual dimension, and his experienced dependency on love. Both agree that these faults can only be overcome through rooting the human being in the structures of being itself, and thus through combining an involved engagement with the existential human predicament with the comparatively detached perspective of ontology.

I will argue that Tillich's and Murdoch's accounts of the self and of love, and the parallels between them, point to the possibility of a defence of selfless love and indicate the extent to which this can be justified, both on theological and on secular philosophical premises. However, the differences between Tillich and Murdoch will also be useful to the present enquiry into the relation between selfless love and human flourishing. In the concluding chapter of this thesis, the contrast between them highlights both strengths and difficulties in Tillich's and Murdoch's respective accounts and draws attention to the metaphysical presuppositions to which a viable account of selfless love as conducive to human flourishing is tied. This last chapter thus also offers an opportunity to consider the extent to which a fruitful defence of selfless love would have to go beyond their thought.

#### **1.4 Sources**

A final note is necessary on the sources I draw on and the manner in which I do so. Of Tillich's immense oeuvre, I focus on his more strictly academic writings, making only an occasional reference to his sermons. This is because, although Tillich's rhetorical skill

arguably comes to the fore particularly in the sermons, these do not add to, comment on, or alter the content of his academic writings. Of the latter, his *Systematic Theology* constitutes the focus of my analyses. Murdoch develops her ideas in less systematic a fashion than Tillich. Not only does she frequently paint bold and generalising pictures involving idiosyncratic and heuristic depictions of the history of thought in an *ad hoc* fashion, but she also develops her ideas by literary as well as by philosophical means. Although Murdoch, famously, rejects the label of a ‘philosophical novelist’ (which she associates with the didactic (mis)use of literature of which she accuses Sartre),<sup>34</sup> her novels do, and are widely recognised to, play a constitutive role in the development and exposition of her thought: as one commentator rightly argues, Murdoch has an ‘embodied’ philosophical writing style.<sup>35</sup> Though I lack the space to engage with her fictional works in as much detail as her philosophical writings, I will thus occasionally cite passages from her novels, where ideas she entertains in her philosophical writings are played out in concrete and illustrative contexts.

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<sup>34</sup> See e.g. interviews with Frank Kermode, ‘The House of Fiction: Interviews with Seven English Novelists.’ *Partisan Review* Vol.30 (1963); and Rubin Rabinovitz (1968) *Iris Murdoch*. Columbia University Press, NY, p.3.

<sup>35</sup> Altorf correctly observes that characters in Murdoch’s novels sometimes quote exactly or almost exactly out of her philosophical essays—though not always necessarily to prove Murdoch’s philosophical claims right (Marije Altorf, ‘The Body in the Text: Iris Murdoch’s Embodied Writing Style in The Sovereignty of Good’ in Darlene Bird, Yvonne Sherwood (ed.s) (2005) *Bodies in Question. Gender, Religion, Text*. Ashgate, Hants). See also Guy Backus (1986) *Iris Murdoch: The Novelist as Philosopher, The Philosopher as Novelist: ‘The Unicorn’ as a Philosophical Novel*. Peter Lang, Bern; Miles Leeson (2010) *Iris Murdoch: Philosophical Novelist*. Continuum, London; and Peter Hawkins (1983) *The Language of Grace. Flannery O’Connor, Walker Percy and Iris Murdoch*. Cowley, Cambridge MA, p.89.

## Chapter 2 – The human self in existentialism

As stated in Chapter 1, it is the purpose of this thesis to examine whether selfless love is compatible with the flourishing of the self. With both critics and defenders of selfless love, I assume that the meaning and validity of selfless love is to a large extent determined by the nature of the self. I propose, therefore, the following question: does the rejection of the Cartesian notion that the self is a clearly delineated (though immaterial) entity inhering in the human body necessitate a dismissal of the possibility and value of selfless love? Or does such a rejection open a new space for re-evaluating, and perhaps even vindicating, selfless love? The first step towards discerning this question, which will concern us throughout this thesis, is to take a closer look at those post-Cartesian conceptualisations of the self, which have provoked rejections of selfless love as obstructive of human flourishing. One such conceptualisation is Jean-Paul Sartre's (1905-1980). In the following, I will examine his existentialist account of the self more closely because his radical, yet illustrative, re-definition of the self does indeed lead him to reject the notion of selfless love, and because Paul Tillich and Iris Murdoch, the thinkers at the core of the present study, are strongly influenced by and react against Sartre's ideas. They consider these to epitomise the most radical version of modernist reactions against the Cartesian self. While Murdoch is more sceptical of this, Tillich also considers the existentialists highly expressive of his contemporaries' experience of existence. The discussion in this chapter will thus serve as a background to subsequent discussions of Tillich's and Murdoch's accounts of the self, and, ultimately, as a background to the question of what both selfless love and the flourishing of the self might be.

This chapter will begin with a brief discussion of the philosophical background to Sartrean existentialism, followed by a more indepth examination of Sartre's own

account of the human self. The chapter will close with an initial sketch of Tillich's and Murdoch's reception of Sartre's anthropology.

## 2.1 History, cause, concerns

For all the differences between pre-modern discussions of essence and existence and those of the twentieth-century, the existentialists' appropriation of this terminology is a significant indicator that the ancient sense that reality is experienced as containing breaks and fissures—doubtlessly a perception preceding even Plato and Aristotle—continues to hold sway among the proponents of this modern sensibility.<sup>36</sup> The human being perceives a gap between ordinary experiences and ultimate reality. Although Sartre famously reverses the order of essence and existence, arguing the latter to precede the former, he continues to understand essence as the eternal, pure and universal (thought)forms of being while defining existence as that particular 'being' which 'stands out' of the totality of 'Being' and of its corresponding 'Nonbeing'.<sup>37</sup>

While historiographies portraying René Descartes (1596-1650) as the sole origin of, or turning point towards, modern understandings of the self are surely simplistic, his thinking certainly exemplifies a new stage in the human being's sense of alienation from Reality. By claiming that 'the only certainty there is' is that, when I think, 'I am, I exist', Descartes extended the above-mentioned human experience of a fundamental gap to the person's most immediate reality.<sup>38</sup> If, with the 'cogito', Descartes perhaps made clear that one's momentarily present self-consciousness is real, he therewith simultaneously called into doubt the reality of everything else (*res extensa*). Human beings cannot know whether their consciousness (*res cogitans*) is connected to anything in the world, whether it be their

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<sup>36</sup> Tillich, *ST II*, pp.21f.

<sup>37</sup> This modern use of 'essence' is of course not to be confused with Thomas Aquinas' (1225-1274) 'essentia', often also translated in English as 'essence'. Aquinas opposes 'esse' with 'essentia', which correlate with the Existentialists' 'essence' and 'existence' respectively. Paul Tillich 'Existential Philosophy', *Journal of the History of Ideas* Vol.5, No.1 (1944), p.47.

<sup>38</sup> René Descartes (1986) *Meditations on First Philosophy. With Selections from the Objections and Replies* (tr. John Cottingham). CUP, Cambridge, p.17.

own bodies, or the objects around them. The individual is divisible from her body (mind, body, and external world being thought of as independent substances), and has nothing except the supposed goodwill of God to suggest that she ought to trust her mind's suggestion that the objects of her perception exist also outside her imagination.<sup>39</sup> With this picture, Descartes can be said to prepare the existentialist perception of a split not only between more or less truthful modes of being but also between separate kinds of being: while the *res extensa* does not exactly correspond to essence, the *res cogitans* directs us towards the estranged 'existent thinker'. Descartes' thinking subject is estranged from the material world, including not only his surroundings but also his own body. Descartes thereby provokes a picture of the self as a substance in the sense of a thinking but object-like reality distinct from, and inhering in, the material body rather than suggesting the body to be a *dimension* of human selfhood.

'Draw[ing] a line between the mind (or the self, made manifest to me by the cogito) and the world', between 'the immaterial self and the material world', the thought of Descartes paves the way for a view, to which, as we shall see, Murdoch objects: namely, the notion that values are 'excluded from the world', that there is a gap between (apparent) fact and value.<sup>40</sup> His perspective on the self thus leaves philosophy with at least two lasting problems: how can philosophy avoid an account of the human being the solipsism of which jars with our relational experience of the world and of ourselves, and what are the origins and implications of the self's two-dimensionality, that is of the self's existence and its appearance to consciousness?<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Descartes, *Mediations*, p.18. Though taking up the implied assumption that consciousness is connected to truth itself, Murdoch will be found to reverse the Cartesian model in her interpretation of the ontological argument insofar as she considers consciousness to enable insight precisely not into the self but into Good, which she distinguishes from self.

<sup>40</sup> Descartes does not yet follow these ethical implications through himself (Timothy Chappell (2005) *The Inescapable Self. An Introduction to Western Philosophy since Descartes*. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, pp.173, 203).

<sup>41</sup> Einar Overenget (1998) *Seeing the Self: Heidegger on subjectivity*. Kluwer Academic Publishers, London, p.160.

These questions have been addressed in numerous places, including the transcendental idealist redefinition of the mind's, the body's and the world's substantial natures as facultative qualities in Immanuel Kant (1724-1804).<sup>42</sup> However, the existentialist response to them was prepared particularly by G. W. F. Hegel's (1770-1831) approach to the human self as self-consciousness. This conveys a particular regard for the problem of solipsism, and for the tension between contingent personal existence and the non-temporal world of perfect essences. Hegel asserts that as a result of human freedom the person lives in 'a state of separation from or contradiction with the external world', and separates '[...] the object from the intuition, the concept from the image, finally [...] himself from himself'.<sup>43</sup> All external estrangements are merely manifestations, however, of self-consciousness's own estrangement, which is overcome in the submersion of the subjective self in a universal, objective system of essences through the mechanism of the divine self-revelation. Existential thinkers reject this Hegelian solution to estrangement, rightfully fearing that the essentialisation of the concretely existing person results in a loss of human freedom and individual distinctness for the human self. However, Hegel's influence on existentialism's concerns and methodology nonetheless ranges from his coinage of terms like 'self-estrangement' and 'unhappy consciousness', his decision to consider this estrangement in reference to human experience and worldly phenomena and his attention to the role played in this by awareness of nonbeing, and fear of death.<sup>44</sup> Hegel's implicit notion that man's salvation depends on his use of his powers of reason, and thus that man is his own, rational maker, will moreover be found to pertain even among many of Hegel's existentialist critics.<sup>45</sup>

These doubtlessly include first and foremost Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), who rejects Hegel's conceptual reconciliation of reality perhaps primarily for its neglect

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<sup>42</sup> Immanuel Kant (2007) *Critique of Pure Reason. Revised second edition*. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.

<sup>43</sup> Inwood in G.W.F. Hegel (ed. Michael Inwood) (1989) *Selections*. Macmillan Publishing, New York, p.57.

<sup>44</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1949) *The Phenomenology of Mind* (tr. J.B. Baillie). George Allen & Unwin, London, pp.507ff, pp.251ff.

<sup>45</sup> Inwood in Hegel, *Selections*, p.8.

of the concrete human individual. It is only on account of and over against this subject that Hegel can develop his absolute system. The denial or sublation of this individual by a process of absolute thought undermines Hegel's own system, Kierkegaard observes. Confrontation of the human individual demands a confrontation of her immediate subjective experience of estrangement. According to Kierkegaard, the human spirit experiences conflicts that cause anxiety and that bear temptations to sin but that also constitute the precondition for freedom.<sup>46</sup> Thought is, Kierkegaard argues, part of finite existence and not, therefore, identical with Being. It cannot reach being and is thus unable to undo the experience of a gap between the finite and the infinite, that is, between the individual and reality beyond the individual. If Kierkegaard stresses the limits of abstract thought he does not, however, seek to enshrine the insecurity and incompleteness which existential estrangement leaves the human being with. His thought suggests that the threat of meaninglessness and self-destruction must be overcome not by shutting out anxiety but by 'learn[ing] to be anxious in the right way' such that 'the terrible things of life [...] become weak by comparison with those of possibility'.<sup>47</sup> This means having faith.

Like Nietzsche, Kierkegaard considers freedom to be interdependent with true human subjectivity, and thus not with the enclosure of the individual self in a logical system of identity but with the human being's facing the task of realising its individuality and struggling for rationality.<sup>48</sup> Kierkegaard's subject is a 'voluntary agent', a 'living, active, self-making, self-choosing, self-renewing energy, genuinely set in time, process and becoming'.<sup>49</sup> In his *Purity of heart is to will one thing* (1847) Kierkegaard argues that human beings ought to think of themselves in terms of 'I will', rather than as 'I am'

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<sup>46</sup> Søren Kierkegaard (1980) *The Concept of Anxiety. A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, p.155.

<sup>47</sup> Kierkegaard, *Anxiety*, pp.155, 157.

<sup>48</sup> Mary Warnock (1970) *Existentialism*. OUP, Oxford, p.3; Søren Kierkegaard (1956) *Purity of heart is to will one thing. Spiritual Preparation for the Office of Confession* (tr. Steere, D.), Harper and Row, New York, p.184.

<sup>49</sup> James Brown (1962) *Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Buber and Barth*. Collier Books, New York, p.42.

(Hegel).<sup>50</sup> The normative 'ought' in this is derived from an appeal to human experience: contrary to Hegel's abstractions, Kierkegaard seeks to re-habilitate the cognitive value of human experience and perception and with this, of the self's subjective inwardness. Human beings do not and cannot experience reality as a rationally and objectively evolving process of divine essence but as malleable by their subjective will and freedom. The objectivity aimed for by Hegel, not subjective experiences, is an illusion, which promotes an insincere, inauthentic and, thus, according to Kierkegaard, wrong subservience to pre-determined, allegedly objective rules or moral laws.<sup>51</sup> Although acknowledging, more than, say, Nietzsche, that a true subject requires an object, and that the human will requires a limit (both of which, object and limit, he finds in Christianity's confrontation of the human being with the paradox of the Incarnate God), Kierkegaard suggests that the human being truly exists only insofar as he makes use of his freedom by creating his own values, and by freely acting upon them. This does not imply an ultimate surrender to absolute subjectivity in the sense of self-created values. It does however imply a relative individualisation of Kant's concept of the moral law, and an enhanced sense of the importance of the individual's inner stance towards another, which will come to be crucial for the existentialist understanding of reality.

It is this urgent warning against the objectifying tendencies prevalent not only in Hegel but promoted also by the idealist, naturalist and scientific worldviews of the day, and increasingly perceived as leading towards the objectification (or what Marx termed the 'Verdinglichung') of the human being, which continued to drive the existentialist (and related, Marxian and Nietzschean) projects in the middle of the twentieth-century.<sup>52</sup> From this perspective, essentialism such as could be found in Hegel was ironically promoting precisely the existential predicament of self-alienation, which it sought to

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<sup>50</sup> Kierkegaard, *Purity of heart*.

<sup>51</sup> Warnock, *Existentialism*, p.7.

<sup>52</sup> Paul Tillich, 'The Nature and the Significance of Existential Thought', *The Journal of Philosophy* Vol.53, No.23 (1956), p.746. Tillich, *EP*, p.66.

overcome. Existence showed itself as the ‘dehumanisation’ of the human being rather than as the asserted ‘expression of essential humanity’ and Kierkegaard’s claim that the individual subject is not at all reconciled was extended to society at large (Marx) and to life as such (Schopenhauer, Nietzsche).<sup>53</sup>

Although Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) was interested less in human *existence* than in *Being* as a whole and thus distanced himself from the term ‘existentialism’, his concern with the simultaneously individual and situated nature of the self and, consequently, with the interrelatedness of subject and object, as well as of consciousness and world is too relevant to the problematic at hand to be left unmentioned.<sup>54</sup> Heidegger intends to leave behind both the Cartesian dualism of mind and world and the post-Cartesian (though not Kierkegaardian) tendency to locate “‘within” the subject’ what was until then considered to exist ‘between knower/agent and world, linking them and making them inseparable’.<sup>55</sup> He attempts to do so by emphasising that the being of the human self is simply another way of ‘Being-in-the-world’—and that the human way of being is thus on a continuum with that of other worldly entities.<sup>56</sup> According to Heidegger, this forms an ontological (as opposed to Descartes’ cognitive) basis for the connection between the human self and that which is other than self, and precludes any juxtapositions of the two. This implies neither the suggestion that the self is merely another spatial object in the world, nor the denial that its world is always subjective insofar as everyone ‘proximally’ has his own world.<sup>57</sup> It does mean, however, that human subjectivity does not extend to the ontological level of being, on which the human being is in continuity with the so-called objective world (*das Vorhandene*). The individual’s consciousness of herself as Dasein, that is as a worldly self, is consequently given *with* her

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<sup>53</sup> Tillich, *ST II*, p.25.

<sup>54</sup> Arguably Heidegger was yet a more profound influence on Tillich than Sartre. However, since it is Sartre and not Heidegger who connects Tillich with Murdoch (Murdoch’s major engagement with Heidegger having come late, and having been left unfinished and unpublished) this thesis focuses on their engagement with Sartre.

<sup>55</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p.188.

<sup>56</sup> Martin Heidegger (1962) *Being and Time*. Blackwell, Oxford, pp.95.

<sup>57</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p.92.

consciousness of objects, and is indeed fundamentally constituted by the objective world.<sup>58</sup> Contrary to attempts such as those of Descartes and Hegel, Dasein and *Vorhandenes* cannot, therefore, be considered independently from each other. Doing so would require the detached position of an outsider in relation to the world.

The Heideggerian emphasis on the worldly nature of consciousness must not be taken as an objectification of consciousness. As we saw, Heidegger seeks precisely to avoid spatialising the I since it is on account of such a conceptualisation that consciousness and world are separated from one another. For Heidegger, the self or I is a word ‘to be understood only in the sense of a non-committal formal indicator’.<sup>59</sup> Its appearance in any given present moment does not say much about the ontological nature of Dasein and indeed distracts from the phenomenal nature of Dasein.<sup>60</sup> The self is insubstantial and signifies solely our continuity or sameness over time. It can legitimately signify only temporal (not spatial) unity, which excludes a (spatialising) focus on the present moment; it is ‘organised by a sense of the past as the source of a given situation, and the future as what my action must co-determine’.<sup>61</sup> Heidegger thus strips the self of its Cartesian substantiality and understands it only in terms of the continuity of consciousness, which he considers to fundamentally lean towards death, the ‘certainty and sovereignty’ of which must be continually confronted.<sup>62</sup>

At the same time, Heidegger cannot be said to ‘eliminate the subjective perspective’.<sup>63</sup> Aware ‘that such a move would reduce the human being to an object in a mechanistic physical universe’, Heidegger, not unlike Kierkegaard, indeed demands that the self *emancipate* itself from objectification through the ‘*Man*’ and ‘find itself’, i.e. that it allows itself to be ‘taken hold of in its own way’.<sup>64</sup> This endeavour to gain a more

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<sup>58</sup> Overenget, *Seeing the Self*, p.140.

<sup>59</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p.152.

<sup>60</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p.152.

<sup>61</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p.463.

<sup>62</sup> Brown, *Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Buber, Barth*, p.87.

<sup>63</sup> Overenget, *Seeing the Self*, p.159.

<sup>64</sup> Overenget, *Seeing the Self*, p.159; Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p.167.

authentic standing within and relation to the world indicates a temporal process of the self's 'growing and becoming'.<sup>65</sup> For a self that is thrown into the world, this does not, Heidegger claims, involve wilful choice or 'inward self-reflection' so much as an involvement with and engagement in the world.<sup>66</sup> As we will see, this call for a turn outwards, like the notions of an ontological unity of human and other realities and of a liberation consisting in one's letting oneself be 'taken hold of', resembles Murdoch's reaction against Sartre more than Sartre's own thinking. Nonetheless, Heidegger's emphasis that the substantiality of the self is secondary and derivative, his dismissal of the *Man-selbst* ('they-self') as prevalent but *inauthentic* selfhood, and his consequent sense of the human being's gradual coming into being indicate his affinities and contributions to the Sartrean existentialism examined below.<sup>67</sup> As Tillich argues, it is only on the basis of Heidegger that Sartre could develop the programme that, in Tillich's eyes, made him 'the symbol of present-day Existentialism'.<sup>68</sup> Heidegger's thought not only entails the most complete version of 'the Existentialist analysis of courage to be as oneself' but also constitutes the starting point or foundation for Sartre's own demystified and thus radicalised conclusions.<sup>69</sup> It is to these latter conclusions, and their implications for the nature of the self in particular, that we will now turn.

## **2.2 The human self in Sartre's Existentialism**

### **2.2.1 The self in relation to the different aspects of being**

Although drawing significantly on Hegel, Sartre follows Heidegger in approaching the problem of solipsism posed by Cartesian dualism ontologically rather than epistemologically or cognitively. At the same time, his primary starting point is the

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<sup>65</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p.50.

<sup>66</sup> Overenget, *Seeing the Self*, p.139

<sup>67</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p.166.

<sup>68</sup> Tillich, *TCB*, p.149.

<sup>69</sup> Tillich, *TCB*, p.149.

experienced reality of the human subject. This leads him to posit not merely man's detachment from a transcendent world of essence but the very non-existence of any such guiding world, and thus the meaninglessness of all allegedly objective propositions. In doing so, Sartre not only conjoins much of his above predecessors' thought but also takes it to a more radical level.

Sartre thinks of Being as 'all-embracing and objective' and distinguishes it both from 'individual and subjective' existence and from transcendent essence.<sup>70</sup> He splits Being, and the human self along with it, into three different aspects. Being-for-itself (*être-pour-soi*) signifies the transparent, free and absolute consciousness of human being. Being-in-itself (*être-en-soi*) is the solid, stable and non-conscious being of non-human realities.<sup>71</sup> Being-in-itself can never be *fully* grasped by consciousness; its Being, which is that of the 'phenomenon', always 'overflows the knowledge which we have of it'.<sup>72</sup> As discussed shortly, Being-for-itself experiences Being-in-itself as alien, even threatening. Finally, Being-for-others (*être-pour-autrui*) refers to the 'dimension of being in which my Self exists outside as an object [and thus as a Being-in-itself] for others'.<sup>73</sup> In analogy to Heidegger, these three forms of Being correlate with three 'ekstases', that is, with ways in which consciousness is successively separated from, and thus 'stands out' from, its self (although for Heidegger, the self stands out towards Being as such, to which Sartre does not attribute the same ontological weight).<sup>74</sup> Sartre defines these as 'temporality', which involves the continual attempt of consciousness to 'nihilate[] the in-itself' in its existence in past, present and future, 'reflection' whereby the 'for-itself tries to adopt an external point of view on itself', and 'Being-for-others' wherein the self discovers its lack of knowledge of and control over its own self in the world.<sup>75</sup> In order to indicate the

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<sup>70</sup> Sartre, *BN*, p.630.

<sup>71</sup> Sartre, *BN*, p.631.

<sup>72</sup> Sartre, *BN*, p.630.

<sup>73</sup> Sartre, *BN*, p.630.

<sup>74</sup> Sartre, *BN*, p.631.

<sup>75</sup> Sartre, *BN*, p.631.

relevancy of this scheme to Tillich's and Murdoch's thought, a more detailed exposition of these categories is necessary.

Like his predecessors, Sartre is interested in the relation between consciousness and world, and, particularly, in how it is that human consciousness can perceive the world from a unified point of view. Similar to Heidegger, he is convinced that this question can legitimately be approached only where consciousness and world are considered in conjunction with rather than in an artificial separation from one another. Reflecting on 'consciousness-in-the-world', Sartre comes to reject the Kantian claim that the unity of consciousness necessarily involves the possession of a transcendental ego.<sup>76</sup> According to Sartre, the notion of a transcendental ego is indeed counter-productive. It still implies the idea of a substance inhabiting and governing consciousness, and thereby 'violently *separat[ing]* consciousness from itself' and robbing it of its freedom.<sup>77</sup> 'The transcendental I', Sartre argues, 'is the death of consciousness'.<sup>78</sup> Rejecting the ego's transcendental origin, Sartre—leaning on, and radicalising, Heidegger—pictures the ego as nothing more than an object of consciousness, a Being-in-itself, which is 'in the world' and arises to consciousness with the world's other objects.<sup>79</sup> With this, he renders the individual's sense of self a purely empirical matter, and denies the 'inner life' for instance in the sense of the unconscious.<sup>80</sup> He consequently rejects the sort of inward reflection connected with the alleged existence of an inner life. According to Sartre, such reflection is based on the misunderstanding that the unity and the personality referred to as 'self' exists before the act of reflection when in fact the 'self' is its product.

The only transcendental ground for Being-for-itself is an impersonal, universal indeterminate consciousness. Lacking any pre-reflective unity, Being-for-itself is

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<sup>76</sup> Sartre, *BN*, p.631.

<sup>77</sup> Emphasis added. Jean-Paul Sartre (2004) *The Transcendence of the Ego: A Sketch for a Phenomenological Description* (tr. Andrew Brown). Routledge, London, p.7.

<sup>78</sup> Sartre, *Transcendence of the Ego*, p.7.

<sup>79</sup> Sartre, *Transcendence of the Ego*, p.1.

<sup>80</sup> Sartre, *Transcendence of the Ego*, p.43.

absolute, transparent, spontaneous and free, Sartre asserts somewhat dogmatically (he has been accused of upsetting the phenomenological principle that phenomenology must guide metaphysics).<sup>81</sup> Contrary to Being-in-itself, Being-for-itself ‘determines itself to exist at every instant’ and is ‘always a creation ex nihilo’.<sup>82</sup> It is a dynamic being in time, not a static entity. Hence, ‘when it is purified of the I’, consciousness is revealed to be not a subject which has the world as its object, but itself an object of an ‘absolute, impersonal consciousness’, which links consciousness and world together.<sup>83</sup> It understands that its own self does not create its world, but merely – and anxiously – witnesses the ‘tireless creation of existence’ which it itself depends on.<sup>84</sup>

### 2.2.2 The instability and freedom of the self

Lacking any substantiality, even in the form of a transcendental I, consciousness is empty. This emptiness is experienced as a ‘lack of Being, a desire for Being’; the for-itself is the ‘reality by which lack appears in the world’.<sup>85</sup> It is itself a lack, and the foundation not of being but of its own nothingness.<sup>86</sup> Nonetheless realising that there is being, consciousness desires to transcend itself, to become the foundation of its own being, that is, to *be its self*. Consciousness wants to grab hold of that inert self which, although appearing to be pre-existing, is a mere contingent product of its own and others’ reflective act. Aware that it lacks a stable and substantive ‘co-incidence with its self’, the instable and changeable for-itself seeks to ‘synthetically assimilate’ such a ‘certain particular and concrete reality’ which would finally ‘transform the for-itself into itself’ and thus stabilise its being.<sup>87</sup> Yet any stability the for-itself appears to have attained, any

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<sup>81</sup> Sarah Richmond, *Introduction to Sartre, The Transcendence of the Ego*, p.xvi.

<sup>82</sup> Sartre, *Transcendence of the Ego*, p.46.

<sup>83</sup> Sartre, *Transcendence of the Ego*, p.51.

<sup>84</sup> Sartre, *Transcendence of the Ego*, p.46.

<sup>85</sup> Sartre, *BN*, pp.630, 95, 87.

<sup>86</sup> Sartre, *BN*, p.80. It is Sartre’s redefinition of the self as nothingness, which allows him to agree with Heidegger that consciousness is unstable and that solipsism must be overcome, as well as to assert rather than deny the ontological particularity of the self.

<sup>87</sup> Sartre, *BN*, pp.630, 95, 80.

orientation or foothold it grants itself is necessarily illusory and reflective of an unreflective consciousness, or what Sartre calls 'bad faith' (*mauvaise foi*). A merger of for-itself and in-itself would be paradoxical or divine, and dismissed by Sartre as an impossibility.

The human being's inability to be *both* reflective or conscious *and* permanent or stable equally implies the impossibility of objective knowledge or objective values. Belief in such certainties is, again, indicative of 'bad faith' (*mauvaise foi*). All certainties are inevitably man-made, and, if not recognised as such, enslave the human being to values which are inauthentic insofar as they do not correspond to the real being of the for-itself and cannot therefore be existentially felt. The only real, objective value is the for-itself itself. Any specific value is an individual and freely projected way of being in the world, thus lacking any prior, objective existence. Such a value can be legitimately held where it is sincere, that is, where it is existentially felt and chosen—indeed *subjectively* developed—rather than simply adopted as supposedly objective.

The absolute freedom of consciousness consists in the choice of such values: far from constituting the capacity to do good (good, that is, in a predetermined, objective sense) freedom is the 'undetermined self-realisation of the existential subject'.<sup>88</sup> A reflective consciousness exercising this freedom sees through the futility of the desire for permanence. Such a consciousness is moral because it reveals and is haunted by values the moment it emerges. It also understands, however, that these values, though existing unconditionally for the for-itself, do not signify any substantial, concrete or ontologically stable quality or state of affairs. Considering this 'double character' of value, Sartre concludes that the self itself is value: value/self is 'the absent in-itself which haunts being-for-itself'.<sup>89</sup> Value is, one might say, the being of that which is not. Accordingly, consciousness's striving for value/self has no definable end-point but can only be

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<sup>88</sup> Tillich, 'The Nature and Significance of Existentialist Thought', *The Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 53, No. 23, p.746.

<sup>89</sup> Sartre, *BN*, pp.92f.

evaluated according to its relative sincerity and authenticity. Never able to reach its goal, Sartre's for-itself is, one might say, a movement that cannot be objectified. For Sartre, the endless movement of the for-itself towards value and self-identity indicates that the 'substantial limits of the instantaneity of the Cartesian cogito' do not hold, that the mode of consciousness is not spatial but temporal.<sup>90</sup>

### 2.2.3 Self and Other

The above means that the world's being *there* is relative to the nothingness of the for-itself. The for-itself does not however create or add anything to Being-in-itself. In this regard, Sartre endorses a realist ontology which he opposes to 'Kantian relativism' or the notion that we cannot know about the substantive existence of the world.<sup>91</sup> The undelineable for-itself is surrounded by given Being-in-itself, and separated from it by nothing (i.e. itself). Far from suggesting that being-in-itself is in any way dependent on the for-itself, Sartre argues that the for-itself depends on being-in-itself for its existence. Being nothing in itself, being-for-itself only exists in relation to something other than itself. Being-for-itself is indeed aware that while it is the foundation of its own nothingness, the foundation of its being lies in the consciousness of the Other.<sup>92</sup> The for-itself realises that it depends on the Other's 'mak[ing] [it] be' by sensing that it exists as an object for another, that it is also being-for-others.<sup>93</sup> This is an ambiguous matter. On the one hand, it is only on account of this that the for-itself can be aware of its self at all. Thus, for Sartre, self-knowledge depends on the Other, who is of interest to the for-itself only insofar as he represents myself to myself. On the other hand, this self-representation through the Other implies that the Other defines the particular manifestation of myself. I am at the Other's mercy insofar as their consciousness of my

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<sup>90</sup> Sartre, *BN*, p.104.

<sup>91</sup> Sartre, *BN*, p.217.

<sup>92</sup> Sartre, *BN*, p.364.

<sup>93</sup> Sartre, *BN*, p.364.

self effectively determines my being: what there is to me is exhausted by how I appear to them. The insecurity that results from this dependency instigates an existential dread in the for-itself, which, in turn, results in a conflict of consciousnesses wanting to control and possess each other.<sup>94</sup>

As this already indicates, Sartre takes a Hegelian turn not only in adopting what he calls Hegel's 'brilliant intuition' that I 'depend on the Other in my being', but also in the conclusions he draws from this.<sup>95</sup> Sartre's definition of consciousness as absolute freedom allows only a negative interpretation of this dependency (it undermines the freedom and thus the true nature of the for-itself) such that Sartre envisages this dependency to result in the attempt of the for-itself to free itself from the Other's grasp. Since no consciousness can exist without the other, the for-itself can only 'recover its own Being by directly or indirectly making an object out of the other', that is, by 'enslav[ing] the Other' who possesses me by making me be.<sup>96</sup> The claim that true human existence depends on liberation from objectification surely still complies with the aim to provide a corrective to essentialism. Yet the implication that this liberation consists in the successful objectification of the other appears as an ironic condonation of precisely the kind of modern tendencies towards the objectification of man which existentialism, even in its preliminary Kierkegaardian stage, set out to combat.

Despite his account of a battle of freedoms, resulting from each individual's desperate attempt to freely found itself, Sartre does not however envisage a stage wherein one individual simply subdues the other, as is arguably the case in Hegel's Master-Slave dynamic. We have seen that the Other's free exercise of consciousness not only shapes the existence of the for-itself, but also makes it possible in the first place. It does not therefore benefit the for-itself to possess another as an inert object (as the master possesses the slave); what the for-itself must strive for (and Sartre considers this

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<sup>94</sup> Sartre, *BN*, p.237.

<sup>95</sup> Sartre, *BN*, p.237.

<sup>96</sup> Barnes in Sartre, *BN*, p.630; Sartre, *BN*, p.364.

the dynamic of love) is to *control* their *free* perception of myself – to control the Other’s freedom *as* freedom.<sup>97</sup> Given that this is a contradiction in terms, Sartre, unlike Hegel, does not envisage a resolution of the conflict of consciousnesses in the sense of a ‘community of recognition’.<sup>98</sup> If anything, he considers the futility of this paradoxical endeavour to lead the self to ‘pursue the death of the Other’, that is to at least reduce the Other to existing only as an object no longer able to perceive and control the self in the role of a subject.<sup>99</sup>

For Sartre, the human being cannot, therefore, have consciousness of itself without the other’s recognition but nor can he know himself as subject without denying the other their subjectivity. Against Hegel, Sartre asserts that true knowledge of self and other is logically impossible. The ‘plurality of consciousnesses’ remains a ‘scandal’, and ‘the separation and conflict of consciousnesses’ is inevitable for as long as consciousnesses exist.<sup>100</sup> Solipsism can thus be overcome only on an ontological level where all consciousnesses are united in the one impersonal absolute consciousness, where they, however, lose their self-consciousness and, thus, their subjectivity. Siding, in this matter, with Heidegger over Hegel, Sartre maintains that on a cognitive level solipsism is unavoidable. This is because knowledge is always caught up in a subject-object duality. Knowledge of oneself as subject *and* as object is impossible. I can ‘transcend myself toward a Whole, but I cannot establish myself in this Whole so as to contemplate myself and to contemplate the Other’.<sup>101</sup> Knowledge of the whole implies, for Sartre, a loss of subjectivity. This is, Sartre implies, simply accepted by Hegel, whom he accuses of failing to ‘even conceive of the possibility of a being-for-others which is

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<sup>97</sup> Sartre, *BN*, p.367.

<sup>98</sup> George Pattison (2011) *God and Being: An Enquiry*. OUP, Oxford, p.203.

<sup>99</sup> Sartre, *BN*, p.237. As Simone de Beauvoir shows in the novel *She Came to Stay*, even the other’s death does not nullify their determining power over the self however (see the novel’s ending) (Simone de Beauvoir (2006) *She Came to Stay*. Harper, London).

<sup>100</sup> Sartre, *BN*, p.244.

<sup>101</sup> Sartre, *BN*, p.244.

not finally reducible to a 'being-as-object'.<sup>102</sup> Self-consciousness, and thus existence as a free subject, is a necessarily solipsistic matter which cannot tolerate the other's subjectivity and which is, therefore, at odds with any common sense of a communion between self and other. Thus, although Sartre praises nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophy for having understood that solipsism cannot be refuted as long as the human self is thought of as a distinct (spatial) substance, he nevertheless remains critical of its claim to have forged a connection between myself and the Other through knowledge.<sup>103</sup>

#### **2.2.4 The project of the self**

If engaged (i.e. self-conscious) knowledge of the other is impossible, the individual subject's engaged knowledge of its own being-for-itself is the necessary precondition for its very being. This properly implies self-liberation from bad faith and towards true knowledge, which corresponds with the liberation of the for-itself from its determination, even formation, by the world. This requires a unification and personalisation of consciousness through an 'original project' enabled through the exercise of absolute freedom.<sup>104</sup> True being depends on being conceived and chosen independently of anything outside consciousness. It is not, as Heidegger suggests, founded on the orientation of the for-itself towards death, but on its choice of life, Sartre argues. According to Sartre the project is accomplished only where it is realised in the subject's very being: contrary to Heidegger's notion that the existential structures of life can be worked out also unconsciously, Sartre's self is solely a project of consciousness in the sense of one's conscious exercise of the choosing will. At the same time, any actual realisation of one's project in one's self-being, and thus any true selfhood and self-definition, is impossible since any project ultimately contradicts the fact that, being nothing, consciousness cannot found itself. Sartre thus argues that 'the

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<sup>102</sup> Sartre, *BN*, p.238.

<sup>103</sup> Sartre, *BN*, p.233.

<sup>104</sup> Sartre, *BN*, pp.407, 464.

for-itself is *effectively* a perpetual project of founding itself qua being and a perpetual failure of this project'.<sup>105</sup>

Despite its inevitable failure, an individual project nonetheless constitutes the only and necessary means of unifying an otherwise boundless and undefined consciousness. After all, the only essence of the for-itself is that it is what it makes of itself (i.e. its existence). The project also enables consciousness directed *onto* the world to be *in* the world without letting itself be determined or imposed on by the objectivity of the world.<sup>106</sup> The for-itself must thus choose a 'way of being' through 'positing [... its] ultimate ends', and wilfully projecting itself onto these.<sup>107</sup> Despite his strong use of Heideggerian ontology, Sartre indeed sides with Kierkegaard as regards the latter's strong emphasis on the will (as opposed to Heidegger's notion of the self as thrown into and constituted by the world). Sartre's thought on the individual project also indicates his understanding of psychoanalysis: denying the existence of an unconscious, he understands this as the endeavour to discern one's project and how it shapes one's life.

### 2.2.5 Anxious being-in-the-world

As Sartre pictures it, being-in-the-world is thus fundamentally characterised by *angoisse*, or anguish/Angst. This results from the human being's awareness that his absolute freedom implies a total and unaided responsibility for his own being, yet that this cannot be exercised in independence from the world, which necessarily seeks to prevent the execution of this freedom. The uncontrollability of the in-itself and according impossibility of true self-transcendence (which we have seen to include other people as much as other objects) results in an aggressive fear of both persons and objects. This is famously captured by Sartre's literary figure, Garcin, as 'L'enfer, c'est les autres' and is also expressed in Sartre's horror of anything which underlines the uncontrollable

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<sup>105</sup> Sartre, *BN*, p.620.

<sup>106</sup> Chappell, *The Inescapable Self*, p.216.

<sup>107</sup> Sartre, *BN*, pp.630, 443.

contingency and particularity of things, such as the physical and sexual body's 'slime' and stickiness, which Sartre describes as 'the revenge of the in-itself'.<sup>108</sup> Sartre's notion of self and world and of the relation between the two, moreover, leads him to veer back and forth between asserting a total, self-realising freedom and an oppressive determinism.<sup>109</sup> Contrary to Kierkegaard's individual, Sartre's is compelled to make his self through the free creation of values, yet cannot but fail at this, both because he is determined by his surroundings and because the very attainment of a (stable) self constitutes a lapse into bad faith and thus undermines the free being proper to the conscious for-itself. Although supposedly absolutely free, Sartre's for-itself also finds that 'quand je délibère les jeux sont faits', that when it begins to deliberate about which choices to make the self has already been determined by the other's perception of itself and by the prohibition to commit.<sup>110</sup> In effect, the for-itself is in a predicament from which there is 'No Exit'.<sup>111</sup> As the foundation of its own nothingness, being-for-itself is thus ultimately both condemned to literal selflessness and unable to love. On the face of it, Sartre's thought thus not only challenges the notion that selfless love can lead to the flourishing and thus, the freedom, of the self but lets 'selfless love' as such appear as a contradiction in terms. While we will return to this impression throughout this thesis, it is now time to briefly consider Tillich's and Murdoch's reactions to the above ideas. This will illuminate their own accounts of the human self, discussed further below.

### **2.3 Paul Tillich's and Iris Murdoch's reception of existentialism**

As already indicated, both Paul Tillich and Iris Murdoch consider Sartrean existentialism to epitomise the consciousness of their day. Murdoch—according to Peter Conradi

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<sup>108</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Huis Clos*, in Sartre (1947) *Théâtre I. Les Mouches, Huis Clos, Morts sans Sépulture, La Putain Respectueuse*. Gallimard, Paris, p.182; Sartre, *BN*, p.609f.

<sup>109</sup> See e.g. Murdoch, *SoG*, p.35.

<sup>110</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre (1943) *L'Être et le Néant. Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique*. Gallimard, Paris, p.506; (cf. Sartre, *BN*, p.451).

<sup>111</sup> Sartre, *Huis Clos* ('huis clos' meaning 'closed door').

‘almost certainly the first English philosopher to take [Sartre] seriously’—sees in existentialism, which she describes as ‘a theory of the self and the self’s attitude to death’, ‘the philosophy of this age’.<sup>112</sup> Tillich, who considers it the task of theology to answer the questions of its contemporary time similarly considers existentialism ‘the good luck’ and ‘natural ally of Christianity’ because it has analysed ‘the predicament of man and his world in the state of estrangement’ and thus formulates these questions.<sup>113</sup> Tillich and Murdoch are thus strongly influenced by Sartre’s existentialist perspective on the self by way of both an existential perspective (manifest not least in his use of illustrative examples from everyday life) as well as by his use of an ontological terminology enriched with religious and psychoanalytic concepts such as responsibility, guilt (even sin) and anxiety. This evinces their shared intellectual heritage, which extends not only to Kierkegaard, but comprises a wide spectrum of the Augustinian-Platonic tradition of thought.

Tillich and Murdoch welcome particularly the existentialist attempt to address the nature of the human self, to do so from the perspective of the existential anxieties of the modern human being, and with a regard for the constitutive roles played by human consciousness and freedom. Both also appreciate the existentialist regard for questions traditionally addressed within the religious realm and sidelined by what especially Murdoch perceives to be the behaviourist dismissal of the moral value of consciousness typical of the Anglo-Saxon analytic philosophy of the time.<sup>114</sup>

### **2.3.1 Sartre’s instable self: a developing project**

Among these more religious questions is that of whether the individual’s state of being is ‘truthful’ as opposed to, say, ‘successful’. Tillich and Murdoch applaud Sartre’s recognition that the realisation of full human selfhood is a matter of more or less

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<sup>112</sup> Conradi in *Preface to Murdoch*, *EM*, p.xxi; Conradi, *Iris Murdoch*, p.215.

<sup>113</sup> Tillich, *ST II*, p.30.

<sup>114</sup> Tillich, *ST II*, p.26; Murdoch in Conradi, *Iris Murdoch*, p.215.

truthful levels of being, between which the individual can and must choose. In proposing this, Sartre recognises, they find, the reality and psychological power of impersonal, mechanistic forces continually dragging the individual to lower levels of being without however surrendering to a version of popular but simplistic portrayals of human life as determined by these forces. Instead, Sartre affirms the reality of human freedom and the consequent possibility to resist such forces. In doing so, he gives, as Tillich argues, an urgent, honest and theologically valuable ‘interpretation of man’s own existence’, including an account of the ‘psychological dynamics of modern man’.<sup>115</sup>

In light of the consequently dynamic nature of the self, we will find Tillich and Murdoch to accept, by and large, Sartre’s consequent rejection of a static, object-like self as a self-indulgent (and in that sense selfish) though nonetheless common illusion and his suggestion that the human self is, instead, a reality continually developing and emerging on account of the individual’s actions. They will be shown to reject the extent to which Sartre considers this project a function of the autonomous will but their shared concern to move away from objectifications of the human being leads them to sympathise with Sartre’s notion that the human self is not a given reality but a developing project. They furthermore appreciate not only Sartre’s observation that it is *on account* of the upheavals undergone by the individual’s consciousness that she knows herself destined for a higher and more truthful state of being, but also his attempt to draw attention to the extent to which this dynamism is dependent on, and determined by, the individual’s inner life, i.e. by the workings of her consciousness. Particularly Murdoch considers this to do greater justice to ordinary human beings’ perception of themselves than behaviourist and empiricist approaches to the self.

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<sup>115</sup> Tillich, ‘Existentialist Philosophy’, p.66.

### 2.3.2 Selfhood and freedom

Sharing Sartre's concern to liberate the human being from undue determinations, including those by personal others and impersonal surroundings or conventions, both Tillich and Murdoch, furthermore, welcome and share Sartre's emphasis on the moral significance of human freedom as a reality intertwined with being itself. A similar perception, indeed, motivates Tillich's quest for the 'New Being' and Murdoch's resistance against what she refers to as the 'ordinary language man' resulting from the behaviouristic flight into convention, both discussed below. Freedom, they agree, is not simply a mechanism enabling arbitrary decision-making without deeper consequences. Rather, it is a reality the use of which affects us in our very being, and which is thus properly geared towards, dependent on, and enabling of, truthful being. They agree that the individual's use of his freedom affects his inner life and, with this, the state—indeed, the very being—of his self. Thus, all three consider freedom to be properly used towards, and enhanced by, emancipation from the kind of comfortable but morally and ontologically debilitating self-delusions Sartre refers to as bad faith.

At the same time, we will find Tillich and Murdoch reject Sartre's decision to respond to portrayals of the world as a 'logical or naturalistic mechanism' by absolutising human freedom, and his consequent sense that freedom lies in extricating ourselves from any determination by the other.<sup>116</sup> The assumption that human freedom is maintained only if the human being is seen as 'standing outside the structural necessities of essence' in that she is 'neither logically nor physically nor morally determined by them' results from what both Tillich and Murdoch consider to be a mistaken juxtaposition of freedom and destiny (or, in Murdoch's words determinism) as two theoretical options between which we must choose.<sup>117</sup> Such an opposition rests on a misunderstanding both of freedom and of that which determines the human being.

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<sup>116</sup> Tillich, 'Existentialist Philosophy', p.66.

<sup>117</sup> Tillich, 'The Nature and Significance', p.746.

Freedom cannot, Murdoch argues, be identified ‘with a casting off of bonds, with emotional unrestraint [...]’.<sup>118</sup> As they see it, freedom will lead to an aimlessness on account of which it ultimately undermines itself if the connection of freedom and being is not seen to pertain also to being outside the self: freedom is necessarily rooted in, and framed by, the structures of being as such and does not, therefore, signify human autonomy. According to Tillich’s and Murdoch’s philosophies, autonomy and heteronomy are not, indeed, alternatives but inter-connected errors. Sartre’s assertion of one (absolute freedom and thus autonomy) inevitably leads him to veer back and forth between both.

This arguably becomes apparent in the inner contradictions inherent in Sartre’s thought, or his inability to sustain his own values. Sartre’s assertion of freedom as absolute precludes the acceptance of any value as binding, even for the individual. The very rebellion of the reflective individual against a given order can consist in nothing but the creation of a new, albeit individualised order of values, which, once accepted as *values* (i.e. as authoritative or binding), results in a new lapse into bad faith, which must again be rebelled against. Ultimately, the implication of Sartre’s decision to make a virtue of sincerity is indeed that *all* values, including those generated by one’s own consciousness, must be resisted, as Tillich and Murdoch, among others, recognise. Sartre’s individual, whose personal being is said to depend on her use of freedom to create sincere (i.e. individually felt) values, can be sincere to her own nothingness only through a lack of values. This, however, throws her back into impersonal determination by the other—or ‘bad faith’. Far from being free, Sartre’s human being is thus imprisoned in a state of eternal adolescence or immaturity. Its only ‘freedom’ lies in its necessarily unending rebellion against its supposed oppression. In exposing this, Tillich and Murdoch do not deny the value of Sartre’s unmasking of the self-deluding tendencies of the human

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<sup>118</sup> Murdoch in Interview with William Slaymaker, in Gillian Dooley (2003) *From a Tiny Corner in a House of Fiction. Conversations with Iris Murdoch*. University of South Carolina Press, Columbia, p.140

individual, but conclude that Sartre's own system ultimately obstructs a coherent and convincing account of how these can be overcome. Lacking any notion of an objective standard external to itself (and thus, its own self-delusions), it is unclear how his individual would be able to recognise both untruth and the supposed truth of absolute freedom for what it is. As Murdoch observes, 'all positive beliefs stand in danger of *mauvaise foi*' such that Sartre's thought 'inspire[s] action more by a sort of romantic provocation than by its truth'.<sup>119</sup>

### 2.3.3 Sartre's 'courage to be'

Tillich in particular, moreover, shares Sartre's sense that life can, absurdly, only be affirmed in the face of an unavoidable tension between constructive and destructive poles—being and nothingness in Sartre's case, being and nonbeing in Tillich's. It is in light of the observation that the existentialist experiences the threat of nonbeing as nothing less than continually lurking meaninglessness and despair that Tillich praises Sartre for demonstrating great courage.<sup>120</sup> We will find Tillich applauds Sartre for confronting these fears and seeking to affirm being even in spite of them, as indicative of a proper and courageous willingness to integrate even the anxieties about meaninglessness 'into the courage to be as oneself—a feat demanded also of the theologian whom Tillich considers to inevitably be 'in faith *and* in doubt, committed *and* alienated, [...]'.<sup>121</sup> By contrast, he sees in those who reject 'as meaningless the meaningful attempt to reveal the meaninglessness of our situation' as dishonest, cowardly and disempowering.<sup>122</sup>

Nonetheless, Tillich sees a tendency in Sartre to make *absolutes* of these experiences, such that they ultimately 'drive toward a despair about the possibility of

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<sup>119</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, pp.177, 338.

<sup>120</sup> Tillich, 'The Nature and Significance', p.740; Tillich, *TCB*, p.103.

<sup>121</sup> Tillich, *TCB*, p.139; James Livingston, Francis Schüssler Fiorenza (2006) *Modern Christian Thought*. Vol.2. The Twentieth Century. Fortress Press, Minneapolis, p.143.

<sup>122</sup> Tillich, *TCB*, p.140.

being at all' and 'toward a despairing refusal to accept any finite truth'.<sup>123</sup> Tillich considers this indicative of an inability to see beyond estranged existence: it is only because 'the dimension of the ultimate is shut off' that they appear as absolutes.<sup>124</sup> In this situation the human being builds up 'defences', such as Sartre's claim that the individual's essence is exhausted by his ability to 'make of himself what he wants'.<sup>125</sup> Once these fail, 'the destructive force is directed against the subject himself', thus unleashing feelings of 'emptiness, cynicism, and the experience of meaninglessness' as manifest in Sartre's 'destructive pessimism'.<sup>126</sup> This would seem to be what has occurred when the Sartrean existentialist hero rejects the ultimate meaning even of love and friendship.<sup>127</sup>

Murdoch, similarly, argues that in his reaction against 'the intellectualist, substantialist picture of the self' Sartre adopts aspects of Kant's and Kierkegaard's accounts of the human being while discarding their respective footholds.<sup>128</sup> Thus, he accepts Kant's notion of the human being as an 'isolated non-historical consciousness' identical in every human being but rejects his assertion of a (not entirely knowable) transcendent objective truth; equally, he adopts Kierkegaard's view of man as 'in doubt and confusion', but rejects his belief in God.<sup>129</sup> Similarly, Sartre adopts Kant's view of the will as a free source of value separated 'from the causally determined phenomenal world' but empties the will 'of the universal rational certainty and spiritual authority with which Kant endowed it'.<sup>130</sup> While for Kant there is still a 'moral reality, a real though infinitely distant standard' and thus the challenge of 'understanding and imitating', Sartre asserts merely 'individual power, self-assertion, commitment or choice'.<sup>131</sup> Although 'the

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<sup>123</sup> Tillich, *ST II*, p.73.

<sup>124</sup> Tillich, *ST II*, p.73.

<sup>125</sup> Tillich, *ST II*, p.73, *TCB*, p.150.

<sup>126</sup> Tillich, *ST II*, p.73, p.13.

<sup>127</sup> Tillich, *TCB*, p.144.

<sup>128</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.135.

<sup>129</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.134.

<sup>130</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.444.

<sup>131</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.326; Murdoch, *MGM*, p.444.

task of living is [...] turned into a perpetual psychoanalysis', there is no actual criterion or 'technique for exploring and controlling our own spiritual energy'.<sup>132</sup> Personality is reduced to the free exertion of an unchecked will. Murdoch judges that this not only amounts to a highly pessimistic picture of the world as it mostly is ('the Sartrean world of fact was a wilderness of mauvaise foi occasionally lightened by sincere individual free acts') but that it also creates an inadequate image of thought as 'mov[ing] bodiless[ly] and unimpeded above [the world's] morass', while choosing and 'carr[ying] values'.<sup>133</sup> Underlying the above criticisms is an objection to Sartre's unwillingness to acknowledge that there is a relationship between the human being and being itself that goes *beyond* the existential dimension—in short, to his conflation of essence and existence. As will become apparent in our discussions of Tillich's and Murdoch's own thought, both consider it possible to uphold courage and freedom only where these are rooted in a reality wherein nonbeing is overcome, which transcends and sustains the existential individual, and towards which the individual is responsible.

#### **2.3.4 Existentialist solipsism**

As the below analyses of their accounts will make clear, Tillich and Murdoch consider Sartre's denial of this reality not only to undermine courage and freedom but also to lie at the root of his reducing the human being to 'an empty shell' at odds with what is not itself and lacking a moral compass and vision.<sup>134</sup> Murdoch indeed accuses Sartre of a 'dramatic, solipsistic, romantic and anti-social exaltation of the individual'.<sup>135</sup> According to Murdoch, Sartre's solipsistic tendency expresses itself in his claim that 'the misgivings of a consciousness in bad faith' can be 'uncovered' and explained only by consciousness

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<sup>132</sup> Iris Murdoch (1987) *Sartre. Romantic Rationalist*. Chatto & Windus, London, p.124; Murdoch, *EM*, p.269.

<sup>133</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, pp. 445,156.

<sup>134</sup> Murdoch, *Sartre*, p.122.

<sup>135</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.153.

itself.<sup>136</sup> She finds that with this Sartre does exactly ‘what he has accused traditional philosophy of doing, that is, hypostatizing the mind in the form of an imaginary and indemonstrable substance’.<sup>137</sup> Murdoch consequently concludes that ‘as psychoanalyst [Sartre] remains impenitently Cartesian’.<sup>138</sup> Despite his emphasis on consciousness, Murdoch finds that Sartre treats consciousness in an ‘abstract, perfunctory, a priori and non-empirical’ manner.<sup>139</sup> Sartre masterfully ‘describ[es] certain *carefully selected* states’ of consciousness but ignores or dismisses as illusory those which contradict his notions of absolutely free consciousness on the one hand and consciousness in bad faith on the other.<sup>140</sup> These include the human being’s belief in ordinary virtue and the difficulties implied in trying to achieve this, as well as the human sense of hope and existential desire for love. Sartre’s account of ‘life as an egocentric drama’ of warring states of consciousness makes other-centred love superfluous (and potentially dangerous) for the constitution of the true self and leads him to ignore the ordinary human being’s experience that the fullness of being entails, and is attained in and through, love.<sup>141</sup> In this sense, Sartre’s attempt to ‘take his stand “in the middle of experience”’ is deemed unsuccessful by Murdoch.<sup>142</sup>

## **2.4 Conclusion: the individual, the world and love**

As has become apparent, Tillich’s and Murdoch’s reception of Sartre’s existentialist thought was by no means only positive. It is often precisely Sartre’s perceived weaknesses, however, which stimulate their own thinking. Moreover, Tillich and Murdoch accept and give a central place to Sartre’s insight that conceptions of the human self as a stable, object-like entity are illusory and that the self must instead be

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<sup>136</sup> Murdoch, *Sartre*, p.54.

<sup>137</sup> Murdoch, *Sartre*, p.126.

<sup>138</sup> Murdoch, *Sartre*, p.54.

<sup>139</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.260.

<sup>140</sup> Emphasis added; Murdoch, *MGM*, p.260.

<sup>141</sup> Murdoch, *Sartre*, p.124.

<sup>142</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.160.

pictured as a continually and dynamically developing reality. The same is true for his efforts to protect and promote the freedom and individuality of the human being. It is in this latter respect, however, that Sartre's proposals have also left Tillich and Murdoch with a critical question. How, both ask, can the human being's freedom and individuality be safeguarded without falling into solipsism, i.e. without having to fight or deny the extent to which human beings are inevitably related to and influenced by their historical-cultural situation and by individual realities outside themselves? Or, as one commentator puts it, is it possible to connect the individual with reality without forfeiting or 'losing' the individual in the totality?<sup>143</sup> For both Tillich and Murdoch this is a spiritual and moral as much as an ontological question, and one fundamentally relevant to the existential estrangement of modern man that Sartre describes.

Most particularly, it is, for them, a question about love: as we will see, both Tillich and Murdoch consider it to be precisely on account of selfless love of the other that the human being maintains—or, rather, fully attains—true freedom and individuality. For Murdoch and Tillich, the very instability, freedom and distinct individuality of the self necessitate neither fear nor control but love of the other. Consequently, Tillich and Murdoch hold Sartre's dismissal of a surrendering kind of love to be an invalid one, despite their affirmation of Sartre's account of the unstable self, of his valuation of freedom and individuality, and of his emphasis on the moral significance of consciousness. Both Murdoch and Tillich will be shown to justify and explicate their defence of selfless love by setting the self in relation to an objective, good and transcendent reality other than the will, arguing that, although consciousness existentially often separates the individual from such a transcendent reality, it is in fact precisely human *consciousness* which points to this. Before considering their proposals, however, we

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<sup>143</sup> Sonja Zuba (2009) *Iris Murdoch's Contemporary Retrieval of Plato: the influence of an ancient philosopher on a modern novelist*. Edwin Mellen, Lewiston, p.111.

must complete the groundwork for this with a discussion of the different aspects of 'love' and their modernist polarisations.

### Chapter 3 – The nature and forms of love

In the previous chapter we found that Tillich's and Murdoch's engagement with Sartre leads them to ask how human freedom and individuality can be protected without having to deny or combat the human being's inevitable relatedness. We found that Sartre's assertion of an insubstantial and unstable self helps underline the freedom and individuality of the human self. At the same time, Sartre's interpretation of this self comes at the cost of a negative view of the human being's social relatedness, thus undermining the meaningfulness of the natural desire for love and the Christian command to neighbour-love. It was already indicated that both Tillich and Murdoch propose to resolve this impasse by way of what I argue is a relational anthropology and a concomitant argument for the connection between selfless love and human flourishing. However, before examining their accounts of love and the self, it is necessary to consider the late modern deconstruction of this connection—a deconstruction, which Sartre's anthropology furthers, but which also precedes Sartre, and which extends beyond the existentialist project. Doing so will shed light on the challenges we are faced with in attempting to re-institute the validity of selfless love.

In the following I will thus complete the foundation for the study of Tillich's and Murdoch's own accounts of love by outlining those modern polarisations of love which led to a dissociation of love and human flourishing and, as we will see, to a polarisation of different forms of love. I will give a brief account of the two main sources for Western treatments of love, Plato and the New Testament, which both Tillich and Murdoch draw on. After showing the different emphases but also the different facets of each, I then briefly turn to early receptions of these sources. Both Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, I here suggest, sought primarily to synthesise, rather than to dichotomise what is often, and somewhat bluntly, referred to as Greek and Christian

love by indicating the ultimate unity of self-love and other-love. Moving on to the core of this chapter, I then suggest that the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries saw an increasing polarisation of self-love and other-love (often played out in terms of an opposition between eros and agape) as not only distinct but mutually exclusive. This opposition is intertwined with the kind of polarisation of self and o/Other already detected in Sartre but also found among putative defenders of selfless love. As I will argue, it is problematic from the perspective both of those who advocate primarily self-love and of those who demand other-love. Finally, this opposition forms the critical background to this thesis in that it lies at the root of the dissociation of selfless love and human flourishing, and underlines that a defence of selfless love must overcome such dichotomous understandings of love's different dimensions.

### **3.1 Love's diversity**

#### **3.1.1 Love in Plato**

The perception that human flourishing is somehow dependent on love is at least as old as Socrates.<sup>144</sup> While only occasionally making reference to agape, ancient Greek thought is known to distinguish between love as *storge* (parental love), *philia* (a mutual and sharing love between persons of equal standing) and eros (the intrinsic, and desirous, human love of Good).<sup>145</sup> Plato's *Symposium*, widely considered to be 'the authoritative ancient text' on Greek love, suggests that the individual's happiness or well-being, understood as her return to her divine origin, depends in particular on eros.<sup>146</sup> As the 'desire for beauty, for the good, for wisdom, for happiness, for immortality, for the Absolute,' eros strives

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<sup>144</sup> The following brief overview of Greek thought will centre on the ideas conveyed in the works of Plato. This is because it is in reference to Platonic rather than Aristotelian thought that the juxtaposition of eros and agape relevant to the argument of this thesis emerged, and because it is, similarly, Plato's account of love as eros that Tillich and Murdoch, whose thought forms the core of this thesis, primarily draw on in their attempts to develop an account of selfless love.

<sup>145</sup> In Plato, libido is arguably constituted one of the desires subsumed under eros.

<sup>146</sup> Bernard Brady (2003) *Christian Love: How Christians through the ages have understood love*. Washington, D.C., Georgetown University Press, p.53.

for all that the estranged human soul lacks but needs for the attainment of eternal happiness.<sup>147</sup> Eros is a force which continually pulls the human soul upwards towards its origin and destiny, rising from the more lowly beautiful things towards ‘the great sea of beauty’ so that the human being may finally know beauty in itself, which in turn enables understanding and contemplation of the Good, the ultimate object of eros.<sup>148</sup>

Eros, however, neither intrinsically good nor bad, can miss its goal. Thus, eros must, in a sense, be educated; that is, its constituent desires (reflective desire for wisdom, passionate desire for success or power, and concupiscent desire for material satisfaction) must be properly ordered.<sup>149</sup> The *Symposium*, for instance, introduces a distinction between ‘common’ and ‘heavenly Aphrodite.’ The ‘common’ and ‘heavenly’ manifestations of this love are respectively associated with a somewhat debased physical passion, on the one hand, and with a genuine attraction to what is stronger and more intelligent than the lover, on the other.<sup>150</sup> It is as the ‘heavenly Aphrodite’ that eros must be manifest if it is to fulfil its promise. This requires that the erotic impulses ultimately—though not necessarily immediately—move beyond the physical level. Eros must detach itself ‘from the individual person and from physical beauty’ and learn to appreciate beauty in its universal nature.<sup>151</sup>

The discussions in the *Symposium*, the *Phaedrus*, the *Lysis* and other Platonic texts already raise many of the issues concerning Christian debates on the nature of love. The Platonic texts recognise love’s ultimate oneness but also its variegated forms and manifestations. This becomes evident not only in the distinction between love’s different contexts (e.g. eros, *philia*, *storge*) but also in the distinction between different degrees of

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<sup>147</sup> Plato (1998) *Symposium* (tr. C.J. Rowe). Aris & Phillips, Warminster, p.85.

<sup>148</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, pp.97, 99. F.C. White persuasively challenges the commonly-held notion that Plato identifies the Good and the Beautiful, suggesting instead that Beauty is only a penultimate object of eros. However, this is of no further import for our analyses and cannot be further explored. Cf. F. C. White, ‘Love and Beauty in Plato’s *Symposium*’, *Journal of Hellenic Studies* Vol.109 (1989), pp.149-157.

<sup>149</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, p.81.

<sup>150</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, p.33.

<sup>151</sup> F.M. Cornford, ‘The Doctrine of Eros in Plato’s *Symposium*’ in W. K. C. Guthrie (1950) *The Unwritten Philosophy and Other Essays*. CUP, Cambridge, p.78.

purity in which especially eros-love can be assumed. Various tensions are thought to surround even pure eros. Resulting from the soul's estrangement and seeking to return the soul to its origin, eros has something of an ontological necessity; it is a response to a certain situation—estrangement—and thus appears to be necessary rather than gratuitous. Its proper orientation towards the Good and the Beautiful, moreover, suggests that eros is discriminatory and object-dependent. The person progresses on the path towards that possession of the Beautiful, in which he finds his own individual happiness, by loving *beautiful* objects and persons. This has led to the perception that Platonic eros is concerned primarily with the promotion and realisation of human self-interest, an impression sometimes enhanced by the fact that eros, unlike the contemporary English term 'love', is, as Rowe points out, 'inseparable from sexual desire'.<sup>152</sup>

Eros' association with desire does not necessarily mean it is selfish and self-centred. In light of the *Lysis* and the *Phaedrus*, Plato has been argued to have been critical of Diotima insofar as she portrayed love as primarily self-seeking and acquisitive,<sup>153</sup> while other commentators have challenged the very notion that Diotima conceives of eros as mere individualistic acquisitiveness in the first place.<sup>154</sup> Plato's distinction between 'common' and 'heavenly Aphrodite' moreover implies a distinction between eros as a ravenous grabbing-hold of whatever satisfies the self materially and instinctually from eros as a love of wisdom, which entails helping others. Furthermore, Socrates seems to conceive of a somewhat selfless 'caring for others, at least insofar as it includes contributing to their intellectual improvement', and famously suggests that the redeemed soul must continue to help those still separated from the Good by re-entering 'the

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<sup>152</sup> Rowe in *Introduction to Plato, Symposium*, pp.5f.

<sup>153</sup> Catherine Osborne (1996) *Eros Unveiled: Plato and the God of Love*. Clarendon Press, Oxford, pp.56f.

<sup>154</sup> Elizabeth Pender, 'Spiritual Pregnancy in Plato's *Symposium*', *Classical Quarterly* Vol.42 (1992); Catherine Pickstock, who has for instance pointed to Diotima's notion of the lover being 'pregnant' with virtue and intelligence, on account of which he wants to 'beget' from the beautiful, who captivates the pregnant lover to the point of 'self-forgetfulness' (Catherine Pickstock, 'Eros and emergence', *Telos* Vol.127 (2004), pp.97-118, pp.30f (*Symposium*, 209a, 206b; *Phaedrus* 252 a, b; 259ff).

cave'.<sup>155</sup> As Cornford argues, Plato's emphasis that the soul's struggle is about its *return* to its divine origin (and thus more about a transfiguration than a sublimation of the human being) implies that eros can 'actualis[e] the highest potentialities of human being' only because it is not an individualistic but a universal and creative force originating outside of the individual's life in the cave, in the divine.<sup>156</sup> Plato's claim that eros 'flows into [the lover], and some, when he is filled, overflows outside' has furthermore been considered indicative that eros mediates the Good through an 'interpersonal' stimulation and, it seems, fertilisation.<sup>157</sup> Platonic eros, then, appears to consist of both a notion of desire and of out-pouring.

While Greek thought on eros does signify a force geared towards the salvific ascent of the individual and the acquisition of the Good, the above already indicates that attempts to understand Greek eros as straightforwardly self-interested and self-assertive are likely to rest on one-dimensional simplifications of the concept.

### **3.1.2 Love in the New Testament<sup>158</sup>**

Just as the Platonic texts, the Bible gives no one and unambiguous definition of love. Many of its proposals moreover parallel Greek ideas. Nonetheless, Christianity's bold identification of love with God Himself (1 Jn 4:8) shifts the ground of the debate. From being identified as a neutral, even potentially ambiguous, means towards the individual's fulfilment in Plato, love in the New Testament is unified in God and identified as an unambiguously good gift. Love's identification with God solidifies the understanding of love as one, or unified. Such emphasis on love's unity manifests itself in the New Testament's almost exclusive recourse to the term 'agape' (there is no reference to 'eros'

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<sup>155</sup> Rowe, *Introduction to Plato, Symposium*, p.7. Plato (2008) *The Republic*. OUP, Oxford, 514a-520a.

<sup>156</sup> Cornford, *The Doctrine of Eros*, p.78; Plato, *Symposium*, p.97; in Brady, *Christian Love*, p.53.

<sup>157</sup> *Phaedrus*, 255c; Pickstock, C. (1998) *After Writing. On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy*. Blackwell, Oxford, pp.29f.

<sup>158</sup> The New Testament is here considered as the continuation and completion of Old Testament ideas on love, which, for reasons of space, cannot be given explicit treatment. As will become apparent, particularly the love commandments in Deuteronomy and Leviticus are of relevance to the present discussion.

and only some to *'philia'*). Love, in the New Testament, like God, is perfect and one. Contrary to eros, portrayed as an almost mechanical *pull* or attraction *back* to one's source and destiny, agape *is* its own self-giving source, an initiative rather than a response, freely and (arguably) gratuitously moving out of itself. While eros is an ascent motivated by lack or need, agape appears as a descent or an overflowing of plenitude. While eros has only one proper object, the Good, God's action in Christ suggests agape to be a love of all things, even the sinner. While eros is the human soul's love of the divine, agape is first and foremost God's love of the world.

Though not necessarily as absolute as the purposefully provocative and schematic presentation above suggests, Christian and Greek portrayals of love do imply differences in emphases, therefore, which have come to be associated with 'agape' and 'eros', and with self-giving and self-interested love, respectively. That these cannot simply be accounted for by declaring one as a divine and the other as a human love is made clear in the double love commandment, which unifies the commandments to love God (in Deut 6:4) and neighbour (in Lev 19:18) and which appears repeatedly in the New Testament (Mt 22:37-39, but also Lk 10:27, Mk 12:30-31). As in the New Testament's frequent but ambiguous reference to 'the love of God', 'agape' clearly refers not only to God's own love but to the creature's love of God, of neighbour, of self, and even of one's enemy (Mt 5:44), often meaning all these things at once (e.g. Jn 15:9-10; 2 Cor 5:13-14).<sup>159</sup> Injunctions such as 'For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it' (Lk 9:24), further underline why agape has been understood as a 'totally self-giving, self-spending love, sacrificing the self without expectations of receiving anything in return', and why it has, whether rightly or wrongly, been contrasted with eros, understood as 'the quest to be satisfied at the

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<sup>159</sup> Osborne, *Eros Unveiled*, pp.31, 35. The diversity of interpretations of parables such as that of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37) underlines the difficulties in deriving an *ethic* of love from the New Testament.

deepest level of being, a search for the beautiful and the good that will maintain and fulfil the self.<sup>160</sup>

The differences between Greek and Christian love raise various questions. These include the relation between God's own love and human love of God, and the relation between love of neighbour and love of self. While these relations will to some extent be addressed throughout this thesis, two contentious points particularly relevant for our later discussion must be especially emphasised here. First, what place does other-centred love leave for the self as agent and for features typical of human love, such as the desire for happiness? The association of Christian love with God's own love has, as becomes evident below, resulted in its dissociation from desirous, acquisitive and self-interested love, but even from human agency as such.

Secondly, to what extent is the human self affirmed in Christian love? In addition to the New Testament's relative silence on the matter of self-love, agape's association with a God who sacrifices his Son on the cross has sometimes been perceived to imply an exclusion of self-love. Paul's call for subordination, service and suffering, and his assertion that love 'does not insist on its own way' has cast further doubt on whether the self is affirmed in Christian love (1 Cor 13:5). The hint at self-love in the 'as yourself' of the love commandment has thus been surrounded with controversy. While thinkers such as Anders Nygren interpret the 'as yourself' clause as referring to the fallen love which the human being is most familiar with, yet which must in fact be replaced by other-love, there have been other, more classical interpretations, which regard self-love as a precondition for neighbour love and/or as a natural duty to yourself as God's creature.<sup>161</sup> Having acquired an albeit cursory overview of some of the questions engendered by the meeting of Platonic and New Testament thought, it is time to turn towards the most

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<sup>160</sup> Paul Fiddes (1991) *Freedom and Limit. A Dialogue between Literature and Christian Doctrine*. MacMillan, London, p.158. Fiddes argues against the polarisation of eros and agape.

<sup>161</sup> See e.g. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II q.25, a.4; q.26, a.4.

seminal receptions of these two accounts of love, and their attempts at synthesising them.

### **3.2 The Movements of the ‘Forms’ of Love: ‘Thesis’ and ‘Antithesis’**

#### **3.2.1 Early Christian integration**

Steeped in neo-Platonic philosophy before converting to Christianity, Augustine of Hippo (354-430) found himself confronted with versions of the above-described divergences regarding the nature of love. (Neo-)Platonic ideas such as the belief that love draws all things towards one Good, through participation in which they are divinised, clashed with the Christian notion of love as universal. Attempting to resolve this incongruity regarding love’s object, Augustine developed a Christian metaphysical order of being, which included, famously, an ‘ordo amoris’ similar to Plato’s order of desire but defining love (charity) not only as the path but as ‘the fulfilment and the end of the law and of all the divine scriptures [...] (Rom 13:8, 1 Tm 1:5)’.<sup>162</sup> Together with faith and hope, love is seen to lead the human being to eternal life, yet unlike faith and hope love is seen to abide even once eternal life has been reached. This combination of Greek and Christian ideas has established Augustine as the ‘supreme doctor of love’.<sup>163</sup> Most importantly for our present purposes, it has made his the first major attempt at clarifying the relation between Christian love and the human subject, of whose forcefully desirous nature he was well aware.

Augustine considers the human being to be driven by cravings and desires the objects of which constitute the goal of her actions. Human beings are what they desire. Augustine famously identifies human desire as a kind of love: desire is, he writes, ‘love

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<sup>162</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, Book I, Ch.35.

<sup>163</sup> Williams, *The Spirit and the Forms of Love*, p.17.

striving to possess what it loves'.<sup>164</sup> He observes that this love is a force of the changeable soul and thus can neither be eradicated nor 'be idle' but must 'lead [the lover] on' till it has reached its *telos*, God.<sup>165</sup> Similarly to Plato, he argues that this human love can be good or bad, depending on its object. Love, which Augustine refers to as *amor*, can be directed towards 'four kinds of things', 'one which is above us, the second which we are ourselves, the third which is on a level with us, the fourth which is beneath us'.<sup>166</sup> Each of these demands to be met on different terms. The ultimate fulfilment of all love is God, who is Love, the fulfilment of life itself, the *summum bonum*. Consequently, *amor Dei* must form the pinnacle of the order of love. God is the only reality we can and must love for its own sake. Our neighbours, by contrast, must be loved as beings who 'are capable of enjoying God together with us'.<sup>167</sup> Although arguing that we must love everyone equally, Augustine recognises that we cannot in fact serve everyone, thus allowing that we attend more to those which circumstances have brought close to us.<sup>168</sup>

The most difficult and complex love is love of self, *amor sui*. Augustine famously contrasts *amor sui* in its primary sense with *amor Dei*. This self-love emerges where the human loves are not subordinated to the love of God. Its characteristic marks are *cupiditas* (greed) and *concupiscentia* (disordered appetite). As O'Donovan shows, Augustine considers such self-love to rely on a 'diminished and ontologically false concept of the self' as independent of, or separable from, the wider cosmos.<sup>169</sup> Significantly, he also considers this perverse self-love so entirely unrelated to even a neutral impulse for self-

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<sup>164</sup> Augustine (1998) *The City of God against the Pagans* (ed. R. Dyson). CUP, Cambridge, 14.7, p.592.

<sup>165</sup> Augustine, *The Works of Saint Augustine* (2nd Release). Electronic edition. Expositions of the Psalms, 121-150, Volume III/20, Psalm 121.1, p.13; Confessions Book 1, section 1.

<sup>166</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, Book I, Ch.23. Augustine's Latin terminology cannot be directly correlated with the Greek.

<sup>167</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, Book I, Ch. 27.

<sup>168</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, Book I, Ch. 28.

<sup>169</sup> Oliver O'Donovan (1980) *The Problem of Self-Love in St Augustine*. Yale University Press, New Haven, p. 148.

preservation that he does not think it can be redeemed through a mere correction of this sense of self.<sup>170</sup>

Notwithstanding his harsh rejection of most self-love as disordered and despicable, Augustine does not, however, reject self-love altogether. The natural impulse for self-preservation entails a more redeemable kind of self-love, which is in fact love of ‘earthly things’, of the world in its profanity and fleetingness—a world in which the true self *ultimately* has no part.<sup>171</sup> In order for this to become true love of self<sup>172</sup>, the human being must turn away from ‘the habits and tendencies of the soul to seek enjoyment in inferior things’ and towards enjoyment of God.<sup>173</sup> Such self-love is inter-dependent with a correct sense of oneself, that is, of oneself as a being whose destiny and fulfilment lies in and with God, and whose true self-love is thus coincident with love of God such that ‘duty and self-interest’ ultimately overlap.<sup>174</sup> As a result, Augustine does not so much collapse love of self into love of God as place it under the criterion of love of God, a distinction which will concern us again in our analyses of Tillich and Murdoch.

Augustine, then, distinguishes between good and bad love but, notably, does not so much draw the dividing line between desirous and non-desirous human love but between desirous love in its different orientations. Although true love depends on the subordination of human love to divine love, true love is distinguished from false love not simply according to its source or its object as such but, in an important sense,

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<sup>170</sup> O’Donovan, *The Problem of Self-love*, p. 148.

<sup>171</sup> Augustine, *The Works of Saint Augustine* (2nd Release). Electronic edition. Sermons, (94A-147A) on the Old Testament. Volume III/4, Sermon 142.3, p.415.

<sup>172</sup> That Augustine leaves room for a proper *amor sui* has recently been contested by Jeanrond, who for instance criticises that Augustine does not know to value the earthly body and its desires (Werner Jeanrond (2010) *Theology of Love*. T&T Clark, London, pp.54f). It is true that Augustine’s concept of true self-love is motivated primarily by a concern for the eternal soul and its salvation and less for the material body and its earthly desires, and that Augustine does not explore the role self-love potentially plays in shaping one’s worldly relationships. However, Jeanrond’s use primarily of Augustine’s early texts arguably leads him to overlook that, as Augustine left his Manichean influences increasingly behind, he increasingly speaks of ‘enjoying’ the neighbour ‘in God’ (rather than ‘using’ him towards God), and takes on a, for the time, unusually positive view of the body (cf. e.g. Plotinus’ *Ennead* 6.7.31, but also other fathers such as Jerome).

<sup>173</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, Book I, Ch.24.

<sup>174</sup> O’Donovan, *The Problem of Self-love*, p.145.

according to how it treats its object.<sup>175</sup> It is not desire as such which is problematic but desirous love enjoying the self as an end in itself. Self and world are inadequate objects of love only where they are desired for their own sake, and where that within self and world is desired which is not created by God but which pulls down the soul.

Since the Fall, *amor Dei*, which constitutes the necessary criterion for true self-love, has been replaced with *amor sui* in the first sense of self-love discussed above. This means that the order of love has fallen into a disarray which the human being is unable to overcome of its own account. While Augustine's picture of upward-striving desire in need of purification resembles Platonic eros, his interpretation of the Fall opens the door to—and makes necessary—the divine agape which descends on the human being from above. The redemptive power of the divine love, its grace, lies in its ability to make its objects love-worthy, justified, or good. Only because of this can God's own love be directed towards and transform the depraved human being. The directedness of agape thus indicates the fallen world's relative goodness: it is because it is loved by God that a worldly reality can be known as good and that it can and must therefore be loved also by the human being, Augustine implies.

Augustine's account underlines the real challenges involved in incorporating human desires into true love without denying those desires' frequent and undeniably dark manifestations. He also draws our attention to the difficulty of establishing a balance between the demands of Christian love and a concern for the individual subject and her worldly (and thus also bodily) desires in general. A second classical treatment of the question is by Thomas Aquinas. Without discussing Aquinas in detail, whom neither Tillich nor Murdoch explicitly draw on, the argument of this thesis requires us to take explicit note of at least two features typical of his synthesizing thought.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, Book XV, section 4.

<sup>176</sup> Tillich's ontology of course relies heavily on Aristotle and Aquinas, yet he rarely makes direct references or appeals to these thinkers in his *ST*, and uses their terms and concepts in an eclectic and idiosyncratic

Aquinas, firstly, enshrines Augustine's identification of God as the *summum bonum* and, thus, as the fulfilment of the human being.<sup>177</sup> He detects an element of self-interest in all human love – an observation which drives Nygren to deny the very possibility of human love – and justifies such self-interest in love by arguing that, as 'the first movement of the will, and, indeed, of every appetite', all love, is in some sense appetitive.<sup>178</sup> Aquinas infers from this that self-love is the necessary condition of neighbour-love, while arguing also that the oneness of Good means that self-love necessarily entails neighbour-love as its correlate.<sup>179</sup> Both loves are in unity because persons cannot be thought of as isolated beings but are fundamentally related to one another in the *summum bonum*. Aquinas further relaxes, therefore, any remaining sense in Augustine of a conflict between the good of the self and that of the neighbour. With this, his thought counters notions of a dichotomy between eros and agape (or, indeed, selfishness and altruism),<sup>180</sup> and allows for a more unambiguous endorsement of a right self-love as the proper orientation of a natural impulse.

This is connected with the second point worth emphasising: namely, that for Aquinas the will and intellect are not entirely impaired, even after the Fall.<sup>181</sup> This leaves him more optimistic regarding the human being's knowledge, freedom, and agency in love. Thus, whereas Augustine de-emphasises (though not necessarily denies) human agency in love, Thomas is clear that, in the case of human love, like all acts of the human will, both God *and* the human being are fully active.<sup>182</sup> Similarly, his indebtedness to Aristotle, coupled with his maxim that grace does not destroy nature but perfects it, leads him to envision a super-natural telos for human life that perfects the *natural* goods

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manner. An in-depth engagement with Thomas can however be found in Paul Tillich, 'The Two Types of Philosophy of Religion' in Paul Tillich, *Main Works* (ed. by John Clayton), Vol.4.

<sup>177</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia q.6, a.2; Ia-IIae q.19, a.9; Ia-IIae q.3, a.1.

<sup>178</sup> Stephen Pope (1995) *The Evolution of Altruism and the Ordering of Love*. Georgetown University Press, Washington, p.55.

<sup>179</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* III, 153.

<sup>180</sup> Pope, *The Evolution of Altruism*, p.394.

<sup>181</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia q.83, a.1 ad.3; Ia-IIae q.85, a.1-2.

<sup>182</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia-IIae q.114, a.1.

that constitute an imperfect, but nonetheless *real*, happiness.<sup>183</sup> Thus, in a certain sense, Aquinas attributes some value to the human capacities that are not (yet) operating under God's grace. Divine love, for instance, perfects the human's *natural* capacity for the good of friendship.<sup>184</sup> In principle, human strivings for fulfilment are natural and created, rather than merely the selfish result of the Fall. While critics of Augustine like Werner Jeanrond value this greater valuation of worldly needs and their pursuit as doing greater justice to the goodness of creation and to the inception of God's Kingdom in the here and now, Nygren sees in it the ultimate justification of human selfishness and, thus, the perversion of Christianity. Having attained a rough overview of the intellectual foundations of the more heated and disparate disputations on love, selflessness and human flourishing in secular modernity, it is to these modern discussions that we now turn.

### 3.2.2 Modern differentiations and dissociations

It has already become apparent that love's relation to the self has been a particularly contentious issue in attempts to define the nature of love. Though not absent from Greek discussions of love, this was significantly fuelled by the Christian standard of a perfectly self-giving divine love. Christian love, by virtue of its supposed total lack of self-interest, appeared to set itself apart from the Greek notion of 'love as deprived and straining seeker, as enchanter and sophist.'<sup>185</sup> In light of this, it is all the more notable that the above-discussed Christian writers sought, with different emphases and levels of boldness, to establish the compatibility and inter-dependence of an upwards-rising desirous (eros) love and a divine self-giving (agape) love. Western thought has, however, always known more polarising approaches to this question. These reached a new height in late modernity, which saw the proclamation of the death of God and an increasing

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<sup>183</sup> Cf. Aquinas' discussion on man's last end in *Summa Theologiae*, Ia-IIae q.1-5.

<sup>184</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-IIae q.28; IIa-IIae q.23 a.1; q.24 a.2 cor.

<sup>185</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.343.

emancipation of the modern consciousness of human beings as creative and powerful (of which Sartre has been shown to be a particularly bold representative). Both defenders and critics of Christianity and its moral precepts advanced the disassociation of love into the supposed opposites of self-centred and other-centred love. As we will see, the contenders largely agreed on this division, but, depending on their different understandings of the human being, its origin and telos, disagreed on which of these opposites was to be endorsed.

Since this conflict is part of the backdrop to Tillich's and Murdoch's work on love, it will be helpful, now, to sketch it by reference to a selection of the most radical and consistent figures on the different sides of this spectrum, Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud and Jean-Paul Sartre on the one hand, and Søren Kierkegaard, Anders Nygren and Simone Weil on the other. These authors, whose complex and sometimes ambiguous ideas on love can, again, be sketched only schematically, are not presumed to be definitive representatives of the modern debates on love. Apart from Nygren, they did not *explicitly* deal with the agape-eros polarity. Many may consider the views of these authors extreme, perhaps outdated, and in and of themselves hardly reflective of the majority of participants in this debate. However, it is precisely because of their radicality, because of the lasting relevance of their challenges and because of their continuing hold on the contemporary imagination (and on that of Tillich and Murdoch) that this selection of thinkers lends itself to distilling the controversial questions surrounding love as theism crumbles and as the morality of selflessness is called into question. As already noted, I thus present their various positions in a stark way, and with a view to fostering the clarity of my argument in this thesis. Friedrich Nietzsche has undertaken one of the most determined and influential struggles for emancipation from the Christian paradigm and it is his treatment of love and human flourishing that we will now address.

## *The secular modern trajectory of love*

### *Friedrich Nietzsche*

Often seen as a major influence on, or precursor to, the existentialist conceptualisation of the human being and its call for realising one's individuality,<sup>186</sup> Nietzsche rejects what he perceives to be the Christian 'poison[ing]' of eros and the assertion that true love is selfless.<sup>187</sup> He sees notions of selflessness as life-denying and escapist, and seeks instead to base morality, or rather life itself, on an attitude of rejecting nothing and affirming all that is—that is, to 'abandon all half-heartedness about the actual existence we have and all thoughts about how it might be better or other than it is'.<sup>188</sup> With this, Nietzsche famously calls into question the value of all existing values.<sup>189</sup> Against traditional Christian notions of the soul, including Descartes' understanding of the human being as a thinking self, Nietzsche posits that the human being primarily consists not in a rational and unified intellect or consciousness but in deep-lying self-seeking bodily desires, urges, feelings and instincts which properly manifest themselves through the will and which constitute the real ground of our actions.<sup>190</sup> Given their primacy within the human being, these irrational and selfish desires surface whether they are consciously and actively endorsed or not.

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<sup>186</sup> e.g. Tillich, *TCB*, p.143.

<sup>187</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche (1990) *Beyond Good and Evil. Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*. Penguin, London, section 168.

<sup>188</sup> Here and below, quotes from the original are my translations. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft*, in Colli, G, Montinari, M (Hrg.) (1973) *Nietzsche Werke*. Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Fünfte Abteilung, Zweiter Band. Walter De Gruyter, Berlin, section 276; Simon May (2011) *Love: A Secret History*. Yale University Press, Yale, pp.189f.

<sup>189</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche (1985) *Der Wille zur Macht* in: *Werke in vier Bänden*. Band II. Verlag 'Das Bergland-Buch', Salzburg.

<sup>190</sup> Kenneth Asher 'Nietzsche, Lawrence and Irrationalism' *Neophilologus* Vol.69 (1985), p.4.

Traditionally assumed norms of objective truthfulness and goodness—indeed any criteria for human acts<sup>191</sup>—are here classed as misleading and oppressive. Always perceiving things on the basis of an unquenchable and self-interested desire for mastering the other, the human being is incapable of discerning objective truth about herself or the world, and should not seek to conform herself to norms that are supposedly right for all.<sup>192</sup> Both the attempt to establish such a standard and the attempt to conform oneself to it are futile. They deny and seek to suppress the human being as it really is, that is, the human being in its irrational, inevitably selfish and irreducible individuality. Suggestions that the person *should* love her neighbour, but also the quest for salvation from suffering, evil and death<sup>193</sup>, are not only unrealistic and dishonest but also cowardly. They weaken the human person, preventing her from being who she really is. Indeed, they signify the attempt to make a virtue out of a cowardly and self-deluding failure to love and accept oneself and the world, and result in pointless guilt, shame and revengeful hatred against oneself and those whom one is told to love.<sup>194</sup> Untrue to human nature such notions breed not morality but sickness and immorality.

An honest and successful life depends on ‘the human being attaining satisfaction with itself’, on empowering oneself through affirming and asserting oneself as one is: one’s individual and creative urges must be embraced and allowed to surface in the most powerful manner.<sup>195</sup> Just as true morality is ‘self-glorification’ and entails ‘a basic animosity and irony towards “selflessness”’ so true love is amor fati, *love* of things *exactly* as they are.<sup>196</sup> Nietzsche considers this to involve self-love, ‘not in the sense of complacent or indulgent self-assertion [...] but in the sense of severe reverence for

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<sup>191</sup> Robert Pippin ‘Lightning and Flash, Agent and Deed (I 6-17)’ in Höffe, O (ed.) (2004) *Friedrich Nietzsche. Zur Genealogie der Moral*. Akademie Verlag, Berlin, p.61.

<sup>192</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche (1994) *On the Genealogy of Morality* (tr. Carol Diethe). CUP, Cambridge, pp.118, 92, 166.

<sup>193</sup> e.g. Nietzsche, *Fröhliche Wissenschaft*, section 338.

<sup>194</sup> Nietzsche, *Fröhliche Wissenschaft*, section 290.

<sup>195</sup> Nietzsche, *Fröhliche Wissenschaft*, section 290.

<sup>196</sup> Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, p.166; Friedrich Nietzsche (2004) *Ecce Homo* (tr. Anthony Ludovici). Courier Dover Publications, New York, p.54.

oneself as a being to be respected and affirmed as it is.<sup>197</sup> While commending this, he, like Sartre, rejects the notion that the human being *observes* herself. In doing so, the person would merely impose predetermined ideas about the self and its good onto herself.<sup>198</sup>

Christian morality is seen to be the perfect anti-type of these proposals. It not only propagates the misguided belief in the reality and possibility of truthfulness but also defines this in terms of selflessness, self-sacrifice and self-denial, thus making normative precisely the denial and suppression of the individual and her potential for strength and power.<sup>199</sup> Contrary to appearances, this ‘slave morality’ is nothing more than a disguised version of a particular group’s self-interested (and inevitable) will to power: the weak seek to control and to assert themselves over against the strong by imposing their weakness on them.<sup>200</sup> The implied glorification and enshrinement of weakness, which perversely makes immoral what is natural, healthy and good, makes this morality especially despicable to Nietzsche. It causes human beings to ‘punish[...] others and then [them]selves, for having the very instinctive drives that all the while are governing [their] interpretative activity’.<sup>201</sup> It makes a virtue out of weakness, cowardice and failure, and paradoxically proposes that one survive by drowning.

Nietzsche’s thought is thus a plea for the affirmation of the individual human being and the desirous urges which constitute it: arguing that the ‘shortage of person avenges itself everywhere’, he suggests that where the human being has not affirmed and developed her individual personality she will harm herself and others.<sup>202</sup> This self-affirmation consists in a ‘confrontation with something that we might dare to call a real

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<sup>197</sup> May, *Love*, p.195.

<sup>198</sup> Nietzsche in May, *Love*, p.195; Asher, *Nietzsche, Lawrence and Irrationalism*, p.11.

<sup>199</sup> As Pippin points out, Nietzsche clearly ‘has a standard form of nineteenth century Christian morality often in his sight’ (Pippin, *Lightning and Flash*, p.47). In light of the previous discussion of Augustine and Aquinas, the below discussion of Kierkegaard and Nygren further indicates that it is indeed nineteenth—and early twentieth—century Christian morality which most is most deserving of Nietzsche’s criticisms.

<sup>200</sup> Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, pp.167, .24.

<sup>201</sup> Christopher Janaway (2007) *Beyond Selflessness. Reading Nietzsche’s Genealogy*. OUP, Oxford, p.251.

<sup>202</sup> Nietzsche, *Fröhliche Wissenschaft*, p.60.

self, the necessary aspect of what one is and was, the unchangeability of one's life'.<sup>203</sup> Arguing, however, that this confrontation may have to entail suffering, and thus necessitates a departure from the pursuit of human well-being (where this is understood as an avoidance of pain), Nietzsche leaves it open as to what true life—or, for Nietzsche, the assertion of the individual will to power—looks like. Consequently, even 'life' or 'the will to power' cannot be said to provide criteria for human action.<sup>204</sup> What is clear is that life will imply internal and external conflict, that is, conflict between one's natural drive for power and one's false pretensions to virtue, as well as conflict between oneself and those over whom one seeks to attain power. While 'reciprocity' is here rejected as 'a piece of gross vulgarity' which denies the fact that my and the other's individuality precludes us from paying back an act by repeating it, Nietzsche does, albeit somewhat sceptically, entertain the idea of a relationship where the 'greedy desire of two persons for one another has receded in favour of a new craving and greed, a *shared* higher longing for an ideal standing above them'.<sup>205</sup>

Ultimately, Nietzsche conceives selfless love as nothing more than the attempt to disguise one's own, and undermine the other's, natural and necessary selfishness. His evaluation of selfless love as dishonest and immoral,<sup>206</sup> is something of a watershed with regard to the rejection of selfless love in late modernity. Yet for all their anti-Christian polemic, his proposals are indeed anything but foreign to the present project and its main protagonists Tillich and Murdoch. This is underlined by Nietzsche's notion that 'one must learn to love'; that this takes 'good will', 'patience', 'fair-mindedness' and 'gentleness with what is strange' until this 'sheds its veil' and reveals its beauty.' Similarly, Nietzsche exhibits a desire to show 'hospitality' to *all* things and to learn to see them as beautiful by loving them, as well as by his conviction that this will be rewarded with

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<sup>203</sup> Janaway, *Beyond Selflessness*, p.262.

<sup>204</sup> Pippin, *Lightning and Flash*, p.61.

<sup>205</sup> Nietzsche, *Fröhliche Wissenschaft*, p.61.

<sup>206</sup> Nietzsche, *Fröhliche Wissenschaft*, sections 14, 119, pp.260.

gratefulness.<sup>207</sup> Although it leads him to reject selfless love, his defence of the individual, his needs and desires, must, equally, be taken seriously by the Christian theologian. As I have suggested in the introduction, Christianity's own principles prescribe that it cannot commend a kind of love, which denies the needs and interests of the individual and undermines true selfhood. Nietzsche's thought should thus prompt those who do advocate selfless love to, for instance, allow for some positive value in the desires of the self. Similarly, the basis on which Nietzsche rejects selfless love—the assumption of a polar opposition between selflessness and self-interest—reminds the theologian that Christianity can legitimately defend selfless love only if such an opposition can be overcome.

### *Sigmund Freud*

Like Nietzsche, who considered psychoanalysis to be the means towards establishing an individual morality, Freud ultimately dismisses the notion of universal neighbour-love as unnatural, unrealistic, and potentially dangerous. Freud's alternative conceptualization of love is built on his psychological account of the human being as driven by instinctual, insatiable and potentially destructive forces and desires, which strive towards unattainable union with what is outside the self.<sup>208</sup> Freud understands these desires in terms of two inter-related instincts: the ego-instinct and the sexual instinct, both grouped under 'libido'.<sup>209</sup> While the former is geared towards the self-preservation of the individual, the latter is geared towards his or her sexual gratification. Initially, both these instincts are satisfied through others (first and foremost the mother), yet as the individual grows into adulthood it finds it can no longer rely on this. Life thus

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<sup>207</sup> Nietzsche, *Fröhliche Wissenschaft*, section 334; Nietzsche in May, *Love*, pp.196f.

<sup>208</sup> Irving Singer distinguishes between four uses of 'Liebe' in Freud. These cannot be individually discussed here – particularly Freud's association of love with the death-drive is left out of the present discussion (Irving Singer (1987) *The Nature of Love*. Vol.3. The Modern World. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, pp.97-158).

<sup>209</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis', in Sigmund Freud (2001) *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (tr. James Strachey), Vol.XXII. Vintage Books, London, p.96.

increasingly becomes a constant attempt to gain control over the objects of our sexual desire by way not of destroying but of possessing them.

Insofar as such possession or its sexual realization is not always possible, the other becomes a source of frustration and thus of hate as well as of love.<sup>210</sup> Experiences of frustration provoke the human being's inherent aggression but also make it possible for the human being to recognize itself as an individual with a world external to its will and desire. A major reason for the frustrations of libido lies in the constraints social conventions and taboos impose on libidinal satisfaction. These require a sacrifice of sexual gratification—a sacrifice which may entail a compromise to happiness but which Freud considers crucial to self-preservation and security.<sup>211</sup> The individual finds it must inhibit its sexual quest in order to survive. While this aim-inhibition, or the channeling of sexual energy towards prescribed sexual and non-sexual ends, is the productive precondition for the achievements of civilization, it also bears the risk of generating neuroses, which are typically the result of the search for 'substitutive satisfactions'.<sup>212</sup>

These are best avoided if the sexual-instinct is not repressed or re-channelled towards unconsciously chosen and futile substitutes but where it is allowed to surface in a sublimated manner. Where taboos unavoidably prevent the direct satisfaction of the sexual-instinct it must be allowed to surface according to 'ego-controlled' ends, that is, *according to* the ego's terms.<sup>213</sup> This proposal leads Freud to understand libido, which he eventually identifies with eros, in terms of a polarity between ego-instincts and object-

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<sup>210</sup> This is in line with Freud's later assertion of the inter-dependence of love and hate (Sigmund Freud, 'The Ego and the Id', in Freud, *The Standard Edition*, Vol.XXII. Vintage Books, London, p.43).

<sup>211</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Civilisation and its Discontents', in Freud, *The Standard Edition*, Vol.XXI. Vintage Books, London, p.104.

<sup>212</sup> Freud, *Civilisation and its Discontents*, p.108.

<sup>213</sup> Pat Duffy Hutcheon *Through a Glass Darkly: Freud's Concept of Love* (no pagination); last accessed on 08/12/11 at <http://patduffyhutcheon.com/Papers%20and%20Presentations/Freuds%20Concept%20of%20Love.htm#8>.

instincts.<sup>214</sup> Whether libidinal satisfaction is found in another object, or narcissistically, eros's goal is the satisfaction of the ego.<sup>215</sup>

According to what Singer regards to be Freud's 'essentialism',<sup>216</sup> this is in keeping with the capacities and destiny of inherently selfish human nature. Love is not only unable but must not even try to 'transcend its fundamental selfishness' as Christian universal neighbour-love suggests.<sup>217</sup> Ideals such as that of non-discriminatory love are unreasonable in that they inevitably rely on an 'over-valuation' of the other, are unjust towards those who 'deserve' my love, and bound to evoke my hate of the other.<sup>218</sup> Like Nietzsche, Freud rejects a priori attributions of value to others. Ideals must be obeyed yet the only valid ideals are idealizations of the ego, which form the super-ego.<sup>219</sup> Equally, other persons can be loved, yet only in a narcissistic way, that is insofar as they manifest the lover's own best features, or even more perfect versions thereof.<sup>220</sup> While Freud recognizes that the individual's good is *affected* by relations with the other, which must thus be ordered in the individual's best interest, he envisages the satisfaction of the individual's needs and desires to be the result solely of the individual's own ability to successfully assert its ego.

Love is here reduced to a feature in those 'developmental processes that enable us to cope with an environment [...] that thwarts our infinitely selfish desires'.<sup>221</sup> In and of itself, this reduction surely leaves no room for the notion that selfless love, in the sense of a love concerned with the other for his own sake, is compatible with the needs and flourishing of the individual lover. Nonetheless, the attention Freud draws to the

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<sup>214</sup> Freud, *Civilisation and its Discontents*, pp.117ff. Freud then adds to this a contrast between the erotic and the death instinct (cf. Beyond the Pleasure Principle).

<sup>215</sup> The fact that psychoanalysis aims precisely to make the ego the master of the human person ('Wo Es war, soll Ich werden') will be shown to prompt Murdoch's critique of Freud (Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, p.80).

<sup>216</sup> Singer, *Nature of Love*, pp.130ff.

<sup>217</sup> May, *Love*, p.200.

<sup>218</sup> Freud, *Civilisation and its Discontents*, p.109.

<sup>219</sup> Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, pp.64f.

<sup>220</sup> Freud, *Civilisation and its Discontents*, p.109.

<sup>221</sup> Singer, *Nature of Love*, p.141.

claims and power of deep-seated desires, drives and motivations is highly significant to the present enquiry into the nature and validity of selfless love. The meaning of desire, as Freud has revealed it to us, remains open to debate. Freud has for instance been criticized for evaluating love's object solely according to its ability to 'satisfy biological drives, bodily demands' and thus for overlooking love's creative role and imaginative ability to bestow value on something;<sup>222</sup> yet he has also been found to propose that human desire 'invests the external world and its objects with value' such that these objects can 'become real and significant for us', 'richer in detail and more integrated in structure'—which would arguably make Freud a resource for the attempt to reconnect the human being with what lies outside it and, thus, for overcoming solipsism.<sup>223</sup> However this may be, Freud's insights into the central and inescapable role desire plays in human actions alert us, as Murdoch will stress, to the darker features of the human being. It also confirms that, as noted in our discussion of Nietzsche, selfless love can only be defended where it does not entail a mere suppression of these drives but where it can make sense of and attribute some kind of value to them. The fact that Freud rejects selfless love on the basis of the assumption that civilization and sexuality (or 'communal oneness' and the satisfaction of the individual) are at cross purposes further confirms our suspicion that selfless love can be defended only where this dichotomy is overcome.<sup>224</sup> It is indeed another indicator, corroborated by the forthcoming analyses of Tillich's and Murdoch's thought, that the validity of selfless love depends on an understanding of the human self as intrinsically relational.

### *Jean-Paul Sartre*

Sartre's understanding of love, which connects the above authors to the discussion of the previous chapter, also deserves explicit mention. We saw that Sartre considers the

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<sup>222</sup> Singer, *Nature of Love*, p.161.

<sup>223</sup> May, *Love*, p.209.

<sup>224</sup> Freud, *Civilisation and its Discontents*, p.108; Singer, *Nature of Love*, p.150.

human being to lack a substantial self, to be unstable and absolutely free. We already saw that while Sartre considers the instability of the self to imply the freedom to wilfully realise one's individuality, he also infers from it a particular vulnerability to outside influences—indeed, to being determined by the other. The other, whether this be the individual's environment in general or a particular personal other, constitutes a threat to the individual's freely created self. It is precisely his interpretation of the human being's relative 'self-lessness'—his lack of a stable self—which leads Sartre to reject the surrender and self-giving commonly associated with selfless love. Such love risks compromising the freedom constitutive of the individual's very being.

More specifically, Sartre's issue with selfless love results from his awareness that, despite her freedom, the human being's individual self-realisation is meaningless where the self-created identity is not recognised or accepted by the other. The other has the power to subvert my self-created individuality by refusing to acknowledge and respect, or even undermine, it. It is for this reason that others appear as threats to the individual and his project, such that each individual seeks to control them and their influence on the self. In Sartre's view this kind of an attempt to enforce the other's recognition of my individuality, is the only love there is: far from being a selfless, self-giving or self-surrendering love, love is what Sartre defines as 'the project of making oneself be loved'.<sup>225</sup>

Such love, however, is ultimately impossible and futile. This is because it is not simply the other's recognition in general, but the other's *free* recognition, which each individual seeks to enforce when they vie for the other's love. Where the other recognises my individuality—where he loves me—against his will and only on account of my power over him, his recognition is worthless: it is 'the Other's *freedom* [which] is the foundation of my being', Sartre writes.<sup>226</sup> Where I have *made* the other recognise (or love)

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<sup>225</sup> Sartre, *BN*, p.375.

<sup>226</sup> Emphasis added. Sartre, *BN*, p.366.

me in my individuality, their love ceases to be the love I desire. Love as Sartre envisages it does not, therefore, 'want to possess as one possesses a thing, but wants to possess a freedom as freedom'.<sup>227</sup> This 'struggle of two freedoms' to master one another without destroying one another *qua* freedom is paradoxical; thus, 'love's very objective [...] is self-defeating and is bound to bring the lover and the beloved into conflict with one another'.<sup>228</sup> Ultimately, it effects nothing more than that each individual becomes the other's personal hell.

The vicious circle could, it seems, only be broken where there is another who is not himself dependent on this security and who is outside the self's control and can thus love and recognise the self freely. Yet even in the unlikely situation that two lovers renounce their urge to control one another and, instead, passively respect one another's freedom, 'the lovers remain each one for himself in a total subjectivity'.<sup>229</sup> As Sartre concludes towards the end of his major discussion of love, 'nothing comes to relieve them of their duty to make themselves exist each one for himself'.<sup>230</sup> Sartre's self remains a solitary and individually created reality typically threatened by the other and at best respected by them.

It was already noted above that this solipsism leaves Sartre unable to make sense of gratuitous human acts of love and indeed of the desire not only to be loved but to love. It is certainly at odds with a notion of selfless love. At the same time, one should heed Sartre's insistence that relations with others do not exonerate the human being from her obligation to use her freedom to shape her being and to realise her individuality. Similar to Nietzsche's call for empowerment, and to Freud's emphasis on the unquenchable nature of human desire, Sartre highlights that, if selfless love is to be valid, it must affirm and promote precisely human freedom and individual distinctness.

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<sup>227</sup> Sartre, *BN*, p.367.

<sup>228</sup> Ilham Dilman (1987) *Love and Human Separateness*. Blackwell, Oxford, p.71; Sartre, *BN*, p.379.

<sup>229</sup> Sartre, *BN*, p.376.

<sup>230</sup> Sartre, *BN*, p.376.

Above, we gained an illustrative overview of authors, who draw attention to the natural potential, needs and desires of the human being qua individual, and who favour a more self-assertive over self-giving love. We must now survey what I propose is something of a Christian counter-part to the above polarisation of different forms of love. After a brief glance at Søren Kierkegaard, in some ways a predecessor of Nygren's, I will turn to Nygren's seminal account of love in his *Agape and Eros*. This will be followed by a short discussion of Simone Weil, who is one of Iris Murdoch's major influences, yet whose thinking has traits of a similarly austere selflessness.

### *The Christian modern trajectory of love*

#### *Søren Kierkegaard*

In keeping with his Lutheran background, Søren Kierkegaard's (1813-1855) concern with regard to the question of love is primarily the Christian command to neighbour love, which he considers to be modelled on God's own love. That God extends love even to the worst of sinners means, Kierkegaard suggests, that true love of others is indiscriminatory, unconditional, and 'does not seek its own'.<sup>231</sup> Christian love does not take into account the particularity of the beloved but is distinctively unchangeable and limitless despite the beloved's changeableness, limitations, and lack of reciprocity. It 'abides' because it is always rooted in God's own love.<sup>232</sup> A truly loving person will be unable to break with another, not because she abides in the *other* but because she abides in a love, which *transforms* the other. True love as Kierkegaard conceives it is thus distinct from any form of natural love in that it is independent of the state of the beloved object.

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<sup>231</sup> Søren Kierkegaard (1995) *Works of Love* (tr. Hong & Hong). Princeton University Press, Princeton, pp.264f.

<sup>232</sup> Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, pp.303f.

It rules out not only *self*-preferential, but also ‘passionate preferential’ love generally.<sup>233</sup> Preferential love is ‘essentially another form of self-love’, in which the other is loved as an ‘other *I*, and which, ‘in the strictest sense’ amounts to ‘self-deification’ and ‘idol-worship’.<sup>234</sup> True love is thus ‘other-regarding’ as opposed to ‘self-regarding’, and entails a renunciation of worldly needs, desires and well-being.<sup>235</sup> Kierkegaard indeed describes the very essence of Christian love in terms of ‘self-denial’ (inwardly) and ‘self-sacrificing unselfishness’ (outwardly): through these the human being ‘makes himself into nothing’, an ‘unworthy servant’ of God and neighbour.<sup>236</sup> Love is ‘a characteristic by which or in virtue of which you exist for others’.<sup>237</sup>

At the same time, Kierkegaard acknowledges that love, say, of a husband or a friend is ruled out only where it does not rest on love of God as the primary love. Preferential love must ‘undergo[...] the change of eternity by becoming duty’.<sup>238</sup> That is, it must be placed under the criterion of the Christian love *commandment*, which is intended to keep natural human selfishness in check. Only where love is placed under the divine *command* to love (which is matched by the divine gift of love) does a relationship become ‘dependable’ insofar as it is no longer tied to worldly contingencies but is ‘eternally secured’ by God.<sup>239</sup> Only then does love lose its natural elements of self-seeking, ‘anxiety about the possibility of change’, jealousy and, potentially, despair.<sup>240</sup> Only then can the lover overcome his self-preoccupation and give himself ‘wholeheartedly’ and courageously.<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, pp.53, 57.

<sup>234</sup> Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, pp.53, 57.

<sup>235</sup> Pattison, *God and Being*, p.226; Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, p.56.

<sup>236</sup> Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, pp.56, 365.

<sup>237</sup> As quoted by Outka, G. (1972) *Agape. An Ethical Analysis*. New Haven, Yale University Press, p.13.

<sup>238</sup> Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, p.35.

<sup>239</sup> Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, p.32.

<sup>240</sup> Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, pp.33, 35; Søren Kierkegaard (1968) *The Sickness unto Death*. Princeton University Press, Princeton. With respect to the connection between love and anxiety, Kierkegaard writes that, had the first parents accepted the commandment (despite being unable to understand it) they would not have been subject that anxiety which caused them to fall (Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, p.66).

<sup>241</sup> Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, pp.35, 41.

Kierkegaard's understanding of commanded love thus leaves room for a kind of self-love. Indeed, it implies that the human being *must* value itself as a created human being just as she values the neighbour as a human being.<sup>242</sup> In arguing that 'you shall love yourself in the same way as you love your neighbour when you love him as yourself', Kierkegaard even blurs the distinction between *true* self- and other-love.<sup>243</sup> 'The distinction *'mine and yours'* is an antithetical relation, he argues, and thereby implies that true love of the other always also entails a kind of self-love.<sup>244</sup> Kierkegaard moreover recognises that our concern for the neighbour's good may require us to counter his or her attempts at exploiting us, and that, despite being unchangeable, Christian love can take on different forms of expression depending on the requirements of the relation.<sup>245</sup> He also considers desirous love in the sense of an 'infinite passion' for God the basis of Christian life and faith.<sup>246</sup> These features leave Kierkegaard's thought less austere than that of Nygren, discussed below.

Nonetheless, Kierkegaard's rejection of self-regard and preferential love—a rejection which both Augustine and Aquinas, for example, would not accept—remains problematic. It leaves unclear, for instance, how and why the human being would obey commanded love in the first place.<sup>247</sup> It also does injustice to the sensual and psychological nature of the human being and cannot but dismiss her desire to be loved in this capacity and qua embodied individual.<sup>248</sup> Suspicious of any kind of union and, instead, painting lover and beloved as separate spiritual beings, Kierkegaard arguably also overlooks the importance of reciprocity in love, which will concern us in later chapters of this thesis.<sup>249</sup> In this he is curiously at one with Nietzsche, Freud and Sartre. Finally, Kierkegaard's

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<sup>242</sup> Outka, *Agape*, pp.20f.

<sup>243</sup> In Stephen Pope (2007) *Human Evolution and Christian Ethics*. CUP, Cambridge, p.238; Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, p.23.

<sup>244</sup> Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, p.267.

<sup>245</sup> Outka, *Agape*, pp.20f.

<sup>246</sup> Søren Kierkegaard (2006) *Fear and Trembling* (tr. Sylvia Walsh). CUP, Cambridge, pp.97, 59.

<sup>247</sup> Kierkegaard arguably gives some indication for this in his work *Either/Or* (Søren Kierkegaard (1987) *Either/Or* (tr. Hong&Hong). Princeton University Press, Princeton).

<sup>248</sup> Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, p.56.

<sup>249</sup> Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, p.56.

suggestion that ‘the distinction *‘mine and yours’* become[s] entirely cancelled’ only in the context of ‘self-denying love’ points to an insufficient recognition of the individual value and needs of the lover’s own self.<sup>250</sup> Nonetheless, Kierkegaard must be credited with his nuanced perspective on self-love as a matter not simply to be rejected but to be discussed in the context of distinctions between true and false self-love (and true and false self).<sup>251</sup> As George Pattison points out, Kierkegaard’s account of love moreover entails an important warning of an ‘egoism *à deux*’, wherein I love the other simply as ‘the one in whom I see myself as I would most like to be’.<sup>252</sup>

### *Anders Nygren*

If Kierkegaard was highly sceptical of the compatibility of desirous and reciprocating love, on the one hand, and Christian love, on the other, Nygren (1890-1978) fully developed and completed the Christian polarisation of these qualities of love. Nygren bluntly identifies Christian and Greek love as agape and eros, respectively, and forces the two into a diametrical opposition.<sup>253</sup> Christian attempts to integrate and unite eros and agape, the beginnings of which Nygren situates no later than in John’s gospel,<sup>254</sup> are seen to have corrupted and distorted the very particularity of Christianity. The integration of eros and agape, which has culminated in the mediaeval notion of caritas, is necessarily motivated by an egocentric and individualistic ethic of human happiness and fulfilment. This kind of Greek eudaimonism is precisely what Christianity came to transcend by means of its theocentric interest in ‘the-Good-in-itself’.<sup>255</sup> In order to be restored, Christian agape-love must be purged of all traces of Greek eros.

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<sup>250</sup> Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, p.268.

<sup>251</sup> Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, pp.22f.

<sup>252</sup> Pattison, *God and Being*, p.225.

<sup>253</sup> Anders Nygren (1982) *Agape and Eros*. Part I and II. London, SPCK, p.30.

<sup>254</sup> Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, p.158.

<sup>255</sup> Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, pp.44f. As O’Donovan rightly points out, Nygren’s is more legitimately a critique of eudaimonistic approaches to morality in general than of eros itself. In the following I will nonetheless consider him on his own terms, not least because the very title of this thesis in any case assumes an eudaimonistic approach to ethics, because endorsements of eudaimonism and love as eros are

Platonic eros, of which Nygren treats only the so-called heavenly kind (dismissing vulgar or common eros entirely), promises purification of the natural passions through spiritualisation, Nygren argues. He finds this to be indicative of an attempted flight from the world and its materiality that is entirely at odds with the Christian God's affirmation of the 'sense-world' through his actions in Christ.<sup>256</sup> Most importantly, eros's promise of purification suggests that natural human love, the whole of which Nygren, like Augustine, identifies as self-love, can be redeemed rather than having to be left behind. As Nygren sees it, this means that eros is tied to an un-Christian belief in a power of human self-direction and potential ascension towards God. For Nygren, eros in and of itself implies that man has 'a life of his own apart from God'.<sup>257</sup> It reduces God to an object to be acquired for the human being's self-satisfaction and cannot accommodate the divine descent that is at the heart of Christianity. As such, it is dependent on the value of its object and, thus, unrelated to the love of sinners made manifest by God in Jesus Christ, so Nygren's argument goes.

By contrast, agape, which Nygren considers to be most purely conveyed by St Paul, is no human capacity or inclination but the love which God, in Jesus Christ, has demonstrated to be His, and only His. This love, which has God as its only ground, does not seek to achieve any particular end: God loves not for any distinct reason but simply because this accords with God's nature. As God's love both of the righteous and of the sinner indicates, agape is not only entirely 'spontaneous' and 'unmotivated' but – in clear contradiction to Nietzsche's love – also 'indifferent to value'.<sup>258</sup> Refusing both the views that the sinner retains a righteous core and that God loves one more than the other, Nygren considers agape to make no distinctions with respect to its object. Agape creates

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indeed often intertwined, and because of Nygren's valuable and profound account of the essential characteristics or demands of Christian agape.

<sup>256</sup> Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, p.179.

<sup>257</sup> Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, p.92.

<sup>258</sup> Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, pp.74, 75, 77.

worth in its object, thus sharing in God's general creativity. Finally, agape initiates that 'fellowship with God' which is otherwise impossible.<sup>259</sup>

All the above features describe God's love for the human being. Following Jesus' words that 'freely ye have received, freely give' (Mt 10:8) Nygren argues that the Christian must 'pass on' this love to his or her fellows.<sup>260</sup> But because the Christian's love is to be 'patterned on God's love', Nygren concludes that the human being cannot in fact love at all.<sup>261</sup> Agape is considered to exceed the capacities of the human being, who is unable to create out of nothing and cannot spontaneously initiate love.<sup>262</sup> All the human being is capable of is eros-love, yet this is so unlike true love that it cannot be integrated with or sublimated into Christian agape. The human being can open herself to God's agape such that it flows through her but the responsive character of such an act already means it properly is no longer one of love but of faith, which Nygren identifies with being 'possessed by God, [...] belong[ing] absolutely to Him'.<sup>263</sup>

Agape in the context of neighbour-love remains solely God's love, which flows through the faithful human subject as through a 'tube'.<sup>264</sup> Only if this distinction is observed does it become clear that 'the Christian has nothing of his own to give' and that any love manifesting itself through him comes, in fact, from God.<sup>265</sup> The human being can indeed never be an agent of love in the proper sense. Love of self is consequently also dismissed: seen as entirely 'alien to the New Testament commandments of love' it must not be 'refined but totally annihilated', Nygren argues.<sup>266</sup> While Kierkegaard still exhorted against potential exploitation of the self, if only for the sake of the other's good, Nygren does not explicitly make any such caveat. Nygren thus not only dissociates selfless love from the self's natural desires and flourishing, but also

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<sup>259</sup> Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, pp.80, 75.

<sup>260</sup> Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, p.91.

<sup>261</sup> Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, pp.93f.

<sup>262</sup> Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, p.125.

<sup>263</sup> Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, p.94.

<sup>264</sup> Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, pp. 735, 129.

<sup>265</sup> Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, p.129.

<sup>266</sup> Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, pp.100, 709.

denies that either selfless love or the concern for human flourishing are valid human options. A love unconcerned with the self and its desires is the only true love, yet such love is a human impossibility. According to Nygren, this means that, instead of attempting to love her neighbour directly, the human being must surrender herself, her natural love and accompanying desire, to God.

The problems with this view are arguably illustrated in Nygren's consequent claim that the Christian must be willing 'to sacrifice even her "spiritual" advantages and privileges, if need be, in the service of the neighbour': this might imply, so Nygren's example goes, that a person holding the higher ideal of celibacy might nonetheless engage in sexual acts for the sake of his or her partner.<sup>267</sup> Nygren's suspension of all norms thus appears to have the incongruous effect that the human person simply and naively surrenders to another's personal, and potentially unholy, desires. Here self and other appear to be pushed into the roles of slave and master in a manner, which undermines not only their respective flourishing but goodness itself. Additionally, there are ironic parallels between Nygren and Sartre. Both deny that the self is imbued with an inner moral structure and knowledge and think of the self as separated by an unbridgeable gulf from God and other human beings. Both understand love in terms of a disintegration of the self, which Sartre dreads and Nygren commends. Notwithstanding these problems, Nygren's thought does draw attention to the ambiguity of human desire, the limitations and dependency of the human agent, and the harm potentially entailed in the individual's preoccupation with his own flourishing. His account at the very least serves as a warning against all too optimistic an assumption of human desire into love, and raises the question of whether the human being is destined for more than natural flourishing.

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<sup>267</sup> Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, pp.735, 131.

## *Simone Weil*

Significantly more influenced by Greek thought and yet less clearly concerned with the eros and agape motifs, Simone Weil's (1909-1943) thought in many ways diverges from Kierkegaard and Nygren. The French writer and activist draws on, and in part criticises, Plato, Judaism, Catholic Christianity, and Eastern religious philosophy. Her morality is centred on the 'decreation' of the ego.<sup>268</sup> While we saw Sartre suggest that we must deconstruct our common sense of self so as to realise our actual *lack* of a given, essential self, Weil proposes that we must deconstruct our common sense of an (ego-) self so as to lay *bare* the true essence of the self. Both nonetheless converge in asserting the more immediate task of liberation from the undermining, illusory ego. Unlike Sartre, however, Weil understands this task as one of love.

In contrast to Nygren, Weil distinguishes between egoism and the inability to recognise the good, and suggests that the human predicament in fact results from the latter. Weil indeed writes that far from being selfish, the human being would 'like to be an egoist and cannot'.<sup>269</sup> Unlike God, who, according to Weil, loves Himself through us, humans are capable *only* of loving something other than themselves: they cannot love themselves. Instead, human beings instinctually love selflessly. At the same time, however, they are incapable of adequately recognising *which* other things they should love in this selfless way. This is because they lack the 'power of supernatural attention' and the 'patience to allow it to develop': they constantly mistake evil for good.<sup>270</sup> In effect, the human predicament consists in a selfless love of the wrong things: human beings have humility, Weil argues, yet their flawed perception leads them to misdirect this humility, and thus to idolatrously humiliate themselves before false gods.<sup>271</sup> It is in this

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<sup>268</sup> Simone Weil (1987) *Gravity and Grace*. Ark Paperbacks, London, pp.28f.

<sup>269</sup> Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p.53.

<sup>270</sup> Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p.53.

<sup>271</sup> Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p.53.

Platonic and Augustinian sense of attaching itself to the wrong things that human love is problematic.

A truthful life relies on love of the right things. It relies on, as Weil puts it, refusing to let oneself be dragged down by gravity and allowing oneself, instead, to be elevated by grace. True love of creatures is possible only where it has become ‘associated with the creative love of God’ by having ‘passed through God as through fire’.<sup>272</sup> In such love the opposites typically separating human love become united, such that this love can love someone as they are and simultaneously hope to recreate them—a proposition we will find Murdoch taking up. Weil’s views of the preconditions for love’s passage through God bear certain affinities with Nygren. Like Nygren, Weil identifies God’s creative and sustaining love as normative for love in general, and thus asserts that love’s passage through God depends on ‘renunciation and sacrifice’.<sup>273</sup> Given that, with his sacrifice, God has ‘renounce[d] being everything’, human beings ‘should renounce being something’.<sup>274</sup> Weil describes the proper human self-offering to God as making oneself nothing by taking ‘the form of a slave’.<sup>275</sup> This consists in the surrender of our presumptive self-sufficiency, of our inherently selfish and illusory ego, which, she argues, is all the human being has to offer. Judging that human desire typically constitutes a false attachment to the world, Weil demands that this too must be sacrificed (even where its object is something good) until it exists merely in a void, lacking any actual object. Love thus demands the human being’s detachment from all value, preference, and desire: ‘love of God is pure when joy and suffering inspire an equal degree of gratitude’.<sup>276</sup> Only then, so Weil implies, can grace be received.

Similarly to Nygren, Weil tends towards the view that the human being’s love depends on self-renunciation because true love is in fact not human at all, but the divine

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<sup>272</sup> Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p.57.

<sup>273</sup> Weil, *On Science*, p.153.

<sup>274</sup> Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, pp.29, 35.

<sup>275</sup> Weil, *On Science*, p.157.

<sup>276</sup> Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p.55.

self-love passing through the self. In proposing the ‘decréation’ of the ego, Weil may thus be read as seeking to establish the preconditions necessary in order for the human being to function as the ‘tube’ Nygren envisages. This is supported by her claim that in neighbour-love ‘we should be impelled towards our neighbour *by* God’; or, similarly: in ‘true love it is not we who love the afflicted in God, it is God in us who loves them’.<sup>277</sup> Love between persons emanates from God and comes about ‘through God’.<sup>278</sup> True love, however, does not happen ‘for the love of God’ but rather consists in loving ‘each other for the love of the one for the other’—an ‘impossibility’ which can only ‘come[...] about through the agency of God’.<sup>279</sup>

The thought of Weil is yet another case of tending to deny human agency and desire a role in love. Yet again, love appears to be severed from the flourishing of the worldly individual in a manner, which appears to vindicate the above-discussed modern doubts about Christian love. Weil appears to commit the human being to a love, which is literally selfless in that the human self—like human desires and concerns—has no active role in it. The renunciation of natural needs and desires is here taken to an extreme, often taken to be illustrated in Weil’s own premature death.<sup>280</sup> At the same time, Weil’s insistence that God can only be loved indirectly, via His creation, and that creatures, *including the self*, must therefore be loved for their own sake does seem to indicate her respect for the needs and dignity of the human self. Writing that ‘to love a stranger as oneself implies the reverse: to love oneself as a stranger’, Weil’s thinking indeed draws our attention to the question of *how* the self is best loved.<sup>281</sup> The flourishing

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<sup>277</sup> Emphasis added. Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p.41.

<sup>278</sup> Simone Weil (1977) *Waiting on God. Letters and Essays*. London, HarperCollins, p.87.

<sup>279</sup> Weil, *Waiting on God*, p.87.

<sup>280</sup> During the Second World War, Weil’s understanding of solidarity with the working classes famously led her to undertake a heavy work regime and then to limit her food rations to what (she thought) workers in occupied France were allowed. Having also contracted tuberculosis, this eventually weakened her such that she died at age 34. The view that Weil was anorexic has also been raised (Robert Coles (1987) *Simone Weil—A Modern Pilgrimage*. Addison Wesley, Redding; David McLellan (1990) *Utopian Pessimist: The Life and Thought of Simone Weil*. Poseidon, New York).

<sup>281</sup> Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p.55.

of the human person may not be, she implies, as straightforward a matter as implied in Nietzsche's direct affirmations of human strength and power.

### 3.2.3 Modern love: An Evaluation

The above discussion has illustrated that, while there have always been tensions regarding love's different possible aspects, these tensions are heightened in late modernity. This has been shown to lead secular critics of Christianity to reject the kind of loving other-centred and self-giving stance I have associated with selfless love. By contrast, it has led Christian defenders of such love to reject the concern with the empowerment and flourishing of the desirous, worldly self. This split is rooted particularly in different interpretations of the modern perspective on the desirous nature of the human person. The non-Christian thinkers discussed above in many ways still share the traditional Platonic and Augustinian call for a re-channelling of desire but proclaim that this must be geared towards the attainment of worldly power (Nietzsche), the purposes of the ego (Freud) and the realisation of freedom and individuality (Sartre). From the perception that the human being's 'primary motive' in any action is inevitably and necessarily 'self-seeking', they conclude that 'the agape ideal would [...] encourage masochism and frustration [...]'.<sup>282</sup> Love must be understood as eros in the sense of a desirous and self-interested love.

The late modern Christian thinkers discussed have, by contrast, tended to infer from modernity's assertion of the inevitability of self-seeking desire that the natural human being is incapable of true love. They have thus displayed a tendency towards denying any role in love to desire in the sense of preferential love (Kierkegaard), to all desirous love (Nygren), or to all object-focused desire (Weil). With this, the above-

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<sup>282</sup> Mike Martin (1996) *Love's Virtues*, University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, p.39.

discussed Christian thinkers are illustrative of a late modern Christian tendency to hold on to a notion of selfless love, but to dissociate this from the lover's worldly needs and desires, including the desire for worldly well-being. The human being must renounce his worldly needs. That which its secular critics accuse Christianity of is here affirmed and enshrined.

Notably, thinkers on both sides accept the modern view that the human being is primarily, or even solely, marked and determined by self-interested natural drives and desires, and both base their insistence on the incompatibility of selfless love and aspirations to worldly human flourishing precisely on this insight. In doing so, both depart from the Augustinian and Thomistic view which assigns human desire a role in love but which calls for the orientation of this desire towards the transcendent God. Instead, they judge that the human being is incapable of a truly other-centred, self-giving love. Yet while one side consequently rejects attempts at selfless love as detrimental to the individual's well-being, the other attacks the notion of a human love and rejects the individual's concern with his well-being. On similar principles both sides have thus contributed to the dissociation of selfless love and human flourishing.

This dissociation is problematic from both perspectives. Contrary to Nietzsche's, Freud's and Sartre's affirmation of human desire, it leaves these writers unable to make sense of the human desire for forgiveness, conversion and self-transcendence. Their dismissal of selfless love is based on a naturalistic reduction, which leaves them incapable of addressing the needs of the soul, which, I would argue, also constitute an important element already in this-worldly flourishing.<sup>283</sup> It arguably also corresponds with an opposition of self and other, which is compelled to, arbitrarily, deconstruct the human

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<sup>283</sup> According to Niebuhr, the fruit of Christian neighbour-love, whose source 'transcends history', is an 'integrity of spirit', which demands sacrifices which 'cannot be justified in purely historical and this-worldly terms' (Reinhold Niebuhr (1964) *The Nature and Destiny of Man. A Christian Interpretation*. Volume II. Human Destiny. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, pp.70, 80). While Niebuhr argues that neighbour-love is of value primarily in the next life, his suggestion that it prevents human beings from lapsing into the natural alternatives of 'egoistic utilitarianism' and of a flight from this world nonetheless indicates its relevance also to this life (Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny*, p.75).

desire for, and openness to, being changed by another, and which must, similarly, deconstruct the human being's belief in the possibility of reciprocal communion. The denunciation of such experiences as mere instances of unhealthy self-victimisation or as cover-ups for self-interest appears as little more than a reversal of what the above authors criticise: instead of degrading desire by calling for its suppression, these authors arguably degrade it by denying it certain experienced meanings and by comprehensively relegating it to the level of selfishness. That human experience is here taken seriously only selectively and according to pre-determined criteria appears to contradict the existentialist principle.

From a Christian perspective, the above developments underlying the demise of selfless love are doubly problematic. They arguably marginalise Christian love from the secular modern person, her existential concerns and understanding of human flourishing. As Daniel Day Williams points out, attempts to 'repress[...] the self's vital impulses' and 'unwillingness to affirm its creative power', understandably cause Christian love to be perceived as an escapist love 'negating life' and 'devaluing [...] man'.<sup>284</sup> This might be taken as an unavoidable divergence in opinion between a Christian and a secular worldview were it not for the fact that a wholesale rejection of the desirous worldly subject and its agency implies an avoidance also of long-standing inner-Christian tensions.

Although Christianity undoubtedly refuses reducing human flourishing to the this-worldly dimension and envisages the possibility of submitting to earthly trials for heavenly ends, its Biblical foundation commands a concern *also* with worldly well-being. Nygren's dismissal of natural human love and of the desire for this-worldly flourishing is

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<sup>284</sup> Williams, *The Spirit and the Forms of Love*, pp. 193,192. Williams affirms Nygren's criticism that Augustine has created an inadequate fusion of Christian and Greek thought but locates the inadequacy less in Augustine's understanding of love than in his concept of God Himself. Augustine, so Williams argues, distorts the Christian God by defining Him in terms of the neo-Platonic Absolute, thereby obscuring 'the active, temporal, creating, suffering side of God's being', on which Williams bases his integration of self-giving and self-fulfilment in human love (Williams, *The Spirit and the Forms of Love*, p.100).

unfaithful to Christ's concern for the human being's wellbeing in the here and now. As O'Donovan points out, in excluding eros and human agency, Nygren's account of love implies a refusal to accept the continuity between creation and redemption, and hence between God the Creator and God the Redeemer: rather than waiting for a redemption *of* creation, Nygren appears to wait for literal *re*-creation.<sup>285</sup> Similarly, the Christian conviction that the Kingdom has already been inaugurated suggests that faith in Christ manifests itself already in worldly flourishing. Nygren in particular also leaves unanswered why the human being should receive the divine love in the first place. If he assumes that the human being should receive God's love—and thus *act*—without reference to the 'Good', he implies that the human being should receive it simply because God commanded this. This would appear to rely on an understanding of God dangerously open to abuse. If he, on the other hand, does not consider the reception of the divine agape to entail human action at all, then this would suggest that the divine love is received unwillingly, thus arguably compromising human freedom and the loving quality of the relationship between God and man. Far from engaging with and helping resolve the challenges Augustine recognised, Nygren's picture ignores them to the effect of placing Christian love on a shaky foundation. Furthermore, it fails to give any viable account of the individual subject's place in love and human flourishing, and will only have fostered the concerns expressed by the above critics.

Both a secular and a Christian perspective thus call out for a more balanced or integrated account of love as combining selflessness and human flourishing. Such integration depends on the possibility of overcoming the above divisions, i.e. on a unification of the individual's needs, potential, and desire to flourish with a genuine and other-centred concern for the other's Good.<sup>286</sup> Insofar as the above divisions are cast as

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<sup>285</sup> O'Donovan, *The Problem of Self-Love*, p.158.

<sup>286</sup> Gene Outka, for instance, seeks to overcome this divide by re-asserting the total impartiality of agape, which he defines as 'equal regard', and by justifying self-love precisely on account of this: the self must be given no more and no less attention than the other (Outka, *Agape*, p.257). His ethical account arguably has

an opposition of eros and agape, the validity of selfless love depends on the possibility of uniting these seemingly different forms of love—a task in line with the Christian notion that love is one. At the same time, any alternative to the above polarisations must not only avoid their shortcomings but also take seriously their criticisms and draw on their insights.

The above considerations, then, suggest that selfless love can legitimately be considered compatible with human flourishing only if it respects and incorporates the needs and desires of the human subject in the world. Selfless love must affirm and strengthen the human being in its freedom and individuality. This implies that it must engage the individual subject as agent, and rules out understanding selfless love in terms of a sheer denial of the human self and its needs.<sup>287</sup> Instead, a legitimate understanding of love must be sensitive to the links between certain forms of morality, on the one hand, and psychological, emotional and physical powerlessness and oppression, on the other. That is, it must counter the dangers potentially implied in notions like selflessness.<sup>288</sup> This will require a positive engagement with the reality of human desire, a

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the weakness of being unable to explain or even justify those acts of generosity and heroism, which agape has commonly been associated with. He has also been criticised for taking self-love for granted as ‘an innate human tendency’, which need not be fostered but merely offset by other-regard (Barbara Hilkert Andolsen ‘Agape in Feminist Ethics’, *The Journal of Religious Ethics* Vol.9, No.1 (1981), p.71). Outka also under-explores the role, in love, of desire and of the ontological relation between self and other, attention to which would arguably help him fend off the criticism that he ‘appears to share Hare’s assumptions concerning the basic integrity of the self’ (Colin Grant, ‘For the Love of God: Agape’ *Journal of Religion Ethics* Vol.24 (1996), p.14).

<sup>287</sup> This is for instance recognised by D’Arcy who argues for a self-giving movement outward toward the other but who also insists that ‘the fine point of personality must always remain untouched’ (Martin D’Arcy (1962) *The Mind and Heart of Love. Lion and Unicorn. A Study in Eros and Agape*. Collins, London, p.314). Robert Merrihew Adams argues that self-concern is necessary also from the sheer perspective of following Christian virtues such as gratitude and penitence, while an ‘already satisfied rather than a striving self-interest’ is proper to agapeic love insofar as the Christian is asked to rejoice in the goods given to him (Robert Merrihew Adams, ‘Pure Love’, *The Journal of Religious Ethics* Vol.8, No.1 (1980), p.94).

<sup>288</sup> This has been highlighted particularly by feminists. See e.g. Andolsen, who finds that Christian understandings of selfless love tend to evoke the spectre of a woman without needs, desires or personality. In reference to Margaret Farley, Andolsen observes that feminists are often sceptical of accounts of love emphasising other-regard and tend to value attempts to avoid undue self-giving by reference to receptivity only where this is unambiguously seen as an *activity* (see e.g. Andolsen, *Agape*, p.77). As briefly discussed below, ideal or true love is here often understood in terms of a mutual relationality and friendship, which Christian feminists frequently conceptualise in Trinitarian terms (e.g. Andolsen (see above), and Margaret Farley ‘New patterns of relationship: beginnings of a moral revolution’ in Walter Burkhardt (ed.) *Woman: New Dimensions*. Paulist Press, New York. Elizabeth Johnson (1992) *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*. Crossroads, New York; Rosemary Radford Ruether (1993) *Sexism and God-talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*. Beacon Press, Boston). A more recent feminist argument has, on the other hand,

consideration of how the (inevitable) relation between self and other can be ordered in a way that does justice to the individuality of both, and a re-consideration of the role of self-interest, self-concern and, indeed, self-love. At the same time, a valid account of love will have to avoid conflating love with a mere assertion of power.<sup>289</sup> It must address the ambiguity as well as the potentially revelatory qualities of human desire. It must take seriously the human desire for, and experience of, self-renunciation and self-transcendence, and give consideration to the Christian notion, stressed by Nygren, of love being associated with God and of 'love at its source, bringing goodness into being.'<sup>290</sup>

All of this is recognised by Tillich and Murdoch who, I will argue, attempt to demonstrate the inter-dependence of selfless love and human flourishing from, and without giving up, their respective Christian and atheistic perspectives. With them, I take the above difficulties as an invitation to reconsider the compatibility of selfless love and human flourishing and, with this, the nature of the self and of love.

### 3.3 Conclusion: the Quest for 'Synthesis'

There have, of course, been many efforts by Christian theologians to unify eros and agape,<sup>291</sup> or, similarly, a self-fulfilling and a self-giving kind of love. Frequent themes in

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warned against quick dismissals of Christian notions of kenosis, renunciation, and vulnerability, which are here perceived as potential pre-requisites for the self-empowerment of the oppressed (e.g. Sarah Coakley, 'Kenosis and Subversion: On the Repression of 'Vulnerability' in Christian Feminist Writing' in Daphne Hampson (ed.) (1996) *Swallowing a Fishbone? Feminist Theologians Debate Christianity*. SPCK, London).

<sup>289</sup> Martin D'Arcy considers the existentialist notion that 'existence precedes essence' responsible for a reduction of other-love to power and of self-love to pride. He considers this existentialist principle to sever the essential principle of human self-enclosedness or self-completeness from the existential principle of the human being's inability to 'subsist by himself' (D'Arcy, *Mind and Heart of Love*, p.314). As D'Arcy argues, the existentialist consequently 'ceases to be a self', thereby implicitly demonstrating the necessary unity of the two loves (D'Arcy, *Mind and Heart of Love*, p.304).

<sup>290</sup> Yves Congar (1983) *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*. Vol.II. Herder and Herder, New York, p.86.

<sup>291</sup> Some of these have already been noted in above references. Eberhard Jüngel has a similar aim when he defines 'love [as] the event of a yet greater selflessness within great self-relatedness' (Eberhard Jüngel (1983) *God as the Mystery of the World: on the foundation of the theology of the crucified one in the dispute between theism and atheism*. T&T Clark, Edinburgh, p.318). Even Karl Barth, initially highly sceptical of eros, increasingly challenged a dichotomisation of eros and agape, and sought to accommodate eros in Christian love (See especially Karl Barth (1960) *Church Dogmatics* III/2 and IV/2 (ed. Geoffrey Bromiley, Thomas Torrance). T&T Clark, Edinburgh; for a helpful overview of Barth's complex understanding of the relation between

such efforts are that self-giving love allows for, depends on, or demands, an element of self-interest or self-love; and that self-giving love entails, or has its proper place in, mutual relationships. Some theologians, such as Daniel Day Williams, also want to include God's own love in such an integration of love.<sup>292</sup> The numerous contributions to the question of love, some of which have been referenced above, are indicative of the complexity of the topic and serve as a warning that the considerations put forth in this thesis are inevitably limited in their scope and originality, and will share much in common with existing accounts of love. This includes particularly many of the above-referenced thinkers' appreciation of the extent to which conceptualisation of love are inter-dependent with conceptualisations of the human self and its relation to the worldly and transcendent other; and their attention to the place and role of self-regard, self-love and mutuality in love.

Unlike some of the above-mentioned accounts, my approaching the question of love via the thought of Tillich and Murdoch will also draw attention to different dimensions or levels of selfhood, and to the place of desire in love. It has also become evident that I address the question of love with a particular focus on the concept of 'selfless love'. As already indicated, this is because the concept of 'selfless love', on the one hand, reflects the other-centredness of Christian love, which constitutes a focal point of the present discussion. In order to underline my intention to examine whether selfless love can legitimately be understood as a love which builds up the self, I consider selfless love in distinction from self-denying or self-sacrificial love (though it may well be that these latter concepts have their place when understood in the perspective of a truly selfless love). By referring to selfless love—that is, by considering selflessness and love in conjunction with one another—I also wish to distance myself from those who make a Christian duty or command of sheer selflessness or self-sacrifice, and to open the door

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eros and agape see David Clough 'Eros and Agape in Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* Vol2, No.2 (2000)).

<sup>292</sup> Williams, *The Spirit and the Forms of Love*.

to an integration of other-centred and desirous love. My decision to focus on the notion of 'selfless love' furthermore stems from the fact that it reflects Sartre's assertion of the relative self-lessness of the human being. If Sartre's thought is given special consideration here then this is because, despite his own, ultimate rejection of a love truly centred on the other and seeking his Good, Sartre's insight into the unreality of a fixed, object-like self and his simultaneous attempt to foster human freedom and individuality potentially point to a connection between selfless love and human flourishing. As I will suggest, this ambiguity at least constitutes one of the reasons for Tillich's and Murdoch's interest in his thought.

In drawing on the thought of Paul Tillich and Iris Murdoch, the present exploration also seeks to set itself apart from those who consider the defence, and also perhaps the critique, of selfless love as an inner-Christian problem. The following conversation takes place between two complementary thinkers: Tillich, who seeks to draw on and incorporate the views and concerns of the non-believer into his theology, and Murdoch, who recognises, and seeks to compensate for, the moral losses implied in the collapse of theism. As such, the thesis considers the meaning and place of selfless love both from a religious *and* from a secular perspective. A final distinctive characteristic of the present approach lies in the fact that it seeks to follow Tillich and Murdoch in combining an existential and an ontological perspective. Feminist debates often focus on (female) experiences, say, of existential desire and oppression to the exclusion of considering the ontological nature of the human self and its relation to the o/Other. Ethical debates, similarly, often avoid rooting their recommendations for external human behaviour ontologically. Theological debates, on the other hand, do not always incorporate the human being's existential experience.

By contrast, the present discussion seeks to understand love in reference to the nature of being, including that of the self, but also considers an existential perspective on

human experiences of being an important source for understanding the nature of being and that of the human self in particular. This will lead us in the direction of the kind of relational understanding of the human self, without which selfless love cannot, as I will suggest, be justified. I will now begin the present enquiry into the validity of selfless love with an examination of Tillich's account of the self.

## Chapter 4 – Paul Tillich’s account of the self

Paul Tillich shares many of the concerns which occupied the existentialist philosophy of his day, even before these reached what Tillich considers to be their most radical, consistent, and psychologically adequate formulation in Sartre.<sup>293</sup> Influenced by the thinking of Nietzsche and Heidegger, Tillich, too, sought to promote the individual’s self-affirmation and self-realisation, his intrinsic power for a greater fullness of being—and to do so not in denial, but in the face of, the darker sides of reality. As will become apparent throughout the following, Tillich indeed agrees with Nietzsche, Freud, Sartre and others that the human being is characterised by a passionate life urge or drive towards self-actualisation, freedom and individuality. That is, he considers Nietzsche’s will to power, Freud’s libido, and Sartre’s drive towards free self-creation testimonies to a self-assertive and typically desirous life force destined to surface. He thus agrees with my earlier proposal that Christianity must make sense of this drive inhering in the human being, and, without suggesting that this task is in any way completed, considers the Reformer’s push for the ‘development of individual personality’ an important instance, even a breakthrough, of this force in Christianity.<sup>294</sup>

Like Sartre, the philosophers of life, psychoanalysts and others, Tillich considers it proper for the existential human being to use his creative freedom to develop his individual personality and to empower himself. Like them, he sees this as crucial to overcoming stifling constraints imposed on the individual by false moralities, whether these be characterised as bourgeois conventionalism (Nietzsche), societal taboos (Freud) or bad faith (Sartre). At the same time, Tillich, more than the above authors, recognises the potentially dark implications of this drive. He judges that it is precisely the emphasis

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<sup>293</sup> Tillich, *TCB*, p.149.

<sup>294</sup> Tillich in Guy Hammond, ‘Individualisation and the quest for meaning’ in Gert Hummel (ed.) (1998) *Truth and History-A Dialogue with Paul Tillich: Proceedings of the VI International Symposium Held in Frankfurt/Main 1996*. De Gruyter, Berlin, p.189.

on the individual and his personality, that has ‘exposed individuals to the danger of secularisation, i.e. to emptiness and the loss of meaningful content’ as evidenced in ‘modern individualism’.<sup>295</sup>

It is with respect to this ambiguity that Tillich considers particularly Sartre’s account of the human condition to be so insightful. It rightly stresses the need for individualisation and freedom, but also testifies to the despair of the contemporary human being, as was shown above.<sup>296</sup> Tillich, so I will argue in the following, attributes this despair to a tendency among the mentioned authors, and Sartre in particular, to attempt to overcome the stifling heteronomy of an oppressive divine being by absolutising the existential individual and his drives such that the human being’s ‘sensed need’ or ‘longing for salvation’ came to be ignored.<sup>297</sup> The proclamation of the death of God has led the philosophers of life and their relatives in (secular) existentialism to, so to speak, subject the human being to oppressive autonomy. The eventual result of this loss of the universal is that ‘the very possibility of meaning itself’ is undermined; consequently, the ‘Protestant accentuation on the meaning of the individual, his sin and forgiveness, is lost’ too.<sup>298</sup>

Coupled with his understanding of Biblical Revelation, Tillich takes this insufficiency of existentialism as his cue for developing an understanding of the human person that avoids falling into the extremes of either heteronomy or autonomy. In order to do so, he considers it necessary to distinguish, contra Sartre, between two inter-dependent dimensions or manners of being.<sup>299</sup> It is with his resulting synthesis of

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<sup>295</sup> Hammond and Tillich in Hammond, ‘Individualisation’, pp.189, 193.

<sup>296</sup> Tillich distinguishes between three dimensions of Existentialism, all of which he considers relevant. While he traces Existentialism as ‘point of view’ back to Augustine (and thus Plato), he considers Existentialism as ‘protest’ and as ‘expression’ typical of the 20<sup>th</sup> century only (Tillich, *TCB*, p.126).

<sup>297</sup> Pattison, *God and Being*, pp.28f.

<sup>298</sup> George McLean ‘Paul Tillich’s Existential Philosophy of Protestantism’ in Thomas O’Meara, Donald Weisser (eds.) (1965) *Paul Tillich in Catholic Thought*. Darton, Longman and Todd, London, p.47.

<sup>299</sup> This already indicates that, contrary to some critics, the human being is not solely or consistently Tillich’s starting point. Tillich similar veers back and forth between taking his starting point in philosophy and in Revelation (see e.g. the transition in Tillich, *ST I*, p.310). This is connected with disagreement about Tillich’s relative essentialism and existentialism: while Hamilton for instance accuses him of never leaving

existentialist and essentialist elements that we must begin the following discussion of Tillich's own account to the self.

#### 4.1 Tillich's ontology of essence and existence

Tillich not only shares some of the existentialist philosophers' concerns, as outlined above, but also their general interest in existence as the foundation and the subject matter of human inquiry as such. He firmly rejects all attempts to escape from finite existence into other-worldly utopias, and, though maintaining the authority of biblical Revelation, argues that this must be oriented precisely towards a transformation of and not an escape from existence. Existence, Tillich argues, provides the form for revelation which must be correlated to it—a notion much criticised<sup>300</sup> yet, as the pastoral worker will confirm, broadly and often beneficially applied. Theology is thus necessarily vested and engaged, its task being to provide answers to the questions of the existential human being, as conveyed for instance in philosophy as well as in art and culture. Analyses of existence must be theology's starting point, first and foremost, for the sake of relevance and purposiveness.

While theology can only point to, rather than effect, a transformation of existence, and while it can only do so by drawing on revelation, Tillich argues that existence sets the paradigm for theological truth claims insofar as 'no statement about God can be made which is not rooted in the correlation between man's self-awareness

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Hegelian essentialism behind, Weigel claims that his 'ontology is existentialist' (Kenneth Hamilton (1963) *The System and the Gospel. A Critique of Paul Tillich*. SCM, London, p.182; Gustave Weigel 'The Theological Significance of Paul Tillich' in O'Meara, Weisser (eds.) *Paul Tillich in Catholic Thought*, p.11). Tillich's dialogical method, his correlation of experience and Revelation and his notion that the unconditioned is present to the human being in the depth of his reason means, however, that he precisely seeks to bridge both.

<sup>300</sup> Critics include in particular scholars writing in the tradition of Karl Barth, in response to whose dialectical approach Tillich developed his correlation method (e.g. Alexander McKelway (1964) *The Systematic Theology of Paul Tillich: A Review and Analysis*. John Knox Press, Richmond, p.268), but, from very different angles, also David Tracy (David Tracy 'Tillich and Contemporary Theology', in James Luther Adams, Wilhelm Pauck, Roger Lincoln Shinn, (eds.) (1985) *The Thought of Paul Tillich*. Harper & Row, San Francisco, p.266), and Mary Daly (Mary Daly (1985) *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*. Beacon Press, Boston, pp.72f), among others.

and the experience of the divine presence'.<sup>301</sup> Existence is authoritative insofar as it is only existential man who can engage in the pursuit of knowledge such that true knowledge (as opposed to futile speculation) must be rooted in the concrete. As one commentator summarises Tillich's position, 'if a theologian is to understand the God-man relationship and make it understandable to his fellowmen, he must be speaking about the "man" which everyone experiences'.<sup>302</sup>

However, according to Tillich it is precisely the existential human being, who, on account of asking about himself, points beyond himself and indeed becomes *intelligible* only in light of what lies beyond himself. The human being in existence is itself 'the door to the deeper levels of reality'.<sup>303</sup> In a clear departure from Sartre, Tillich thus uses his and others' engagement with human existence to justify an ontology which distinguishes between essence and existence and which considers these two dimensions to be originally and properly united rather than standing in a logical or temporal order.<sup>304</sup> He considers his unique symbiosis of existentialist and essentialist elements<sup>305</sup> to be a continuation of the Platonic-Augustinian approach to philosophy, an approach which he refers to as 'ontological' and which he contrasts with Anselm's and Aquinas' 'cosmological' approach (the latter being traced, somewhat controversially, through Duns Scotus and Ockham to Kant and Barth).<sup>306</sup> The specificity of this approach lies, he argues, in an emphasis on a mystical identity of the human being and God over a non-identity between them.<sup>307</sup> Famously, Tillich considers the personal God a 'symbol' for

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<sup>301</sup> Paul Tillich (1960) 'The Impact of Psychotherapy on Theological Thought' in Paul Tillich (2008) *Ausgewählte Texte*. De Gruyter, Berlin, p.395.

<sup>302</sup> Kenan Osborne (1969) *New being: a study on the relationship between conditioned and unconditioned being according to Paul Tillich*. Nijhoff, The Hague, p.201. Of no further import to our argument, the extensive debates on the very nature and meaning of the 'correlation method' will not be discussed here.

<sup>303</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.70.

<sup>304</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.183.

<sup>305</sup> Famously Tillich rejects the label of an 'existentialist theologian' as well as seeking to overcome Hegelian essentialism (e.g. Paul Tillich, 'The Philosophical Background of my Theology' in Paul Tillich (1989) *Main Works* Vol.1 (ed. Günther Wenz). De Gruyter, Berlin, p.416).

<sup>306</sup> Tillich, 'The Two Types of Philosophy of Religion', p.289. Although not making this precise contrast, Murdoch can—roughly—be placed in the same tradition.

<sup>307</sup> As several critics have pointed out, Tillich uses the concept of 'being' in a confusing number of unspecified ways (cf. e.g. McQuarrie (as pointed out by Mary Sheehan (1972) *Religious Experience in the*

‘Being-itself’, which lies beyond language and ‘beyond the contrast of essential and existential being’.<sup>308</sup> He understands God less in terms of Anselm’s *ens realissimum*, i.e. as a highest or universal Being distinct from the human person, but as ‘the power in everything that has power’.<sup>309</sup> In its essence, the human self is seen to ‘participate’ in this power, which is indicative of being-itself.<sup>310</sup> Likewise, being-itself simultaneously transcends, and participates in, the human self, to whom it manifests itself as the ‘power of being’ and as the ‘ground of being’.<sup>311</sup> This participation of being-itself, or universal being, in finite, or particular, being is, for instance, indicated by the human being’s access to universals, by his ability to ask the ontological question (i.e. ‘what is being-itself?’) and by ‘the infinite drive of the finite beyond itself’.<sup>312</sup> As these appeals to the human capacity for knowledge indicate, the central connecting link between the human being and being-itself is the human being’s share in Reason, which constitutes the primary reason for why Revelation refers to the human being as the ‘*imago dei*’.<sup>313</sup> Only because the human being has a reasonable structure, which mirrors that of the divine logos ‘[can] the divine logos [...] appear as man without destroying the humanity of man’, or can there be Revelation without heteronomy.<sup>314</sup>

Tillich furthermore distinguishes being-itself from human being in two respects. Firstly, being-itself, as the power of being, ‘is the ground of the ontological structure of being’; in reference to Böhme, Schelling, and Hegel, Tillich argues that this means that being-itself must contain a ‘negative principle’.<sup>315</sup> Yet since being-itself ‘is not *subject to*

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*thought of Paul Tillich: An introduction.* Thesis for L.Th. at Leuven, p.107), as well as Alistair Macleod (1973) *Paul Tillich: An Essay on the Role of Ontology in His Philosophical Theology*. Allen and Unwin, London; Adrian Thatcher (1978) *The Ontology of Paul Tillich*, p.159). While this creates problematic ambiguities in Tillich’s thinking, these must be left aside for the moment.

<sup>308</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, pp.271, 262.

<sup>309</sup> Tillich, ‘The Two Types of Philosophy of Religion’, p.298.

<sup>310</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.263.

<sup>311</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, pp.212, 261f, 272. Leonard Wheat has argued that Tillich pushes this so far as to deny all non-identity of God and man (Leonard Wheat (1970) *Paul Tillich’s Dialectical Humanism. Unmasking the God above God*. The Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore).

<sup>312</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, pp.195, 212, 182, *ST II*, p.36.

<sup>313</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, pp.190, 287f.

<sup>314</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.288.

<sup>315</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, pp.210, 265.

this structure', it is in no way *compromised* by non-being: in being-itself being continually overcomes non-being.<sup>316</sup> This dynamism within being-itself is seen to indicate that God himself is dynamic—that, symbolically speaking, he has a 'life'.<sup>317</sup> At the same time, the fact that in being-itself non-being is *overcome* signifies that being-itself precedes the distinction between finitude—which Tillich defines as 'being, limited by non-being'—and its potential negation, infinity.<sup>318</sup> This implies that it precedes the distinction also between existential and essential being, which Tillich associates with 'changeable finite and mortal' being and 'unchanging, infinite, and eternal' being respectively.<sup>319</sup> Secondly, because in being-itself being overcomes non-being, it is in no way estranged from, but entirely unified with, itself.<sup>320</sup> It is on account of this perfect unity that being-itself can separate from itself in order to participate in finitude without losing itself. As discussed in depth below, the human being is, by contrast, caught in a tension between finitude and infinity, and legitimately feels threatened by non-being. Awareness of the threat of non-being leads the human person to actualise being over *against* her relation to non-being. This constitutes a necessary step towards the fullness of being human insofar as it enables her to attain consciousness; at the same time, however, it leads her to become estranged from her essence, which entails both being and non-being and by which she participates in the ground and power of her being.<sup>321</sup>

Tillich conceptualises this by distinguishing between an existential and an essential self. The existential is the result of the actualisation of the freedom and power of being to stand 'outside the divine life' which sustains the same freedom and power; the essential signifies unity with the divine life that the existential self separates itself

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<sup>316</sup> Emphasis added. Tillich, *ST I*, p.265, *TCB*, p.180.

<sup>317</sup> Tillich, *TCB*, p.180; *ST I*, p.268.

<sup>318</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.210.

<sup>319</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.262; Pattison, *God and Being*, p.29. Though influenced by classical thought, Tillich's use of ontological terms is different from that of the Thomistic tradition.

<sup>320</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.268: though note that this does not mean that there is no separation in God; rather it means that this separation is continually overcome.

<sup>321</sup> Tillich, *ST II*, pp.33-50.

from.<sup>322</sup> The existential self, which is the actual, living self ultimately depends on its essential ground, and must thus strive towards reunification with it. Such reunification can be attained because being-itself (God) participates even in the ‘estrangement’ of the existential self (in Christ).<sup>323</sup> Where the existential self accepts this, estrangement is conquered and essential and existential self are consciously united—a notion further examined below.

According to Tillich, it is his ‘doctrine concerning man in which the influence of existentialism is important’.<sup>324</sup> Other influences with which Tillich aligns himself include the Platonic-Augustinian tradition, Aristotle, Schelling, Fichte, Hegel, Heidegger, and Nietzsche. Coupled with his recourse also to Christian revelation, this broad array of sources arguably contributes to perceived inconsistencies in his methodological lines of procedure. As Hamilton for instance observes, Tillich follows his existential method in beginning his enquiries with the human being in the first two volumes of the *Systematic Theology*, yet violates this principle and begins with God in the last volume of the same work.<sup>325</sup> In our analysis of Tillich’s account of love, we will, similarly, come to find that Tillich oscillates between deriving his argument from his ontological presuppositions and from invoking the authority of Revelation. Tillich’s eclectic use of sources arguably also contributes to criticisms that Tillich often falls into conceptual unclarity such that ‘there cannot’, according to MacLeod, ‘be a single correct account of his ontological position’.<sup>326</sup> His re-interpretations of classical philosophical concepts have been matched by wilful re-interpretations of Biblical images, which have generated further criticism.<sup>327</sup> An incongruity I will come to lament in the context of his account of love concerns his claim that the unconditioned can only be spoken of symbolically, while simultaneously,

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<sup>322</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, pp.284, 290.

<sup>323</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.300; *ST II*, pp.144f.

<sup>324</sup> In Weigel, ‘The Theological Significance’, p.23.

<sup>325</sup> Hamilton, *The System and the Gospel*, p.100.

<sup>326</sup> MacLeod, *Paul Tillich*, p.18. See also Thatcher, *The Ontology of Paul Tillich*, pp.158-161.

<sup>327</sup> E.g. George Tavad, and Avery Dulles in George Tavad (1962) *Paul Tillich and the Christian message*. Burns & Oates, London, pp.188f, 192.

and somewhat arbitrarily, elevating the language of being as a ‘non-symbolic’ way of referring to the transcendent ground of being.<sup>328</sup>

While these criticisms highlight certain difficulties in Tillich’s thought they are qualified by the fact that they tend to rest on principles other than Tillich’s own. Tillich’s argument *is* somewhat circular insofar as his interpretation of existence and his interpretation of Revelation (which together issue in his ontology) mutually inform one another. This, and the seemingly wilful definitions of concepts it implies, is the inevitable implication of the correlative method as at least Tillich applies it; his application of it entails his claim that truth is discerned in a dialogical encounter between the existential human being and his ground. It not only means that Tillich’s style thus has a conversational quality, but also implies that, although there is objective and eternal truth (‘essence’), truth lies beyond language such that the human being cannot get through to this truth rationally and, thus, conceptually. Truth is properly conveyed—or conveys itself—in living symbols: talk of God is ‘unavoidably’ symbolic.<sup>329</sup> Discursive concepts are malleable and, ultimately, inadequate tools to convey these symbols. This perspective is rooted in Tillich’s understanding of the human being’s relation to the God, his understanding of which he illustrates in reference to the ontological argument.

In line with the above, Tillich considers Anselm’s ontological argument useless if deemed to give a rational description of the being of God.<sup>330</sup> Anselm famously sought ‘a single argument that needed nothing but itself for proof [...] that God really exists; that he is the supreme good, who depends on nothing else’, and observed that it is logically impossible to think that God does not exist once we recognise God as being not a mere thing but ‘that than which a greater cannot be thought’.<sup>331</sup> Anselm further inferred that

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<sup>328</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.264.

<sup>329</sup> Paul Tillich ‘The Word of God’ in Paul Tillich (1987) *Main Works*, Vol.4 (ed. John Clayton). De Gruyter, Berlin, p.411.

<sup>330</sup> Tillich, ‘The Two Types of Philosophy of Religion’, p.300.

<sup>331</sup> Anselm (2001) *Proslogion with the replies of Gaunilo and Anselm* (tr. Thomas Williams). Hackett, Indianapolis, p.2.

as ‘that than which a greater cannot be thought’, God must necessarily exist not only in thought but in reality, which is ‘greater’ than thought: if he existed ‘only in the understanding’ something greater than God could be imagined such that one would not in fact be thinking about God in the first place.<sup>332</sup> On the basis of this logic, Anselm goes on to extend his ‘proof’ to God’s various perfections such as His mercy and justice. Without rejecting this argument *in toto*, Tillich argues that *qua* rational discourse it can never break through to the ultimate ground of being; to suggest otherwise betrays, he suggests, a degree of Pelagianism. This is because ‘ultimate reality’ or the ‘ground of the soul’ lies beyond language and cannot therefore be described literally and in itself.<sup>333</sup> It is precisely (and only) when this is attempted that the ‘Word of God’ begins to conflict with human rationality, and that theology and philosophy are rent apart.<sup>334</sup>

The ontological argument is, however, indicative ‘of the *relation* of our mind to Being as such’.<sup>335</sup> It supports the above-mentioned insight that finite being and being-itself participate in one another such that ‘our mind implies *principia per se nota* which have immediate evidence whenever they are noticed’, such as the transcendentals.<sup>336</sup> Tillich—like Murdoch, who draws on Tillich in this respect,—considers the ontological argument expressive of the fact that ‘an awareness of the infinite is included in man’s awareness of finitude. Man knows he is finite, that he is excluded from an infinity which nevertheless belongs to him’.<sup>337</sup> From the fact that the human being is capable of asking about and reflecting on the structure of being, including his own, Tillich infers that the human person is ‘that being in whom all levels of being are united and approachable’.<sup>338</sup> While

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<sup>332</sup> Anselm, *Proslogion*, pp.2, 7.

<sup>333</sup> Tillich, ‘The Word of God’, p.413.

<sup>334</sup> Tillich, ‘The Two Types of Philosophy of Religion’, p.300.

<sup>335</sup> Emphasis added. Tillich, ‘The Two Types of Philosophy of Religion’, p.292.

<sup>336</sup> Tillich, ‘The Two Types of Philosophy of Religion’, p.292.

<sup>337</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.228.

<sup>338</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.187.

the levels of being characterise ‘all living beings [...]’, they are most perfectly present in the human being; indeed, they ‘are he himself’, Tillich argues.<sup>339</sup>

He considers the structure of being to entail four levels. The remainder of the chapter will mirror this four-level structure. The first of these is the ‘basic ontological structure which is the implicit condition of the ontological question’, i.e. the subject-object structure of being presupposing the self-world relation.<sup>340</sup> The second level consists in the ontological polarities of individuality and universality, dynamics and form, freedom and destiny, whose polar elements express ‘the self-relatedness of being’, and ‘the belongingness of being’ respectively.<sup>341</sup> To these are added, at the third level, the ‘characteristics of being which are the conditions of existence’; they ‘express[...] the power of being to exist’ and the ontologically inescapable ‘difference between essential and existential being’ and their relation to one another and to Being-itself.<sup>342</sup> Fourthly, come ‘the categories of being and knowing’, which, for reasons of space and immediate relevance to our argument, will be discussed only implicitly.<sup>343</sup> It is by way of analysing these ontological structures in the human self that Tillich’s account of the essential (and thus redeemed) nature of the human being but also his picture of the existential predicament and its relation to human essence becomes evident. It is the task, then, of the following discussion to review his account of the four levels of ontology with a view to establishing Tillich’s understanding of the self, and with particular reference to Sartre.

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<sup>339</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.188; It is precisely this ‘structure of a being which has history [and] underlies all historical changes’, the human being ‘as he is given in present experience and in historical memory’ which, for him, is the subject of ‘an ontological and theological doctrine of man’ (Tillich, *ST I*, pp.185f).

<sup>340</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.182.

<sup>341</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.183.

<sup>342</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.183.

<sup>343</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, pp.182f.

## 4.2 The Nature of the Self

### 4.2.1 The self-world relation as the basic ontological structure

Tillich begins his enquiry into the human self with the observation that ‘man experiences *himself* as having a *world* to which he belongs’.<sup>344</sup> Self-consciousness and world-consciousness are inter-dependent. Without awareness of, and thus relation to, the world, ‘self-consciousness would have no content, for every content, psychic as well as bodily, lies within the universe’.<sup>345</sup> Equally, ‘world-consciousness is possible only on the basis of a fully developed self-consciousness’, which implies self-relatedness (a conclusion, Tillich argues, that cannot be proved as wrong without being implicitly affirmed).<sup>346</sup> The interdependent polarity of world-consciousness and self-consciousness constitutes, for Tillich, the ‘basic ontological structure [which] implies all the others’, including the ‘subject-object structure of reason’.<sup>347</sup> Tillich’s assertion of this polarity is expressive of his sense of the centrality of human experience, but also of his awareness of the extent to which this experience depends on reason. Without *experiencing himself* in distinction from, but in relation to, the world, the human being would be neither inclined nor able to ask about the self in the first place. Indeed, he would lack the ability to ask anything at all. Given *that* the human being experiences himself as a self, he cannot but enquire into the self. In Tillich’s existentialism, the legitimacy of and need for such enquiry thus hinges, not on abstract and speculative conclusions about ‘whether selves exist’ but, on the human being’s ‘aware[ness] of self-relatedness’.<sup>348</sup>

At the same time, this experienced awareness and relationality rests, as Kelsey rightly stresses, on reason.<sup>349</sup> Without reason, which is ‘the logos of being’, being

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<sup>344</sup> Emphasis added; Tillich, *ST I*, p.188.

<sup>345</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.189.

<sup>346</sup> Tillich in David Kelsey (1967) *The Fabric of Paul Tillich’s Theology*. Yale University Press, New Haven, p.68.

<sup>347</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.189f.

<sup>348</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.188.

<sup>349</sup> Kelsey, *The Fabric of Paul Tillich’s Theology*, p.68.

‘would be chaos’ or, in other words, not being ‘but only the possibility of it’.<sup>350</sup> Reason creates structure: it allows the self to be a ‘centred structure’, i.e. a separate individual distinct from its surroundings and able to bundle ‘all contents of awareness’.<sup>351</sup> This ‘self-centeredness’ signifies the human being’s distinctness from the world as a separate individual, and is thus a ‘quality’ of what will shortly be described as ‘individualisation’.<sup>352</sup> It provides the human being with that ‘ego-self’ on account of which it ‘possesses’ itself ‘in the form of self-consciousness’.<sup>353</sup> The extent to which the human individual can organise his environment such that the latter becomes a world which is a ‘structured whole’ depends not only on his degree of ‘centredness’, however, but also on the fact that reason inheres in the world.<sup>354</sup> Subjective in the self’s case and objective in the world’s, reason both particularises and connects, Tillich argues. It is on account of its subjective share in objective reason that the centred self is also ‘aware that it *belongs* to that at which it looks’: the ‘ego-self’ *has* a world and is also *in* this world.<sup>355</sup> The fact that the self is also in the world and a part of it means that while it transcends the world it is also conditioned by the world.

Tillich thus asserts the unity of the self, yet also argues, contra Descartes, that the self’s unity is not a given unity but dependent on the self’s openness to, and relation, with the world.<sup>356</sup> The self is what Tillich calls a ‘centred’ structure because, and insofar as, it has a world. As Scharlemann observes, Tillich is asserting the unity of the self ‘over against’, but also as dependent on, ‘the unity outside itself’, the unity of the world.<sup>357</sup> At the same time, he accounts for the existentialist sense of the disunity and indeed emptiness of the self, by arguing that existence implies precisely a rupturing of the inter-

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<sup>350</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.190.

<sup>351</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.190; Tillich, *ST III*, p.39.

<sup>352</sup> Tillich, *ST III*, p.34.

<sup>353</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.188.

<sup>354</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.190.

<sup>355</sup> Emphasis added. Tillich, *ST I*, p.188.

<sup>356</sup> We will encounter a similar approach to the self in Iris Murdoch.

<sup>357</sup> Robert Scharlemann ‘Christianity and the End of Modernity: Tillich and Troeltsch’ in Robert Scharlemann (2004) *Religion and Reflection. Essays on Paul Tillich’s Theology* (ed. Eerdmann Sturm), p.248.

relatedness of self and world.<sup>358</sup> This rupture is a central mark of existence, and promoted by the existential self's continued attempts to emancipate itself from the world. As a result, the self's own status (and self-awareness) as a 'centred structure', and that of the world as a 'structured' whole, is impaired.

With the above picture, Tillich incorporates various observations of Sartre's about the self while casting a different light on them. Similar to Sartre, Tillich for instance considers the polarity of world-consciousness and self-consciousness to imply that the self can precisely not be regarded as 'a thing which may or may not exist'.<sup>359</sup> Like Sartre, Tillich considers such an idea to conjure up notions of the self as a static object existing in a transcendental realm, which is in turn seen to be indicative of the 'supernaturalism' Tillich, too, seeks to leave behind.<sup>360</sup> He, like Sartre, thus associates the existential self with consciousness, and considers it a reality arising out of a dynamic relation with others and lacking the definite solidity it tends to claim. Insofar as this instability and dependency on others is expressive of the self's lack of self-sufficiency—its finite limitedness—Tillich can also be said to implicitly agree with Sartre that the existential self tends to experience its relationality as threatening. Tillich would then also insist, however, that the self can and must escape, not its dependency on relating to others but, its perception of this dependency as a threat. According to Tillich, the illusion of the existential self lies less in its aspirations towards substantial being than in its pretensions to autonomy. Contra Sartre, this implies also that the self must not strive to fill its initial emptiness of its own accord but precisely through entering into relation. In thus calling the self to transcend its existential inclinations, Tillich reveals his view that, while we know the self through existence, it is ultimately 'an original phenomenon

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<sup>358</sup> As one author puts it, Tillich's, like—one might add—Sartre's self 'does not itself have any content but bundles and coordinates' (Karin Grau (1999) *Healing Power' – Ansätze zu einer Theologie der Heilung im Werk Paul Tillichs*. Lit, Münster, p.194). I would add, however, that in doing so, Tillich's self acquires content.

<sup>359</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.188.

<sup>360</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.287.

which logically *precedes* all questions of existence'.<sup>361</sup> Tillich unravels the relation between these two dimensions of human selfhood, the existential and the essential, in the context of three pairs of ontological elements, which constitute the second dimension of the ontological structure.

#### 4.2.2 The ontological polarities constituting the self-world relation

##### *Individualisation and participation*

Tillich considers the above tension between what he has also called 'the self-relatedness of being', and 'the belongingness of being' to imply, firstly, the inter-dependent ontological elements of individualisation and participation.<sup>362</sup> He thereby underlines the observation already made above that the relation to oneself as a distinct individual is inter-dependent with a relationality characterised by the 'experience of being a part of something from which one is at the same time separated'.<sup>363</sup> With this, Tillich gives expression to his valuation of human individuality, but also to the conviction that such human individuality can be attained neither through mere self-relation nor through relations with a reality which is wholly other. Rather, human individuality is made possible on account of going out from self and participating in what is other from self but to which one nonetheless belongs.<sup>364</sup> Equally, human individuality is properly geared precisely towards fostering such participatory relations. The individual self is, firstly, called to participate in the world in general, which it has already been argued to be a part of. It is, secondly, called to participate in other human selves, however. This is because

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<sup>361</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.188.

<sup>362</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.183.

<sup>363</sup> Hammond, 'Individualisation', p.192.

<sup>364</sup> According to Roberts, this allows Tillich to bridge the supposed gap between nominalism and realism: 'against the former it affirms that the knower participates in what is knowable instead of being merely related to it. Against the latter it refuses to regard individualisation as somehow unreal as compared with universals' (David Roberts 'Paul Tillich's Doctrine of Man' in Charles Kegley, Robert Bretall (eds.) (1952) *The Theology of Paul Tillich*. Macmillan, New York, pp.108-131, p.116). See also McLean, *Paul Tillich's Existentialist Philosophy*, p.45.

the greater the simultaneous distinctness and continuity between self and other, the greater a degree of participation is possible: the human being can participate most fully in ‘that level of life which he is himself’.<sup>365</sup>

Tillich’s system thus implies that truly participatory relations with other human beings are a precondition for the development of individuality. As Roberts points out, Tillich understands human selfhood at its fullest to ‘reach the level of ‘personality’; correspondingly, participation of one human being in another culminates in ‘the level of ‘communion’—a kind of participation possible only with persons.<sup>366</sup> Similar to Buber’s notion that the personalisation of the human being depends on ‘I-Thou’ relations, to which we shall refer in the concluding chapter of this thesis, Tillich thus argues that the ‘encounter of person with person’ is the precondition for the development of the human being’s ‘personal life’, which Tillich considers to be connected also with her moral and spiritual life.<sup>367</sup> Since communion appears to depend on the consent, and the active participation of, all parties involved, Tillich can thus be said to consider individuality at its fullest to be dependent on mutuality.

The above has significant implications for the human being’s relation to being-itself. If the encounter with other persons is the context for the emergence of full human selfhood, then this suggests that it is the context wherein essential selfhood becomes manifest. This means that it is also the context in which the human being participates in the ground of its being, in being-itself. The individual’s participation in that which it is both distinct from, and yet belongs to, includes also, and indeed especially, its participation in being-itself. Tillich points to the possibility of such a relation with being-itself when he claims that being-itself actively participates in the self. The human being

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<sup>365</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.195. While Scharlemann may be right that ‘the more centred another self is, the more inaccessible this other becomes to the *power* of one’s own self’ this does not, for Tillich, mean that the other becomes intransigent or alien to the self therefore (as is, as Scharlemann rightly observes, assumed in postmodernism). On the contrary, perfect participation corresponds with the perfect centredness of the relating parties (Scharlemann, ‘Christianity and the End of Modernity’, p.251).

<sup>366</sup> Roberts, ‘Tillich’s Doctrine of Man’, p.116; Tillich, *ST I*, p.195.

<sup>367</sup> Tillich, *ST III*, p.43.

and being-itself thus appear to stand in the kind of full participation I have associated with mutuality and communion. In light of this, Tillich's reluctance to speak of man's relation with being-itself as one of communion, and his reluctance to underline the personal nature of the ground of the human being, appear somewhat wilful. In the next chapter, we will find that this has problematic consequences for Tillich's account of love. For the present purposes, one should note that Tillich's association of individualisation with personhood, and of participation with communion, though perhaps compromised or downplayed by other aspects of his thought, nonetheless implies an important foundation for our enquiry into the validity of selfless love.

These associations of Tillich's counter Sartrean and Nietzschean ideas that the individual is born out of a relation of power over, or control of, another. Tillich does not disagree with Sartre (or Heidegger) that, 'if he did not meet the resistance of other selves, every self would try to make himself absolute', and admits, equally, that it is only on account of the other's resistance against the self's attempts at making itself absolute that the person becomes aware of her individuality.<sup>368</sup> Tillich, however, considers the self's awareness of its individuality to derive, not so much from the frustration of its attempts at imposing itself on the other but, from its becoming aware of the appropriateness of the other's resistance against such attempts. Tillich's self arguably comes to recognise its individuality as a good by recognising another's individuality as an inviolable good. Recognition of the other's individuality or centredness is also the foundation for that participatory communion on account of which one's own individuality develops towards personality. While Tillich considers such participation necessary in order for the individual to be saved from being an 'empty form', he does not consider it to amount to determination by the other.<sup>369</sup> As indicated, the participation Tillich envisages is—at least at its fullest—mutual *and* based on a respect for individuality. In contrast to Nietzsche's

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<sup>368</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.196. Sartre, *BN*, p.245.

<sup>369</sup> McLean, *Paul Tillich's Existentialist Philosophy*, p.48.

and Sartre's and even Freud's emphasis on discerning how concessions to the other can be kept to a minimum, Tillich thus challenges the implicit assumption that relations between self and other are necessarily conflictual and proposes, contra Sartre, that individuality and relatedness are not only compatible but essentially inter-dependent. Meanwhile, Tillich's argument implies that it is precisely the failure to recognise this inter-dependence, which makes human relations in existence conflictual, such that the recognition and realisation of individuality and relatedness is, in turn, obstructed. Seeking unattainable autonomy, the existential human being has, as Nietzsche, Freud and Sartre attest, chosen individualisation over participation (or self-relatedness over belongingness to the world) and has, consequently, become an empty form. Given the destructive consequences this has for the self, this should not be endorsed and propagated; yet, given the same consequences, the existential human being cannot of his own accord restore the balance. While his individualisation results in a loss of world, and thus, in an empty self, his attempts at participation will most likely result in a loss of the self in what Tillich calls 'the collective'.<sup>370</sup>

### *Dynamics and Form*

The polarity of individualisation and participation illustrates Tillich's conviction that the structures of being imply neither a demand to submit to an alien heteronomous power nor the total autonomy of the human being. The other ontological polarities underline this endeavour. The polarity of dynamics and form expresses the fact that being is marked by a 'structure of vitality and intentionality'.<sup>371</sup> The dynamic vitality of the human being indicates her creative drive to affirm, assert and transcend herself, and can be

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<sup>370</sup> Tillich, *ST II*, p.83.

<sup>371</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.199.

associated with the human being's drive for 'self-integration', for 'self-creation' and for 'self-transcendence'.<sup>372</sup>

All of these movements, which Tillich considers to be circular, horizontal and vertical and which entail an element of 'self-identity' (or self-assertion) and of 'self-alteration', are movements of 'life' or of 'the actualisation of potential being'.<sup>373</sup> However, they achieve their goal only if rooted in 'meaningful structures' or forms.<sup>374</sup> The creation of the new self, or the transcendence of the self depends on the confrontation with 'universals'—on 'living in tension with (and toward) something objectively valid'.<sup>375</sup> Without this, Tillich argues, the creative dynamism of the self goes off in all directions and achieves nothing concrete—and certainly not full selfhood. The human being cannot be creative in a vacuum; her vitality must emerge out of and be 'directed towards meaningful contents': it must be 'formed'.<sup>376</sup> Likewise, 'forms' can be preserved only on the basis of being continually re-vitalised through being inhabited and developed. Tillich understands this inter-dependence of dynamics and form to signify the inter-dependence of being and becoming, which manifests itself particularly in the 'moral and cultural acts' of the existential human being, which Tillich associates with the 'growth of the individual'.<sup>377</sup>

It will be significant for our later argument on love that Tillich identifies the dynamic vitality of the human being with her spirit and thus with her capacity for transcending the 'organic realm', which she is at the same time a part of.<sup>378</sup> Drawing on Nietzsche's definition of spirit as 'the life which cuts into life itself', Tillich considers spirit to arise out of the organic realm, which it incorporates into itself, in order to break

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<sup>372</sup> Tillich, *ST III*, p.34.

<sup>373</sup> Tillich, *ST III*, pp.32-34.

<sup>374</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.200.

<sup>375</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.200.

<sup>376</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.200.

<sup>377</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.200.

<sup>378</sup> Tillich, *ST III*, p.12.

back into this same realm in a transformative way.<sup>379</sup> Indeed, Tillich's entire endorsement of the vitality and dynamism of the self arguably betrays his sympathies for Nietzsche's sense of a passionate, boundless, '*Schöpfungslust*', by which the human being strives to overcome and thus transcend himself in the face of those false and heteronomous bourgeois moralities which seek to negate this force, and thus the self.<sup>380</sup> Signifying the assertion of the human being's 'power to be', her 'a courage for self-affirmation [even] in the moment of being negated', Tillich's notion of vitality similarly resonates with Sartre's affirmation of the individual's capacity to transcend her situation, to liberate herself from conformity, to empower herself and attain a new authenticity.<sup>381</sup> It moreover indicates Tillich's agreement with Nietzsche, Sartre and, perhaps Freud, that a life-force inheres in the human being which neither can nor should be suppressed; this life-force lies at the origin of human cultural creativity, of the possibility of overcoming existential estrangement, and of the consequent fullness of being. (Though as we shall see, Tillich considers the effectiveness of this life force to depend on being-itself breaking into existence.)

Tillich also recognises that this force can turn against itself, however. This is the case where it severs itself from its counterpart and accepts no given form. Again, the drive 'beyond the given form through which it has being' is typical of the existential self.<sup>382</sup> Instead of transcending itself 'in terms of form', the existential self has been driven to break form and has thus moved towards chaos.<sup>383</sup> Once such an ontological balance has arisen, the self struggles to inhabit and fill form dynamically, and instead inhabits it rigidly and without content, thus making form a law unto itself. Similar to its swinging back and forth between loss of its world and loss of its self in the world, the

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<sup>379</sup> Tillich, *ST III*, p.29. Friedrich Nietzsche (2006) *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (tr. Adrian Del Caro). CUP, Cambridge, p.80.

<sup>380</sup> Tom Kleffmann (2003) *Nietzsche's Begriff des Lebens und die evangelische Theologie*. Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, p.474.

<sup>381</sup> Kleffmann, *Nietzsche's Begriff des Lebens*, p.459.

<sup>382</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.74.

<sup>383</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.74.

existential self thus tends to find itself continually swinging back and forth between law and chaos.

In particular, the conversation with Nietzsche, Freud and, to some extent, Sartre highlights another possible distortion of the balance between dynamics and form. These authors not only affirm the dynamic element of the human being but arguably also retain a sense of form. The self has directionality and intentionality in that it seeks not to dispense with form entirely, but to transcend given forms towards forms more congenial to its empowerment (such as an individual morality or authentic values). One might, however, argue that, although not necessarily identifiable with the self, the forms Nietzsche, Freud and Sartre deem to be congenial to this do not stand in a sufficiently polar relationship with the self's internal vital dynamism. The above authors indeed always seem close to considering the self's vitality to be the very guiding mechanism or criterion for this vitality. Lacking a truly conditioning counterpart, Nietzsche's vitality is thus 'infinite' to the point of 'demand[ing] self-deification' and of accepting the 'use of other people as means for one's own purposes'.<sup>384</sup> As Tillich recognises, and as Kleffmann shows in a study of theological receptions (and their ultimate limitations) of Nietzsche's 'Lebensbegriff', such vitality does not confront and tackle the threat of non-being as much as assert being over against non-being at all cost.<sup>385</sup> Ironically, rather than affirming the self, it denies the self in its true—that is, finite, relational, and dependent—reality. It would seem, then, that while the self's vital energy must not, for Tillich, be repressed, it does have to be rooted in, and directed towards, its source.

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<sup>384</sup> Kleffmann, *Nietzsche's Begriff des Lebens*, p.475; Jari Ristiniemi (1987) *Experiential Dialectics. An Inquiry into the Epistemological Status and the Methodological Role of the Experiential Core in Paul Tillich's Systematic Thought*. Almqvist & Wiksell International, Stockholm, p.62.

<sup>385</sup> Kleffmann, *Nietzsche's Begriff des Lebens*.

### *Freedom and destiny*

The final polarity of ontological elements, freedom and destiny, is most intricately intertwined with the third level of the self's ontological structure, that is with those 'characteristics of being which are the conditions of existence', and which explain the difference and relation between existence, essence and Being-itself.<sup>386</sup> Tillich associates this polarity most closely with the origins of the human being's actual estrangement from its essence: 'Freedom in polarity with destiny is', Tillich argues, 'the structural element which makes existence possible because it transcends the essential necessity of being without destroying it'.<sup>387</sup> Human freedom is 'identical with the fact that man is spirit', meaning that he is 'the dynamic unity of reason and power, of mental universality and vital individuality'.<sup>388</sup> Were the human being only mind, she would merely be 'statically related to the universals'; as spirit, however, she is 'creating in unity with the eternal forms and norms of being'.<sup>389</sup> Freedom allows the human being to move beyond a given situation by 'imagining and realising something new'; it allows her to transcend and actualise herself towards ever greater degrees of personality and community, to bring forth meaningful cultural products, and even to create things which are merely playful rather than geared towards self-transcendence.<sup>390</sup> Thus, the primary characteristic of freedom lies in its creativity, which Tillich associates with the human being's development of its moral and spiritual life.

However, while freedom is potentially infinite and can transcend even being as such, it cannot do so without being lost. Its rootedness in being means that where freedom leaves behind or denies being, it leaves behind itself, thus leading the human being into the kind of servitude characteristic of the existential self.<sup>391</sup> This is because

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<sup>386</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.183.

<sup>387</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.201.

<sup>388</sup> Tillich, 'The Conception of Man', *The Journal of Religion* Vol.19, No.3 (1939), p.206.

<sup>389</sup> Tillich, 'The Conception of Man', p.206.

<sup>390</sup> Freedom is not, therefore, law. Tillich, 'The Conception of Man', pp.206f.

<sup>391</sup> As Tillich points out, servitude would not be servitude if the self were not essentially free.

freedom cannot be exercised in a vacuum. It is always tied to a particular agent who exercises it in a particular cultural and historical context. Where it turns against these constraining factors it undermines itself. Since being is, according to Tillich, structured by reason, freedom cannot 'decide against reason', without deciding against its own 'essential content'.<sup>392</sup> In the case of the human being, the rootedness of freedom in being must also mean that it is intrinsically constrained by finitude and, indeed, by the culturally and historically shaped circumstances of the particular context and personality of its agent. Freedom cannot be exercised in a vacuum but only by a particular person, who has been shown to emerge in relation to her environment, in a particular context, and in respect of the characteristics of that person and context.

It is these inevitable conditioning factors, which Tillich groups under 'destiny': destiny is 'myself as *given*, formed by nature, history, and myself'.<sup>393</sup> In essence, destiny does not so much compromise freedom as constitute its precondition. It provides freedom with an agent, a context and an object. Destiny is thus distinct from fate. While one's fate can merely be accepted, one's destiny demands to be shaped or 'realise[d]'.<sup>394</sup> Thus, freedom depends on being geared towards, and being affirmative of, destiny. It depends on affirming, and creatively shaping, being in its concrete reality.<sup>395</sup> In turn, destiny can only unravel and become the destiny of a particular individual where it is not simply accepted and surrendered to but creatively appropriated and freely shaped.<sup>396</sup>

Freedom's interdependence with destiny is indicative of the fact that freedom's 'ability to transcend any given situation implies the possibility of losing one's self in the

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<sup>392</sup> Tillich *STI*, p.288; Tillich, 'The Conception of Man', p.208.

<sup>393</sup> Tillich in Kelsey, *The Fabric of Paul Tillich's Theology*, p.71.

<sup>394</sup> Roberts, 'Tillich's Doctrine of Man', p.118.

<sup>395</sup> This once again resonates with Nietzsche's call for the affirmation of things as they are. Yet for Tillich this implies an affirmation of essence as a conditioning factor on existence rather than of sheer existence.

<sup>396</sup> The creative element implied in the self's relationship to destiny is sometimes underemphasised, e.g. by Scharlemann who writes about Tillich's human being that 'if it could make itself out of nothing and in any way [...] it would choose to make itself into precisely the unique individual that it actually is here and now' (Scharlemann, 'Christianity and the End of Modernity', p.249). Scharlemann, problematically, reserves creativity for the postmodern rather than the modern self, when one might argue that it is rather the postmodern self which tends towards stating and enshrining incongruities rather than engaging in the *creative* process of seeking to resolve these.

infinity of transcending one's self.<sup>397</sup> The above implies a rejection both of the notion that the human being is essentially free to be what he wants to be, and of the suggestion that the human being is bound to, and determined by, his environment. Freedom neither amounts to contingency, nor is it illusory. Rather, the inter-dependence of freedom and destiny exposes determinism and indeterminism as two illusory sides of the same coin.

With this, Tillich does not go against Nietzsche's or Sartre's understanding of freedom entirely. To an extent, Tillich indeed welcomes the fact that 'Nietzsche and Sartre [...] understood freedom as the undetermined self-realisation of the existential subject', and distinguishes their account of freedom from 'the indeterministic concept of freedom as contingency'.<sup>398</sup> This is because both retain something of Schelling's definition of 'freedom as the possibility of good and evil' and thus understand that freedom can undermine itself, as when it lapses into mere undirected wilfulness or when it affirms inauthentic values.<sup>399</sup> Positing the actualisation of the individual personality as a good for the attainment of which freedom must be used, both acknowledge that 'decision is not choice without any criterion'.<sup>400</sup> Both, for instance, insist that freedom depends on respect for one's individuality and, as particularly Nietzsche makes clear, for the world as it is.

Nonetheless, Sartre's absolute freedom and Nietzsche's will to power do not, ultimately, orientate the individual to the ground of being, which simultaneously conditions and transcends the human being, and which is both related to and distinct from him. Moreover, and contrary to Tillich's own assessment, Sartre's claim that consciousness itself is empty much rather suggests that he *is* guilty, at least to a degree, of indeterminism which 'treat[s] the will as though it were a thing' to which freedom can or

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<sup>397</sup> Tillich, 'The Conception of Man', p.208.

<sup>398</sup> Tillich, 'The Nature and Significance', p.746.

<sup>399</sup> Tillich, 'The Conception of Man', p.203.

<sup>400</sup> Tillich, 'The Conception of Man', p.203.

cannot be attributed as 'a certain quality'.<sup>401</sup> Tillich's sense that existence continues to be constrained by essence suggests that the notion of an absolutely free (because intrinsically empty) consciousness is an illusion, and indicative of existential estrangement. From Tillich's perspective, Sartre's indecisiveness regarding the extremes of absolute freedom and determinism must moreover be connected with his refusal to recognise, or, rather, to accept, that freedom is rooted in being which, in the case of the human person, entails finitude and 'has been formed by nature and history'.<sup>402</sup> Contra Sartre, Tillich's account implies that freedom is not merely a feature of a supposedly empty consciousness or will but of the whole person, whose self 'includes bodily structure, psychic strivings, moral and spiritual character, communal relations, past experiences [...] and the total impact of the environment' and who must use her freedom to affirm these factors, which constitute her destiny.<sup>403</sup> Once again, then, Tillich deems Sartre to have recognised, and to rightly affirm, a central quality of human existence (freedom), yet to separate this from its essential counterpart (destiny). Once again, this means that freedom's rootedness in its conditioning ground is ruptured such that Sartre, though recognising the potentiality of freedom, finds himself to be unfree and determined by others. With this, Sartre illustrates the predicament of the existential human being, whose separation from essence leads him to experience the structures of being as destroying rather than sustaining freedom, and thus 'as antithetical to human flourishing'.<sup>404</sup>

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<sup>401</sup> Roberts, *Tillich's Doctrine of Man*, p.117.

<sup>402</sup> Roberts, *Tillich's Doctrine of Man*, p.118.

<sup>403</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.204; Tillich, 'The Conception of Man', pp.206-210. Tillich's account of freedom is comparable, therefore, with what has been referred to as a 'compatibilist' notion of freedom, which does 'not attempt to abstract from the conditioning and even "determining" factors that continue to be in effect even as a "free" act is undertaken' (Sarah Coakley "Kenosis": Theological Meanings and Gender Connotations' in John Polkinghorne (ed.) (2001) *The Work of Love. Creation as Kenosis*. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, p.205). As we will see in our discussion of love, Tillich follows what Coakley describes as theological renditions of such an approach which suggest not only that human freedom take account of and relate itself to biological, social, and cultural factors but which adds to this 'God's providential and determining will' as well as the notion of 'God as nurturing and sustaining us *into* freedom' (Coakley, 'Kenosis: Theological Meanings', p.206).

<sup>404</sup> Pattison, *God and Being*, p.30.

### 4.2.3 The conditions of existence

According to Tillich the human being's freedom is not only compromised by existential estrangement but is also responsible for existential estrangement. Human freedom, that is, freedom rooted in *finite* being, is deemed to explain the very fact of actual human existence and thus to lead us to the third level of ontological concepts, which Tillich claims is an 'analysis of finitude in its polarity with infinity as well as in its relation to freedom and destiny, to being and non-being, to essence and existence'.<sup>405</sup>

As indicated at the outset of this chapter, Tillich defines finitude as 'being, limited by non-being'.<sup>406</sup> Unlike being-itself, wherein non-being is continually conquered, finite being has a beginning and an end.<sup>407</sup> This is part of its form and destiny. At the same time, for Tillich, the human being's power for individualisation, her vitality and freedom, indicate that the finite human being also 'belong[s] to that which is beyond non-being, namely, to being-itself'.<sup>408</sup> Only for this reason, is she capable of recognising her finitude and of envisaging infinite possibilities of transcending a given situation. Although unable to realise this existentially, she can even imagine 'the negation of the negative element in finitude'.<sup>409</sup> Tillich considers this combination of finitude and its transcendence to be captured in the notion of 'finite freedom', which he argues is the central characteristic of human essence.<sup>410</sup> According to Tillich, this *finite freedom* evokes anxiety in the human being. Anxiety, which Tillich, like Kierkegaard, distinguishes from fear of a distinct object, results from the human being's awareness of the threat posed by non-being on the one hand, and of his freedom to combat this threat on the other.<sup>411</sup> As such, anxiety is the precondition for the individual's 'break with the world of the

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<sup>405</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.184.

<sup>406</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.210.

<sup>407</sup> Notably, Tillich does not identify being-itself with infinity since he considers this to be merely the negation of finitude and, thus, inter-dependent with finitude.

<sup>408</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.212.

<sup>409</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.212.

<sup>410</sup> Tillich, 'The Conception of Man', p.202.

<sup>411</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.212. cf. Kierkegaard, *Anxiety*, p.42.

everyday' and, thus, a motor for human liberation, indeed for an *actualisation* of his freedom.<sup>412</sup>

However, the feeling of anxiety also implies the human being's temptation to freely respond to the threat of non-being by *denying* his relation to non-being by 'mak[ing] himself existentially the centre of himself and his world'.<sup>413</sup> That is, it implies the temptation to deny the extent to which the human being is conditioned (by his own essence, which connects him with the world and with being-itself) and, instead, to make himself absolute. In short, *finite* freedom entails a particular temptation to sever oneself from destiny. The surrender to this temptation is at the root of the separation of the ontological elements and it is for this reason that the 'description of the basic ontological structure and its elements reaches both its fulfilment and its turning point' in the polarity of freedom and destiny.<sup>414</sup>

The human being's free denial of finite destiny is symbolised in the Biblical account of the Fall, Tillich argues. While insistent that the Fall was not a historical event signifying an ontological change, but that the human being was fallen from the moment he came into existence, it is taken to mythically illustrate the foundations of human existence. Tillich pictures Adam-before-the-Fall as being in innocent but 'dreaming' union with being-itself.<sup>415</sup> In him, essence and existence are in unconscious unity, yet merely potential and unactualised. His finite freedom evokes anxiety about non-being, as described above. Adam-before-the-Fall thus 'experiences the anxiety of losing himself by not actualising himself and his potentialities and the anxiety of losing himself by actualising himself and his potentialities'.<sup>416</sup>

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<sup>412</sup> Livingston, Fiorenza, *Modern Christian Thought*. Vol.2, p.136.

<sup>413</sup> Tillich, *ST II*, p.56.

<sup>414</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.201.

<sup>415</sup> Tillich, *ST II*, p.38.

<sup>416</sup> Paul Tillich (1956) 'Existential Analyses and Religious Symbols' in Paul Tillich (ed. by Gert Hummel) (1992) *Theological Writings. Tillich Main Works* Vol.6, p.372.

This anxiety is not without benefit. It reveals the nature of the human predicament and constitutes the ‘necessary path to disclosure of unity with the ultimate’.<sup>417</sup> Without this anxiety, which, unlike fear, points to an ‘essential structure’, the human being would not experience the ‘shock of non-being’ and would not, therefore, ask about her being.<sup>418</sup> She would not then seek to move towards a greater fullness of being but remain in a state of apathetic unconsciousness. Coupled with the intrinsic urge towards self-transcendence, anxiety leads the human being to freely actualise her individuality independently of the conditioning elements of participation, form and destiny—it leads the human being into actual existence.<sup>419</sup> Tillich and Kierkegaard agree that this can lead to the human being’s awareness of his dependence on a transcendent saving reality (and thus to what has been called ‘the freedom of faith’<sup>420</sup>), but, as already hinted at in the above discussion of Kierkegaard’s account of love, also to despair.<sup>421</sup> Regardless of this ambiguity, Tillich, in principle, nonetheless welcomes the human self-actualisation caused by anxiety as a movement of the spirit that constitutes the necessary prerequisite for that *conscious* union of essence and existence which the human being before the Fall lacks, and which Tillich defines as perfection.<sup>422</sup> This movement of Spirit enables a fundamental shift in consciousness, which in turn effects the realisation of the human being’s ‘possibility and *necessity* of actualising himself and of becoming independent by his self-actualisation, in spite of the estrangement unavoidably connected with it’.<sup>423</sup> The human being could not, indeed, have done otherwise: he has to *exist*, to

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<sup>417</sup> Tillich, ‘Existential Analyses’, p.372.

<sup>418</sup> Tillich, ‘Existential Analyses’, p.372.

<sup>419</sup> Peter Slater ‘Tillich on the Fall and the Temptation of Goodness’, *The Journal of Religion* Vol.65 (1985), p.198.

<sup>420</sup> George Pattison (2002) *Kierkegaard, Religion and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis of Culture*. CUP, Cambridge, p.11.

<sup>421</sup> As has become evident Tillich considers this to happen in Sartrean existentialism. In light of Kierkegaard’s views on love as discussed in the chapter previous to this, one might conclude that Sartrean despair stems from the existentialist’s failure to accept commanded love and from his mistrust of the other, which Kierkegaard considers to be the inevitable effect of such a failure.

<sup>422</sup> It is important here to bear in mind that Tillich, like Kierkegaard, considers pre-fallen man to be in a state of innocence but also of ‘dreaming’ ignorance and, thus, not of perfection. Cf. Kierkegaard, *Anxiety*, pp.41f.

<sup>423</sup> Emphasis added. Tillich, *STI*, p.288.

be *something* before he can *accept* his relation to non-being by turning towards the ground of his being in which non-being is overcome.<sup>424</sup>

That existence necessarily implies estrangement means, however, that it comes at a high price. By wanting to make itself the centre of the world, the self makes itself an object of the world, thereby losing its true self. This self-loss is ‘the first and basic mark of evil’ and the ‘basic “structure of destruction”’ which ‘includes all others’.<sup>425</sup> Indeed, since self and world are structural correlates, the disruption of one structure causes that of the other: self-loss inevitably corresponds with world-loss. What was once the world of the self becomes its mere environment, which is not the self’s own and under whose bondage it now stands as a mere object. This tragic servitude is inter-dependent with sinful servitude such that servitude perpetuates itself. It binds the will, and thus compromises its powers of individualisation, vitality and freedom such that, as Tillich states, ‘parts of the self [are able to] overtake the centre and determine it without being united with the other parts. A contingent motive replaces the centre which is supposed to unite the motives in a centred decision; but it is unable to do so’.<sup>426</sup> Where the self is uprooted from its essence and, with this, from its ground, its vital and creative drives towards self-transcendence ‘move against one another’, thereby ‘split[ting] the person’.<sup>427</sup> Existential estrangement is thus typically marked by inner conflict, by resentment against the world, and by loneliness. The strangeness and familiarity now experienced do not reflect the sphere of ‘essential relationship between finite beings’ but constitute precisely

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<sup>424</sup> Tillich’s above-described account of the Fall itself arguably implies countless problems. It is unclear for instance, why ‘Adam-before-the-Fall’ would be unconscious of the union of essence and existence, yet conscious of his freedom and the threat of non-being. Most significantly, and as highlighted particularly by Niebuhr, Tillich’s highly Hegelian account appears to make the Fall into a logical necessity. Tillich has denied this allegation by claiming that the Fall is not a logical or ‘structural necessity’ but an inevitable fact (Tillich, *ST II*, p.50, Reinhold Niebuhr ‘Biblical Thought and Ontological Speculation in Tillich’s Theology’ in Charles Kegley (ed.) (1982) *The Theology of Paul Tillich*. Pilgrim Press, New York). However, accepting that the virtue of Tillich’s account of the human being lies not so much in its ability to explain the *origins* of the human predicament as in its ability to describe the state of this predicament, the nature of selfhood in its fullness and the challenge implied in realising this, we need not concern ourselves with the value of his interpretation of the Fall in any detail.

<sup>425</sup> Tillich, *ST II*, pp.71, 70. Tillich clearly distinguishes such self-loss from the Biblical notion of ‘losing one’s life’ (Mt 16:25; Mk 8:35).

<sup>426</sup> Tillich, *ST II*, p.73.

<sup>427</sup> Tillich, *ST II*, p.71.

‘a negation of essential belongingness’.<sup>428</sup> Solitude, which presupposes an essential community, becomes loneliness, which implies the loss of that community.

The further this process progresses the more human selfhood and, with this, human flourishing is endangered. Once the self has inflated rather than affirmed itself, further attempts at self-affirmation will, again, lapse into ‘self-inflation’.<sup>429</sup> It is ‘a demonic structure’, Tillich argues, which has brought and continues to bring the self to ‘confuse natural self-affirmation with destructive self-elevation’.<sup>430</sup> The self’s increasing isolation from the world corresponds with the increasing disunity of the self and of the world, until both cease to be a whole in any meaningful sense and are, instead, encountered as meaningless, empty and even unreal. The self’s desire to be the centre of everything thus results in ‘its ceasing to be the centre of anything’.<sup>431</sup> In such feelings of meaninglessness, anxiety is turned into despair or *Verzweiflung* (literally, as Tillich points out, ‘split-into-two-ness’), which Tillich defines as ‘freedom aware of its servitude or finiteness which is separated from its infinity’, and which he detects in the contemporary existentialist consciousness.<sup>432</sup> Here ‘the possibility of being at all’ is doubted.<sup>433</sup>

According to Tillich, then, the human being’s centredness depends on her being centred not on herself but on the ground of her being. Tillich identifies the self’s removal of its own centre from the ground of being (which Tillich also refers to as the divine centre) as ‘unbelief’, and the self’s attempt to make itself the centre of itself and its world as ‘hubris’.<sup>434</sup> Given its unlimited nature, the human’s being’s essential ‘desire to draw the whole of reality into [it]self’ constitutes ‘concupiscence’, which, after unbelief and hubris, is the third in Tillich’s trilogy of sins.<sup>435</sup> Unbelief is ‘the disruption of man’s

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<sup>428</sup> Tillich, ‘Existential Analyses’, p.373.

<sup>429</sup> James Luther Adams, ‘Introduction: The Storms of Our Times and Starry Night’ in Adams, Pauck, Shin (eds.) (1985) *The Thought of Paul Tillich*. Harper and Row, San Francisco, p.12.

<sup>430</sup> Tillich, *ST II*, p.59.

<sup>431</sup> Tillich, *ST II*, p.70.

<sup>432</sup> Tillich, ‘The Conception of Man’, p.213.

<sup>433</sup> Tillich in Kelsey, *The Fabric of Paul Tillich’s Theology*, p.69.

<sup>434</sup> Tillich, *ST II*, p.59

<sup>435</sup> Tillich, *ST II*, p.59

*cognitive* participation in God' and his consequent unawareness that being-itself in fact continues to participate in his existential estrangement.<sup>436</sup> Yet while the basis for overcoming estrangement is thus already present, this does not imply that estrangement can be overcome by mere effort and discourse. The human being in estrangement is subject to the ambiguities of existence, which obstruct an unambiguous response to nonbeing. The sick cannot *heal* the sick, in the sense of overcoming nonbeing on their own account. The situation is particularly difficult for the person who has already descended into despair: the typical experiences of existential estrangement—guilt, doubt, and meaninglessness—are what they are precisely because the human being cannot see the consolation of essence *even* where it is shown to him. As Tillich powerfully argues in *The Courage to Be*, a lack of vision prevents vision. The most that a person caught in these existential straits can do of his own accord is to affirm himself in spite of these feelings. It is for the courage to do so, indeed to accept and affirm even his own sense of doubt and meaninglessness, and thus to accept his given situation, that Tillich credits Sartre with an act of 'creative courage'.<sup>437</sup>

### 4.3 The conditions for overcoming estrangement

In light of this courage, Sartre's philosophy implicitly confirms that the connection with the ground of being persists even at the summit of estrangement from essential being. Indeed, 'there is no self-affirmation of a finite being, and there is no courage to be, in which the ground of being and its power of conquering nonbeing is not effective'.<sup>438</sup> Sartre's failure to recognise that 'the power of infinite self-transcendence is an expression of man's belonging to that which is *beyond* non-being, namely, to being-itself', nonetheless means that his project ultimately fails despite its courageousness.<sup>439</sup> The

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<sup>436</sup> Tillich in Kelsey, *The Fabric of Paul Tillich's Theology*, p.69.

<sup>437</sup> Tillich, *TCB*, p.143.

<sup>438</sup> Tillich, *TCB*, p.160.

<sup>439</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.212.

courage to be as oneself can ultimately only sustain itself where it does not undermine its agent in his being but where it acknowledges both the human being's finitude and his necessary and inevitable rootedness in being. Tillich connects salvation from estrangement and its despair with a shift in consciousness, i.e. on an *awareness* of the human being's participatory relation with being-itself, which makes possible a conscious assumption of non-being into being. Sartre's lack of this awareness means that his courage can only accept, indeed absolutise rather than overcome, doubt and despair. Sartre's courage promotes a 'destructive pessimism', which, Tillich implies, ultimately ruins the self.<sup>440</sup> Sartre is not without faith, yet his is a faith inevitably at the brink of collapse.

The crux lies in the fact that Sartre's assertion that existence precedes essence prevents him from realising both the ground of being and the true nature of the self he seeks to affirm, that is, its finitude. His identification of being-for-itself with nonbeing (or nothingness) may appear humble but is in fact the correlate of his absolute freedom. As such it is intertwined with his denial of that which transcends the human being and with his denial of the conditioned nature of human being—and, thus, with Sartre's elevation of the human being to the status of 'divine a-se-ity', a status which Sartre precisely sought to avoid.<sup>441</sup> Sartre's identification of being-for-itself and nonbeing and his assertion of absolute freedom all belong to his assertion that the human being properly speaking is entirely self-constituted or self-made rather than being 'given to himself as what he is'.<sup>442</sup>

As will become more apparent in the following chapter, Tillich by contrast considers the exit from estrangement that is necessary for the fullness of human selfhood to depend on a recognition of human finitude and, correspondingly, on an affirmation and reception of that which transcends the human being, being-itself. This

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<sup>440</sup> Tillich, 'The Conception of Man', p.215.

<sup>441</sup> Tillich, *TCB*, p.152.

<sup>442</sup> Tillich, *TCB*, p.152.

implies an acceptance of human relatedness as well as human individuality, which Tillich argues becomes possible through the ‘courage to accept acceptance’—a courage intimately interconnected with love.<sup>443</sup>

#### 4.4 Conclusion

Tillich’s account of the human self has, on the one hand, been found to reflect his sensitivity to many of the concerns put forth by Nietzsche, Sartre, and, though less addressed here, Freud. The respective first poles of his ontological polarities (i.e. self, individualisation, dynamics and freedom) reflect his endorsement of the human drive towards a free and creative affirmation of one’s individual self and thus of a transcendence of the status quo proposed by these authors. Drawn to the philosophy of life and to psychoanalysis as well as to existentialism, Tillich repeatedly relates his understanding of the human being’s passionate drive for the fullness of individual selfhood to Nietzsche’s ‘will to power’, to Freud’s ‘libido’ and to Sartre’s call for self-creation in the face of the threat of non-being.<sup>444</sup> Much like them, he considers this force to have liberating capacities.

On the other hand, Tillich considers this force, in and of itself, incapable of leading the human being to the fullness of her selfhood. This is because it is compromised by the structures of existence, such that it can, at best, merely acknowledge, but never conquer, the threat of non-being. Tillich indeed suggests that it is modern psychotherapy and ‘pastoral psychology’ itself, which are rediscovering and confirming the insight of the ‘Augustinian-Reformation type of theology’ that existence as such does not have the means to affirm itself.<sup>445</sup> The sick cannot heal the sick. Tillich thus invokes psychology’s support for his proposal that the human being’s conquest of

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<sup>443</sup> Tillich, *TCB*, p.154.

<sup>444</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.198, *ST II*, p.62f; see also Tillich, *TCB*, pp.25-30, 119.

<sup>445</sup> Tillich, ‘Impact of Psychotherapy’, p.393. Regarding psychology a ‘doctrine [...] of man’, and convinced that man is ‘a unity and a totality’ and that therefore ‘all methods contribute to one and the same picture of man’, Tillich was adamant that his ideas must not contradict the conclusions of psychology (Tillich, ‘The Conception of Man’, p.201).

non-being depends on her relation with being-itself. The human being's drive for self-transcendence is an implicit indicator of the human quest for such participation, but its fruitfulness depends on its interdependence with the essentially conditioned nature of existential being.

Though heavily drawing on Nietzsche, Sartre and Freud Tillich is thus ultimately critical of their insufficient recognition of the constraining—and yet enabling—*counterparts* of the human being's life forces and power, a recognition which would command an acceptance also of the transcendent ground of being. The upshot is Tillich's suggestion that, in and of itself, Nietzsche's will to power 'has demonic-destructive traits' and Freud's libido is an expression of 'concupiscence', because they conflate 'man's essential self-affirmation and his existential striving for power of being without limit'.<sup>446</sup> The existential human being cannot flourish through individual assertions of will or a mere enhancement of his own force. Where he attempts to do so, he is in fact only ever directed towards a distorted version of himself, i.e. towards a being independent of relationship and unlimited by non-being.

We have seen that Tillich, instead, defines true selfhood and human flourishing as 'personality in community' and thus considers the human being's flourishing *qua* individual to depend on her participatory relation with the world. The kind of openness to the other that seems 'antithetical to human flourishing' is proclaimed to be precisely the precondition for such flourishing.<sup>447</sup> With this, Tillich has given an account of the self as a distinct unity standing over against but also dependent on its participation in the world. Similarly, he has portrayed the self as both free and conditioned. He has justified this simultaneous distinctness and relatedness, freedom and conditionedness of the human self with particular reference to the human being's rootedness in the transcendent. Where the human being actively participates in this ground of its being,

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<sup>446</sup> Tillich see also *ST I*, p.171, *ST II*, pp.62f.

<sup>447</sup> Pattison, *God and Being*, p.30.

the human spirit rises from ‘the conditioning psychological realm’ and, while absorbing this into itself, transcends this such that true freedom is attained.<sup>448</sup> This actualisation of the spirit through ‘the presence of the unconditioned in man’s reason’ is the foundation for human flourishing because it enables the integration of the human being’s ‘eros, passion, imagination’ with the ‘logos-structures’ which unites man with being-itself.<sup>449</sup>

Again, Tillich’s conceptualisation of the spirit is in fact inspired by Nietzsche’s claim that the self grows beyond itself through encountering the ‘resistance’ of the other, and that “‘Spirit (intellect) cuts down through life”, discerning the authentic and the inauthentic in the midst of sheer vitality’.<sup>450</sup> Nonetheless, Tillich’s understanding of the spirit is broader, and he considers the crux to lie in recognising that the other cannot ‘be used as a means’ but must be ‘acknowledge[d] as person[...].’<sup>451</sup> This already indicates that the dilemma of existence, as Tillich perceives it, consists precisely in the way the human being relates to the other. What is needed is a courage, which enables the human being to affirm himself as an individual related to and participating in the other. It is in this respect that Tillich connects his anthropology with love, and it is to his account of love that we now turn therefore.

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<sup>448</sup> Tillich, *ST III*, p.28.

<sup>449</sup> Kelsey, *The Fabric of Paul Tillich’s Theology*, p.65; Tillich, *ST III*; p.25.

<sup>450</sup> See e.g. Friedrich Nietzsche (2007) *Twilight of the Idols. With The Antichrist and Ecce Homo* (tr. Anthony Ludovici). Wordsworth Editions, London, p.71; Adams, ‘Storms of Our Times’, p.12.

<sup>451</sup> Ristiniemi, *Experiential Dialectics*, p.62.

## Chapter 5 – Paul Tillich’s account of love

Tillich has been shown to understand the human self as both essentially distinct from, and belonging to, the world and being-itself, and thus, as neither intrinsically autonomous, nor properly subjected to a heteronomous power. His argument has furthermore been shown to imply, firstly, that the human drive towards self-transcendence constitutes an intrinsic part of the human being without which she cannot separate from herself and move out towards others; yet that it is, secondly, precisely this drive which properly pushes the human being towards communion with others, and thus towards morality and religion. The inter-dependence of self and other means that the human being can flourish only where she turns towards, affirms and participates in the other, yet also that the very affirmation of the other depends on an affirmation also of the self.

At the same time, Tillich was found to observe that the ontological polarities constituting the human being are severed from one another in existence, such that their various elements become distorted. The individualising aspect of the human being is, for instance, severed from its counterpart, the human being’s relational, conditioned and self-separating aspect. In order to be manifest truthfully and effectively, the drive for individualisation depends on an actualisation of the human being’s participatory potential, which in turn depends on a restoration of her relation with essential being. Finally, it was indicated that the existential human being’s subjection to ‘the ambiguities of existence’ prevents her from reuniting her free, creative and self-asserting powers with their essential counterparts of her own accord. Her participation in the ground of being, and thus in her own essence, depends on the initiative of a reality which has overcome non-being and which is not, therefore, subject to the destructive ambiguities of existence. In other words, the existential human being is dependent on the participation

of being-itself in existential estrangement. As I will argue in the following, this leads Tillich towards an argument about the dependency of human flourishing on a selfless love which does not deny or even destroy the self and its dynamic drive for individuality and freedom, but which affirms this drive and builds up the self.

### 5.1 Ontological and existential love

More than in the case of his anthropology, Tillich develops his account of love through recourse to revelation as well as through an existential perspective. Revelation leads him to posit that love is one, and identifiable with being-itself.<sup>452</sup> In light of Tillich's assertion of a balance of the ontological polarities in being-itself, this means that love is, essentially, characterised by a balance and unity between the elements of, say, individualisation and participation. Love thus stands for precisely that union of essential and existential being, which, when actualised, liberates the human being from her existential estrangement and realises 'the true expression of potential being'—what Tillich calls the 'New Being'.<sup>453</sup>

Meanwhile, Tillich's existential method leads him to find that, in existence, love consists less in the balanced unity of the ontological elements, than in the *desire* for such unity. Love in existence is characterised precisely by the severance of the ontological polarities. Tillich's existentialism is such that he infers from this that 'love in *all* its forms is a drive towards the reunion of the separated' and can be conceptualised as desire—implying that this must be true also for the love which belongs to being-itself.<sup>454</sup> In the spirit of his attempt to give lasting value to the drives and desires of the existential individual—and contrary to Hamilton's criticism, taken up by others, that Tillich

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<sup>452</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.310.

<sup>453</sup> Tillich, *ST III*, p.137, *ST II*, pp.136ff.

<sup>454</sup> Emphasis added. Tillich, *ST III*, p.35.

devalues existence by regarding it ‘unreal’—Tillich considers existential love indicative of an element in the love of being-itself.<sup>455</sup>

Tillich thus creates a tension between love as the unity of the ontological elements and love as desire for such unity; being-itself entails both dimensions. Tillich seeks to resolve this tension by associating both love and being-itself with his concept of life. As Tillich argues, ‘every life-process unites a trend toward separation [from the other] with a trend towards reunion [with the other]’.<sup>456</sup> This allows Tillich to argue that the separation of the ontological elements is not alien to love, even in being-itself.<sup>457</sup> The difference between love as conveyed in revelation and love as manifest in existence is much rather that in being-itself, where non-being is continually conquered, the trends towards separation and reunion are in ‘unbroken unity’, whereas in existence their ontological unity is broken.<sup>458</sup> Essentially, love is a continually *fulfilled* desire for reunion. Existentially, this desire is yet unfulfilled.

Both revelation and existence point to the fact, however, that love in its fullness is a constant *becoming* one. It is a dynamic process, therefore, and not a static reality. As Tillich understands it, all love is moreover characterised by desire, which revelation does not overcome but which it fulfils. At the same time, love’s rootedness in being-itself means that love cannot be reduced to desire in the sense of an emotion, and that love is interdependent on power and justice.<sup>459</sup> Love’s proper union with power means that it is not a powerless or chaotic surrender to the power of being but that, in its fight against non-being, it ‘resists and condemns’ that which stands against the reunion of the separated in the divine life.<sup>460</sup> Love’s just side is that which ‘affirms the independent right

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<sup>455</sup> Hamilton, *System and the Gospel*, p.175; see also e.g. Osborne, *New Being*, pp.194f.

<sup>456</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.310.

<sup>457</sup> Emphasis added. Tillich, *ST I*, p.310.

<sup>458</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.310.

<sup>459</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.310; *LPJ*.

<sup>460</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.314; Tillich, *LPJ*, p.114.

of object and subject within the love relation' and which ensures that the freedom of the beloved is preserved.<sup>461</sup>

## 5.2 Love's rootedness in being

Of the above-discussed ontological elements, the polarity of individualisation and participation, which is most immediately expressive of the inter-dependence of self and world, plays a particularly central role in love. Love, Tillich argues, is 'absent where there is no individualisation, and [...] can be fully realised only where there is full individualisation'.<sup>462</sup> The self has to be separate from others in order to be able to love them. At the same time, love consists, as we will argue, in participation and, hence, is a central precondition for the self to be itself: the self can only be separate from the other if it also participates in the other. As we have seen above, since the balance between individualisation and participation has been upset in existence, which implies an actualisation primarily of individualisation, existential love is, for Tillich, always a compromised (or incomplete) manifestation of love, prone to perceiving the self and other as diametrically opposed to one another. This leads to a rupturing of existential love into self-love and other-love, seen as exclusive alternatives, and resulting, in turn, in the common supposition of a polarity between love as eros and love as agape.

Tillich, who has already been shown to define *all* love as a longing for reunion, which implies fulfilment, identifies the (existential) rupture between eros and agape as one between the desire for the fulfilment of the self and the desire for the fulfilment of the other, respectively.<sup>463</sup> I now seek to show that, although Tillich refuses to simply conflate these desires, he considers it the mistake of the existential human being to see them as conflicting. True love necessarily implies a concern with, and the fulfilment of, both self and other. I will suggest that Tillich distinguishes between the desire for the

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<sup>461</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.313.

<sup>462</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.310.

<sup>463</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.311.

fulfilment of the self (eros) and the desire for the fulfilment of the other (agape), but that he does not conceptualise this distinction in terms of supposedly distinct objects or orientations of these desires. As we will see, both these desires ultimately seek the reunion of the estranged and both are oriented primarily towards the other. The distinction between them will much rather be found to centre on the different sources of these loves, and on the respective positions from which reunion of the estranged is therefore sought.

### 5.3 Love's manifestation in existence

#### 5.3.1 Love as eros

Much like Murdoch, Tillich considers eros to possess 'the greatness of a divine-human power'.<sup>464</sup> Echoing conventional interpretations of Platonic eros as geared towards the fulfilment of the self through reunion with its essence, Tillich argues that eros seeks to move the human being from 'that which is lower in power and meaning to that which is higher'.<sup>465</sup> It is the human being's unavoidable and legitimate 'striving for the *summum bonum*', and, hence, is most perfectly manifest in the human's love for God.<sup>466</sup> Indeed, human love of God is so closely associated with eros that one can only speak legitimately of a human agapeic love towards God (the possibility of which Nygren denied) 'if eros and agape can[...] be united'.<sup>467</sup> Not only can eros not be shifted but without it, love towards God degenerates into meaningless 'obedience to a moral law, without warmth, without longing, without reunion'; without eros, love of God potentially deforms into 'the opposite of love', Tillich argues.<sup>468</sup> As a love which emerges from the existential human being and which strives for attaining the fulfilment of his self, eros properly seeks

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<sup>464</sup> Tillich, *LPJ*, p.117.

<sup>465</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.311.

<sup>466</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.312.

<sup>467</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.312.

<sup>468</sup> Tillich, *DF*, p.115; Tillich, *LPJ*, p.31.

the participation in the other that enables this fulfilment.<sup>469</sup> This becomes evident if one considers that the existential estrangement of the human being out of which the erotic desire for reunion arises results in a sense of loneliness. This feeling increases the erotic longing for reunification and significantly opens the human being to the other.

Tillich understands eros as a 'mystical' and 'cultural' reality, which includes a cognitive, a moral, and an aesthetic dimension.<sup>470</sup> Eros' reuniting function means it is, firstly, the ground of knowledge.<sup>471</sup> It pushes the human being towards 'the universals' by way of which 'man participates in the remotest stars and the remotest past'.<sup>472</sup> It thereby enables insight into the ground of being, God or 'the Christ', and thus reveals a knowledge which 'transforms and heals' by conquering 'want and estrangement'.<sup>473</sup> In accordance with the mystical identification of God and the Good, eros, secondly, constitutes the explanation for the moral motivation of the will.<sup>474</sup> For Tillich, eros transcends the 'moral command without denying it', thus constituting the 'transmoral motivation for moral action'.<sup>475</sup> Eros, thirdly, functions as the 'aesthetic state of man's spiritual development' and as 'the driving force in all cultural creativity and in all mysticism'.<sup>476</sup> He therefore considers theologians who reject eros because they 'depreciate culture' and/or 'deny a mystical element in man's relation to God' as failing to realise that theology on the one hand and religious and cultural rituals on the other depend on eros towards truth and beauty respectively.<sup>477</sup> Tillich's view that such theologians also overlook the correspondence between the ability to love one's friend

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<sup>469</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.312.

<sup>470</sup> McKelway, *Systematic Theology of Paul Tillich*, p.135.

<sup>471</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.195.

<sup>472</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.195.

<sup>473</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, pp.106f.

<sup>474</sup> Tillich, *MB*, p.59.

<sup>475</sup> Tillich, *LPJ*, p.59.

<sup>476</sup> Tillich, *LPJ*, pp.117f.

<sup>477</sup> Tillich, *LPJ*, p.30.

and to love ‘artistic expression[s] of ultimate reality’ already indicates that he, like Erich Fromm, considers true love to necessarily include *all* parts of reality.<sup>478</sup>

Since the drive for the reunion of being is engrained in ‘the essential structure of life’, true eros, as Tillich understands it, is not simply to be identified with, but transcends, passing emotions and epithymia in the sense of ‘desire for pleasure’.<sup>479</sup> It is neither a surface phenomenon, nor is it in search of superficial gratification. Rather, it emerges out of the depths of the self’s personal centre and seeks to affirm and transform this centre by uniting it with its essential ground. As such, eros, to be sure, seeks an affirmation of the self in its individual identity and signifies ‘the desire for self-fulfilment *by* the other being’.<sup>480</sup> Yet, as will become clearer throughout the following, true eros implies the knowledge that this cannot be achieved by (ab)using the other for the self’s own ends but only through a relation to the other which seeks her good. This is because, striving for the fulfilment of the self, eros’ goal is that true selfhood, which Tillich has been shown to regard as interdependent on participation in the other, whom the individual recognises itself to be separate from but to belong to. True eros thus promotes the individual’s relation to the other ‘as an “I” to a “thou”’ and pursues self-fulfilment through participating in the other.<sup>481</sup> That a participatory relationship with the other is characterised by seeking the other’s Good is underlined by eros’ interdependence with love as agape.

### 5.3.2 Love as agape

Given the essential unity of love, agape must be understood less as a love at odds with eros than as its correspondent. If eros is love emerging from the *dis*unity of the ontological elements, agape is love as it emerges from their unity. Agape is no less

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<sup>478</sup> Tillich, *LPJ*, p.31. For parallels between Tillich and Fromm see below.

<sup>479</sup> Tillich, *ST III*, p.144; Tillich, *LPJ*, p.30.

<sup>480</sup> Emphasis added. Tillich, *DF*, p.114.

<sup>481</sup> Tillich, *LPJ*, p.31.

desirous than eros and is equally geared towards the reunion of what is estranged. Yet agape longs for the fulfilment of the other, and ‘affirms the other unconditionally, that is, apart from higher or lower, pleasant or unpleasant qualities’—indeed, despite their ‘demonised’ state.<sup>482</sup> It is universal, preferring or excluding ‘no-one with whom a concrete relation is possible (the neighbour)’.<sup>483</sup> Given its perfect source, it can seek the other’s flourishing without any calculations. Agape is thus entirely independent of ‘contingent characteristics which change and are partial’, and consequently able to ‘suffer and forgive’.<sup>484</sup> It ‘neither forces [...] nor leaves [the beloved]’, but ‘attracts him and lures him toward reunion’.<sup>485</sup>

Agape is the most adequate characterisation of the divine love of being-itself, a love Tillich considers to manifest itself in existence as the ‘Spiritual Presence’. In arguing this, Tillich bases his interpretation of agape on a prior understanding of God as ‘work[ing] toward the fulfilment of every creature and toward the bringing-together into the unity of his [God’s] life all who are separated and disrupted’.<sup>486</sup> He justifies this by correlating his observations about experience with revelation. On the one hand, he argues that the above qualities of love are *experienced* as ‘blessedness (*makaria* or *beatitudo* in the sense of the beatitudes)’, and that it is because of this experienced blessedness that ‘agape can be applied symbolically to the divine life and its Trinitarian movement’.<sup>487</sup> The experience of blessedness which agape evokes suggests that agape makes ‘the symbol of the divine blessedness concrete’.<sup>488</sup> On the other hand, he claims that love as described above can be called by the name of agape because its qualities match those already connected with the divine love as portrayed in the Biblical texts. Further blurring the boundaries between the perspective ‘from below’ and that ‘from above’, Tillich also

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<sup>482</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.311, 146.

<sup>483</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.311.

<sup>484</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.311.

<sup>485</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.314.

<sup>486</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.310.

<sup>487</sup> Tillich, *ST III*, p.144.

<sup>488</sup> Tillich, *ST III*, p.144.

correlates agape's unifying quality with the transcendent unity of being-itself: '[agape] seeks the other because of the ultimate unity of being within the divine ground', Tillich argues.<sup>489</sup> In the discussion of agape, the conscious tension inherent in Tillich's method—namely, the mutual determination of existential question and ontological answer—again comes to light.

For the purposes of the present argument, it is important to stress that Tillich does not consider agape's focus on the other to come at the cost of a disregard for the agapeic lover's own self and flourishing. The agapeic lover's ability to seek the other's flourishing positively correlates with his own flourishing—that is, with his own individualisation and participation. The agapeic lover's self is thus necessarily implicated in the reunion of lover and beloved, which agape seeks to effect. As will become further apparent below, Tillich indeed considers agape synonymous with true self-love as well as attributing to it something of the unselfish concern for the other we saw Nygren demand. In agape, the flourishing of the lover's self and 'the will to self-surrender for the sake of the other being' do not contradict.<sup>490</sup>

The above discussion has indicated that Tillich accommodates the most central aspects of traditional interpretations of eros and agape in his account of love while rejecting Nygren's attempt to set them into a dichotomy. Tillich continues to understand eros as an ontological pull or attraction back to one's source and thus as a love of what is beautiful. Agape by contrast is love as its own source, unmotivated, gratuitous, and thus a love directed also at the sinner, the estranged. It is a love, which *makes* its object beautiful. While acknowledging these differences, Tillich considers an 'absolute contrast between agape and eros' to have the effect that agape is 'reduced to a moral concept', while eros becomes 'profanised in a merely sexual direction and deprived of possible

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<sup>489</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.311.

<sup>490</sup> Tillich, *DF*, p.114.

participation in unambiguous life'.<sup>491</sup> He justifies the ultimate unity of eros and agape by arguing that *all* love (including the less mentioned philia and libido) is desire for reunion, approached from different foundations.

His argument for the unity of eros and agape is further substantiated if one integrates Tillich's account of love more closely than done by Tillich himself with his above-discussed notion that the structure of being implies the inter-dependence of self and world/other. Love's rootedness in the structure of being necessitates that it is ultimately always equally concerned with self *and* other. Agape, it is true, 'seeks the other because of the ultimate unity of being within the divine ground' rather than for the sake of its own fulfilment.<sup>492</sup> Nonetheless, it is capable of recognising the other and her need only on account of emerging from an individualised being itself. The lover's self and his flourishing thus matters for his ability to agapeically seek the fulfilment of the other. Where agape attains the other's flourishing, the lover's self will moreover be (positively) affected since this flourishing consists in the reunion, which is the object also of his own flourishing. This still leaves unanswered why the existential human being tends to see eros and agape in opposition and how this opposition can be overcome. It is to this question, which is directly implicated with that of human flourishing and how this is attained, that we must now turn.

### 5.3.3 Ambiguous love

While the ontological and essential oneness of love means that 'no love is true love without the unity of eros and agape', this is not realised in existence where the ontological polarities are ruptured.<sup>493</sup> Under the ambiguities of existence, love is distorted. Instead of manifesting itself as the unified reality that it properly is, love is split

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<sup>491</sup> Tillich, *ST III*, p.146.

<sup>492</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.311.

<sup>493</sup> Tillich in Udo Kern (2001) *Liebe als Erkenntnis und Konstruktion von Wirklichkeit. "Erinnerung" an ein stets aktuelles Erkenntnispotential*. De Gruyter, Berlin, p.98.

into isolated parts, each of which thereby loses balance, becomes unlimited and enters into conflict with those counterparts which in fact belong to it. In existence, libido has for instance often ‘fallen under the tyranny of the pleasure principle’, using ‘the other’s being not as an object of reunion but as a tool for gaining pleasure out of him’.<sup>494</sup> Thus ‘bypass[ing] the centre of the other person’, sexual desire becomes destructive and evil.<sup>495</sup> The mystical eros can, similarly, be confused with libido and drawn into the same ambiguity, thus becoming impersonal or covertly sexualising human love towards God. (Tillich attributes the fact that the New Testament does not use the term eros to the prevalence of this distortion). Especially in its cultural form, eros can, in turn, detach ‘from the realities which it expresses’, thereby becoming mere ‘aesthetic enjoyment’ and preventing precisely the ‘existential participation and ultimate responsibility’ it is meant to enable.<sup>496</sup> Since agape emerges from the unity of being, it is no existential possibility at all but precisely the love synonymous with the redemption of existential love. Where the existential human being does attempt to realise agape of its own accord—that is, independently of reunification with the ground of being which founds the fullness of her own being—she would seem to lose herself in the concern for the other. Tillich’s view of the effects of estrangement implies that, as long as the self does not participate in the divine life, which is perfectly integrated through the Spirit, ‘the polarities which make up the dynamism of life [are] driven into conflict with each other in such a way that one may absorb the other’, thereby causing ‘self-loss, disintegration, non-being’.<sup>497</sup>

It is important to underline that Tillich’s sense that eros, libido and *philia* are particularly prone to such distortions does not lead him to simply dismiss these loves. For Tillich, they do not in themselves ‘contradict the created goodness of being’, but rather manifest a drive without which ‘life would not move beyond itself’ and without

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<sup>494</sup> Tillich, *LPJ*, p.117.

<sup>495</sup> Tillich, *LPJ*, p.117. Tillich, *ST II*, p.62.

<sup>496</sup> Tillich, *LPJ*, pp.117f.

<sup>497</sup> John P. Dourley (1975) *Paul Tillich and Bonaventure. An Evaluation of Tillich’s Claim to Stand in the Augustinian-Franciscan Tradition*. E. J. Brill, Leiden, p.164.

which human love of God would thus be meaningless and self-contradictory.<sup>498</sup> Tillich's interpretation of the Bible and of depth psychology leads him to suggest that libido *can*, for instance, constitute a proper and natural 'desire for vital self-fulfilment and not for the pleasure resulting from this union'.<sup>499</sup> *Philia*, similarly, rests on a natural and universal desire of beings to be united with other beings. However, these loves can only achieve their intended goal—the affirmation and flourishing of the individual—if 'passion' is coupled with 'truth', 'libido' with 'surrender' and 'will to power' with 'justice'.<sup>500</sup> This coupling means that, say, even *epithymia* or libido retains a role in true love, but that it does so as 'the desire for vital self-fulfilment' rather than as the above-mentioned 'desire for the pleasure resulting from [...] union' with the other.<sup>501</sup> Like his anthropology, Tillich's account of love thus implies, on the one hand, a valuation of Nietzsche's will to power, Freud's libido and Sartre's drive towards self-actualisation as important 'symbol[s] for man's natural self-affirmation' and indicative of man's 'power of being', and, on the other, a challenge to their accounts and a more nuanced distinction between 'man's essential self-affirmation and his existential striving for power of being without limit'.<sup>502</sup> Being-itself—and true love—demands that human power is combined with meaning. Only then is it in fact capable of empowering the human being and leading her to her fulfilment. It is this combination, which constitutes the human being as 'spirit'.

### 5.3.4 Love under the Spiritual Presence

Although a definite aspect of human essence, the dimension of spirit, which unites the human being with her ground, is not fully actualised in existence. The existential human being would be unable to actualise this dimension were it not for the divine Spirit, in whom power and meaning are in perfect unity, in whom perfect love is actualised, and

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<sup>498</sup> Tillich, *LPJ*, p.116; *ST I*, p.311.

<sup>499</sup> Tillich, *LPJ*, p.30.

<sup>500</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.277.

<sup>501</sup> Tillich, *LPJ*, p.30.

<sup>502</sup> Tillich, *ST II*, p.63.

who participates even in existential estrangement.<sup>503</sup> The presence of the divine Spirit means that existential life is marked not only by ‘structures of destruction’ but also by counterbalancing ‘structures of healing and reunion of the estranged’.<sup>504</sup> This Spirit, which manifests itself in existence as the ‘Spiritual Presence’, strives towards the reunification with, and thus towards the fulfilment of, all creatures and is therefore best symbolised as agape-love.<sup>505</sup> By accepting the existential human being despite her unacceptability, it is capable of generating an ecstatic movement in the human spirit which causes her to become aware of the transcendent union of essence and existence. This movement, which implies the experience of an ‘ultimate concern’, ‘spreads healing forces over a personality in all dimensions of his being’ by reuniting the ontological elements, thus creating a ‘centred self’.<sup>506</sup> As we will see shortly, this implies the ordering and unification of the otherwise conflicting human loves. Agape’s healing forces affect the human being in her entirety, that is, ‘the dimensions of the spirit, of psychological self-awareness, of bodily functions, of social relations and of historical self-realisation’.<sup>507</sup> Its fruit is the New Being or what St. Paul calls a ‘New Creation’, which Tillich defines in terms of ‘re-conciliation, re-union, re-surrection’.<sup>508</sup> This implies, Tillich argues, an awareness of the unity with God and results in an ‘astonishing experience of feeling reunited with one’s self, not in pride and false self-satisfaction, but in a deep self-acceptance’.<sup>509</sup> Where the human being receives and accepts the unconditional divine love conveyed by the Spiritual Presence, she accepts herself ‘as something which is eternally important, eternally loved, eternally accepted’.<sup>510</sup> According to Tillich, this is the meaning and ground of all healing: ‘the reunion of one’s self with one’s self’.<sup>511</sup>

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<sup>503</sup> Tillich, *ST* III, p.118.

<sup>504</sup> Tillich, *ST* II, p.86.

<sup>505</sup> Tillich, *ST* III, p.137.

<sup>506</sup> Tillich, ‘The Impact of Psychotherapy’, p.399.

<sup>507</sup> Tillich, ‘The Impact of Psychotherapy’, p.399.

<sup>508</sup> Tillich, *NB*, p.20.

<sup>509</sup> Tillich, *NB*, p.22.

<sup>510</sup> Tillich, *NB*; p.22.

<sup>511</sup> Tillich, *NB*, p.22.

The result of such acceptance is that agape becomes a reality within the human being. Acceptance of the saving power of the divine agape is ‘the only unambiguous and all-inclusive sacrifice a human being can make’ and (at least ‘fragmentarily’) saves the human being from the typical existential predicament of being uncertain about which potentialities to sacrifice and which not.<sup>512</sup> It allows her to participate in ‘the “communion of the Holy Spirit”’ where ‘the essential being of the person is liberated from the contingencies of freedom and destiny under the conditions of existence’, Tillich argues.<sup>513</sup> Once the self makes this sacrifice, agape takes ‘the personal centre into the universal centre [which corresponds with] the transcendent unity’.<sup>514</sup> The existential self’s tendency to draw into the unity of its centre also those aspects of the encountered world which contradict its essential being, is thus counteracted. Under agape, which ‘seeks the other one in his centre’ and sees him as God sees him, the ‘personal centre [of the self] is established in relation to the universal centre’.<sup>515</sup> In the process of self-integration, the human being is thus enabled to judge contents rightly and to appropriate only those contents which ‘express[...] the essential being of the person’.<sup>516</sup> She is enabled to transcend the confining structures of existence and to participate in ‘the true expression of potential being’.<sup>517</sup> This participation in the New Being allows her not to avoid the tension of finite freedom but to deal with it authentically, that is, to affirm oneself in the face of it.

### 5.3.5 Agape’s effect on eros

We found that in existence the various aspects of love enter into conflict with one another and thus fail to lead their subject to fulfilment. The love of the Spiritual

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<sup>512</sup> Tillich, *ST III*, p.286; Tillich, *TCB*, p.5.

<sup>513</sup> Tillich, *ST III*, p.286.

<sup>514</sup> Tillich, *ST III*, p.286.

<sup>515</sup> Tillich, *ST III*, p.286.

<sup>516</sup> Tillich, *ST III*, p.286.

<sup>517</sup> Tillich, *ST III*, p.137, *ST II*, pp.136ff.

Presence by contrast reunites the human person with the power of being and thus enables her flourishing by ordering and uniting her loves such that they are recognised as 'lying within each other'.<sup>518</sup> Agape can, however, only 'unite with [the other qualities of love], [...] judge them and [...] transform them' because of its own unique 'independen[ce] of [them]'.<sup>519</sup> The unifying process makes apparent precisely agape's distinct origin in the Spiritual Community, its corresponding share in the structures of the New Being, and its embodiment in Christ's self-sacrificial love. The Spiritual community from which agape issues forth can withstand the diversity and tensions of love in existence, and is able to transform these such that 'unity within the divine life' becomes manifest.<sup>520</sup>

Agape does not create unity by dismissing but by affirming love's various aspects. For instance, agape accepts the erotic longing for the fulfilment of self as the precondition for the human being's reception of the divine love. Without such a natural desire, which Tillich understands as the desire for God, human beings could not recognise the Christian revelation for what it is, Tillich claims in opposition to Barth. Contrary to Nygren, Tillich thus embraces the notion of a genuinely human love for God which he considers to be tied up with the notion of a natural human knowledge of God. At the same time, the erotic desire for the fulfilment of self is educated and transformed by agape such that it takes on its most unambiguous and truthful manifestation. Eros under the criterion of agape continues to seek the fulfilment of the self but does so implicitly rather than explicitly, and not through utilising the other, but through entering into a relation with the other, in which it seeks the other's good. Agape thereby prevents erotic desire from 'becoming an aesthetic enjoyment without ultimate seriousness'.<sup>521</sup> It makes 'the cultural eros responsible and the mystical eros personal',

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<sup>518</sup> Tillich, *DF*, p.114.

<sup>519</sup> Tillich, *ST III*, p.146.

<sup>520</sup> Tillich, *LPJ*, p.116.

<sup>521</sup> Tillich, *LPJ*, p.118.

such that a unity between culture and morality is made possible.<sup>522</sup> Agape similarly ‘makes sexual love (libido) seek the fulfilment of others, [...] and causes communal love (philia) to accept in love that which is unacceptable’.<sup>523</sup> Tillich’s agape does not therefore come with an asceticism or, more precisely, allows only for a ‘disciplinary asceticism’ which, contrary to ‘ontological asceticism’, does not reject ‘things because of the material in them’.<sup>524</sup> His agape is ‘the norm and standard for every other type of love’ and ‘expresses the ontological basis for all love in being-itself’.<sup>525</sup>

Although true eros cannot be reduced to an emotion, eros plays a positive role in the fullness of love also insofar as it signifies the inclusion of the emotive dimension.<sup>526</sup> Tillich rejects attempts to sentimentalise love, but he also acknowledges that love involves ‘the centred *whole* of a being in the process of reunion, whether it is in anticipation or in fulfilment’.<sup>527</sup> This means that in affirming the self’s erotic vitality, the divine Spirit affirms the self also in its emotional dimension. Were it otherwise, then agape towards God would not be love but mere obedience to a moral law.<sup>528</sup>

## 5.4 Love and the self

### 5.4.1 Love’s effect on the self

It is now time to ask what the above account of love implies for the flourishing of the human self. We have seen that, for Tillich, human flourishing depends on a unity of ‘centred personality, self-transcending vitality, freedom of self-determination’ (power) on the one hand and ‘universal participation, forms and structures of reality, limiting and

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<sup>522</sup> Tillich, *LPJ*, p.118.

<sup>523</sup> Tillich, *LPJ*, pp.116f.

<sup>524</sup> Tillich, *MB*, p.42.

<sup>525</sup> McKelway, *Systematic Theology of Paul Tillich*, p.135.

<sup>526</sup> Tillich, *DF*, p.115.

<sup>527</sup> Emphasis added. Tillich, *ST III*, p.144.

<sup>528</sup> Tillich, *DF*, p.115.

directing destiny' (meaning) on the other.<sup>529</sup> As we have now also seen, he considers this to correspond with, and to rest on, the unity of eros and agape. The fullness of being includes 'passion as much as truth, libido as much as surrender, will to power as much as justice', Tillich argues.<sup>530</sup> Only if these poles are in unity is the spirit of the human being actualised. Tillich is aware that, if one pole gains the upper hand, the outcome is either 'abstract law or chaotic movement'; on the one hand, then, divine agapeic Spirit promotes 'worldliness', 'self-expression', and 'creativity', without which there would be no 'subject worthy of love'; on the other hand, it demands 'asceticism', 'self-control' and 'discipline', without which the human being is not placed under the divine agape.<sup>531</sup>

By resolving the mutual obstruction and destruction of the existentially separated human loves and by thus liberating the existential human being from enslavement to their conflicting ends, the divine agape not only tolerates the freedom and individuality of the beloved but re-establishes these. Indeed, the love which inheres in the Spiritual Presence does not, according to Tillich, 'violate the structures of the beloved's [or the lover's] individual and social existence'.<sup>532</sup> Rather, it 'maintains the identity of the self without impoverishing the self, and it drives toward the alteration of the self without disrupting it'.<sup>533</sup> Again, this is because the communion which agape wants to establish depends on the self-integration and centredness of the individual, who is thus 'both the subject and the object of love'.<sup>534</sup> The divine agape liberates the human beloved and enables her attainment of true individuality by 'conquer[ing] the double anxiety which logically [...] precedes the transition from essence to existence, the anxiety of not actualising one's essential being and the anxiety of losing oneself within one's self-actualisation', thus overcoming the Fall and instituting the New Being.<sup>535</sup> This powerful

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<sup>529</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.276.

<sup>530</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.277.

<sup>531</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.277; Tillich, *DF*, p.92.

<sup>532</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.313.

<sup>533</sup> Tillich, *ST III*, p.287.

<sup>534</sup> Tillich, *LPJ*, p.27.

<sup>535</sup> Tillich, *ST III*, p.287.

plea for the connection between true love and full selfhood underlines Tillich's agreement with Nietzsche that 'a love relation is creative only if an independent self enters the relation from both sides'.<sup>536</sup> True love can issue only from an individualised self and can do its work only if it is received and accepted by an individualised self.

Meanwhile, the conviction that agape can break into existence and reunite what is separated (eros and agape, self and other, the ontological elements) without requiring the sacrifice of individual identity and freedom, stands of course in contradiction to Sartre and Nietzsche. We saw that Sartre's understanding of selfhood and freedom led Sartre to judge that a loving openness to the other comes at the cost of the self's freedom. Love could only be imagined as a controlling struggle for attaining the other's recognition.<sup>537</sup> Nietzsche, in turn, was convinced that the only benefit and 'pleasure' to be gained from 'selflessness, self-denial, self-sacrifice' is one that 'belongs to cruelty'.<sup>538</sup> Tillich's framework of individualisation and participation and his understanding of freedom, by contrast, leads him to argue that participatory openness to and relation with a distinct other is precisely the precondition for full individuality. While he considers this to require that the human being empty herself of 'a false form of hubristic *human* power', Tillich's true love does not come at the cost of, but promotes, life and its possibilities for 'vital self-expression'.<sup>539</sup> Spirit and life increase correlatively.

Tillich thus rejects understandings of love as a quest for personal power, but shows that doing so does not amount to a total 'resignation of power'.<sup>540</sup> Insofar as Christian accounts of love have commended sheer powerlessness, Tillich indeed agrees with Nietzsche that a 'will-to-power' must be affirmed.<sup>541</sup> He also argues, however, that such conceptualisations of love as powerless are a function of misunderstanding power

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<sup>536</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.313. cf. Nietzsche 'A man must first be firmly poised, he must stand securely on his two legs, otherwise he cannot love at all' (Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, p.64).

<sup>537</sup> Sartre, *BN*, p.379.

<sup>538</sup> Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, p.64.

<sup>539</sup> Coakley, 'Kenosis: Theological Meanings', p.206; Tillich, *ST III*, p.255.

<sup>540</sup> Tillich, *LPJ*, p.11.

<sup>541</sup> Tillich, *LPJ*, p.11.

in compulsory terms and of falsely thinking of love solely in emotional or ethical rather than ontological terms. Tillich's conviction that eros has a place even in redeemed love, and that true love strongly affirms the human self in its freedom, individuality and creativity, raises the question of the nature and validity of self-love. It is this question to which we must turn, before demonstrating why Tillich's account of love can be understood as one of selfless love.

#### 5.4.2 Love, eros and self-love

Strikingly, Tillich is very willing to speak of a divine self-love but far more reticent about the notion of a divine eros. As I show below, Tillich defines the divine agape as a divine self-love. He distances himself from process theologians, however, when he argues that, since God is beyond 'the fulfilment and non-fulfilment of reality', he does not desire his own fulfilment.<sup>542</sup> According to Tillich, the terminology of eros, libido and philia, can only be applied to the divine love in 'poetic-religious symbolism' and is subordinate to the symbol of agape.<sup>543</sup> By contrast, he speaks of human eros but follows Spinoza in 'hesitat[ing]' to use the concept of a human 'self-love'.<sup>544</sup> As we have seen, Tillich recognises that the human being necessarily desires her own fulfilment but, precisely in respect to this desire, prefers to avoid the term 'self-love'. Instead, he distinguishes between the various phenomena which he argues 'self-love' can refer to, i.e. between active self-affirmation, natural self-acceptance, and the selfishness Nygren (and, to some extent, Kierkegaard) were shown to identify as self-love.<sup>545</sup> Notwithstanding this, Tillich does speak of a human self-love when the term is qualified by 'proper' or 'true' and associates such self-love with agape, thus asserting, for instance, that the divine love

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<sup>542</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.312.

<sup>543</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.312.

<sup>544</sup> Tillich, *TCB*, p.22; see e.g. Baruch Spinoza (1996) *Ethics* (tr. Edwin Curley). Penguin, London, III, prop. 55, schol./IV, prop. 48.

<sup>545</sup> Tillich, *LPJ*, p.34, *ST I*, p.313.

invites, even demands, a human self-love *'in the sense of agape'*.<sup>546</sup> In associating self-love first and foremost with agape, Tillich clearly challenges conventional identifications of eros with self-love and of agape with other-love.

Claiming that agape is the 'criterion' for all love of self, Tillich makes the divine self-love the criterion also for human self-love.<sup>547</sup> It is God's love which, for instance, tells us that self-love is possible only on the basis of 'separation from one's self'.<sup>548</sup> As indicated, Tillich places much weight on the dynamic nature of God, and considers only a (Hegel-inspired) notion of separation and reunion to ensure an adequate understanding of this dynamism. Tillich understands this to be expressed in what he considers to be the 'symbol' of the Trinity.<sup>549</sup> God is (symbolically) separated both 'within himself' and 'from himself'—that is, he is three persons (taken to signify internal separation) and has granted the human being freedom (taken to signify external separation).<sup>550</sup> This notion of a double self-separation, which is the precondition for divine participation in estranged existence, symbolises, Tillich suggests, the actual coincidence of what human beings perceive to be distinct and even contradictory kinds of love, self-love and other-love. In a double sense, 'God fulfils his love of himself' through an outward-going love: both his separation within himself and his separation from himself demand a movement outwards, towards the other (who is also the self).<sup>551</sup> This movement, in turn, enables that reunion which Tillich understands to be the telos of love. It is for this reason that Tillich describes the divine self-love as a kind of agape.

Although Tillich does not conflate the human capacity for self-separation with that of God, he portrays this divine self-love both as the justification for, the foundation of, and the guide to, human self-love. I propose that the above indeed implies that

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<sup>546</sup> Emphasis added. *ST I*, p.313.

<sup>547</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.313.

<sup>548</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.313.

<sup>549</sup> Tillich, *ST III*, p.301.

<sup>550</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.313.

<sup>551</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.313.

human self-love depends on being incorporated into the divine agape. As Tillich argues, the human being seeks to love himself in various ways, including a ‘simple self-affirmation, libido, friendship, and eros’.<sup>552</sup> Yet these are the self-love they aim or even profess to be only where they are ‘under the criterion of agape’.<sup>553</sup> As a fundamentally existential kind of love, eros desires and seeks the flourishing of the self. This is not illegitimate but, contrary to what the existential human being likes to think, eros’s proper object is the good and beautiful—the unconditioned, and not the imperfect. Eros can thus love the essential but not the existential self. It can love the self as another. Eros is thus properly oriented towards the other, and towards the essential ground of being in particular. This already signifies eros’ proper connection with agape, or the desire for the fulfilment of the other. It is where eros attempts to enable human flourishing without agape, or other-centred love, that it becomes a ‘false self-love’, ‘a selfishness which is always connected with self-contempt and self-hate’.<sup>554</sup> In order for such an orientation to be achieved, however, eros depends on first being transformed by the divine agape, which is experienced as a love going out to the other while at the same time being a genuine self-love. It depends on a love, which can indeed be identified as self-love, but which is entirely inclusive in its loving such that love of self and others are simultaneous.

This has several critical implications. Firstly, there is a sense here, which Tillich does not work out to the extent he might, that true self-love depends on receiving the love of another, God. In order to become a full reality, self-love, which, the above suggests, manifests itself as an agapeic turn towards the other, must be received as a gift. Tillich illustrates the human need for, and moral importance of, receiving—and accepting—love. In his sermon, ‘The New Being’, Tillich argues that the human person ‘is hostile, consciously or unconsciously, toward those by whom one feels rejected’.<sup>555</sup>

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<sup>552</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.313.

<sup>553</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.313.

<sup>554</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.313.

<sup>555</sup> Tillich, *NB*, p.20.

Such hostility is in no way overcome by futile attempts to appease the other but only by allowing oneself to experience the acceptance which constitutes the core of the divine love. Where the divine acceptance and reconciliation (which expresses itself in reconciliation with self and others) is not accepted, that is, where the human being feels ultimately rejected, she cannot be reunited with her ground and will inevitably become hostile towards herself and others.<sup>556</sup> Tillich hereby connects human flourishing with *being loved*—and with *allowing* oneself to be loved. We will have to return to this in the final chapter of this thesis.

If human self-love depends on a reception of the divine love, and if this love is a kind of self-love, then human self-love is possible only *because* self-love as such does not stay within itself, but is perfectly and generously turned towards the other whom it transforms. The spilling over of self-love to the other is the very precondition for self-love. While the Trinitarian nature of being-itself surely remains a decisive mark of distinction between God and the human being, the notion that the divine self does not love itself directly, as a single reality but rather as another, with whom it is nonetheless also identical, arguably bears some significance also for the nature of human self-love. Tillich indeed seems to imply that true self-love is a love of what Ricoeur would call ‘oneself as another’—that is, of oneself not as the existential self as which one knows oneself but ‘as the eternal image of the divine life’.<sup>557</sup> As such, then, it is a love first and foremost marked by a turn to, and participation in, the divine life, which is the ground of the human being’s essential being. Tillich’s claim that agape can also refer ‘to the love wherein man loves himself’ obliterates any distinction between selfless love and self-love

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<sup>556</sup> Tillich, *NB*, pp.21f.

<sup>557</sup> Paul Ricoeur (1992) *Oneself as Another*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago. Tillich, *ST I*, p.313. David Jasper has recently explored the existential challenge—and potentially disconcerting, even alienating effect—of seeing ‘self as other’ in the context of the ageing body (David Jasper, *The Sacred Body*, e.g. p.36). As Jasper suggests, the body (the crucial role of which I do not have the space to explore in this thesis) signifies the extent to which we are always profane and sacred, and at one with ourselves as well as ‘another’ and, indeed, another’s—namely God’s, ‘who is utterly absent, intolerably present’ (Jasper, *The Sacred Body*, pp.36f). Jasper’s argument here is evocative of Tillich’s sense of the human being’s distinct individuality and relatedness.

as two opposed kinds of love.<sup>558</sup> Tillich's choice of the term 'wherein' as opposed to 'whereby' indicates, moreover, that the human being loves herself, not so much through exercising self-love, but through immersing herself in (the divine) self-love.

Thirdly and finally, it is not only the divine agape but also eros, which, though not constituting true self-love itself, makes true self-love possible. On the one hand, the above description of self-love as outward-turned is arguably exactly that which typically eludes the human being. Caught in anxiety about non-being, the finite human being is tempted to think of self-love as a love, which holds on to, rather than goes out of, the self. The above suggests that such a self-love can only love the fallen and not the true self, and is, thus, false self-love. On the other hand, however, human eros properly provides the foundation for such true self-love in that it actually seeks to move the human being out of itself and towards the good and the beautiful—that is, to that which lies beyond and above the self. *True* eros precisely *counters* the misleading temptation to love oneself in a direct manner. As Tillich conceives it, its function is indeed to open the human being to the divine love and to prepare her for receiving this. This makes it all the more important for eros to be oriented to the unconditioned from which true love springs. Eros, as Tillich pictures it then, is not merely an inevitable human phenomenon to be tolerated because it cannot be left behind, but a vehicle towards true human love and self-love. Its inclusion in true love signifies precisely the human being's lack of self-sufficiency, Tillich's argument implies in total contrast to Nygren's.

The above argument goes entirely against attempts to conceptualise human self-love as a, perhaps regrettable, reality which must be contained. In light of the divine self-love it is much rather an intrinsic aspect of the human being's status as the *imago dei*. At the same time, it challenges unchecked endorsements of human self-love and, instead, suggests that the human being's love of herself and her world is true love only if it 'penetrate[s]

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<sup>558</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.313.

through the finite to its infinite ground'.<sup>559</sup> Since the 'divine self-love includes all creatures', self-love of the human kind will equally 'include[...] everything with which man is existentially united'.<sup>560</sup> Such true self-love 'is not an isolated act which originates in the individual being but is participation in the universal or divine act of self-affirmation, which is the originating power in every individual act'.<sup>561</sup> Thus, what seems like a qualification of self-love—the need for eros to be placed 'under the criterion of agape'—in fact *enables* self-love. At the same time, it does justice to the needs of the other.

According to my interpretation of Tillich's account, true self-love in no way contradicts love of the other but is intertwined with it to the point of being entirely interdependent with it. Self-love as Tillich conceives it is anything but equal to the self-centredness we saw Nygren attribute to self-love. Similarly to Fromm, whose thought Tillich knew well, Tillich seems to suggest that the problem is not that the existential human being has too much self-love, but that she has too little to love herself—or others—properly.<sup>562</sup>

The above suggests that Fromm significantly shaped Tillich's thought on love and, particularly, self-love. Tillich acknowledges this most explicitly in the *The Courage to Be* where he, approvingly, summarises Fromm's view that 'the right self-love and the right love of others are interdependent, and that selfishness and the abuse of others are equally interdependent'.<sup>563</sup> Fromm traces the notion, which he and Tillich reject, 'that love for others and love for oneself are alternatives' back to Kant and Calvin.<sup>564</sup> He considers the mechanical juxtaposition of self-love and other-love, and the

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<sup>559</sup> Tillich, *ST II*, p.54.

<sup>560</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.313.

<sup>561</sup> Tillich, *TCB*, p.23.

<sup>562</sup> Tillich and Fromm were both members of the New York Psychology Group, which met in the years 1941-1945.

<sup>563</sup> Tillich, *TCB*, p.22.

<sup>564</sup> Erich Fromm 'Selfishness and Self-Love', p.3. First published in *Psychiatry. Journal for the Study of Interpersonal Process*, Washington (The William Alanson Psychiatric Foundation), Vol.2 (1939). Accessed online at <http://www.erich-fromm.de/biophil/en/images/stories/pdf-Dateien/1939b-e.pdf> (11/10/2011).

undifferentiated association of self-love with egoism and selfishness to be present in Stirner, Nietzsche and Freud as well as in much theology, and challenges the juxtaposition by arguing that ‘the attitude towards others and towards ourselves, far from being contradictory, basically runs parallel’.<sup>565</sup> In a manner similar to Tillich’s above, he argues that if we perceive others as hostile towards us we will be hostile towards ourselves; equally, love of others necessarily corresponds with a deep affirmation of the self and its ‘happiness, growth, freedom’—that is, with a self-love distinct from selfishness and usually underdeveloped in the individual.<sup>566</sup> While neither Fromm nor Tillich rules out self-sacrifice (both distinguishing, instead, between a valid and indeed self-affirming self-sacrifice and a masochistic self-sacrifice), Fromm, it is true, rejects the distinction between an existential and an essential self and hence, understands self-love more in naturalistic or in this-worldly terms.

### 5.4.3 Love and the courage to be

The inter-dependence of self-love and other-love recognized by Tillich has been found to manifest itself in the very precondition for self-love—that is, in the human being’s acceptance of God’s own love, which is both a divine self-love and a love of the human being. It is with respect to this receptivity that true human self-love or ‘perfect self-affirmation’ is the ‘fundamental expression’ of what Tillich calls the ‘ontology of courage’.<sup>567</sup> Proper self-love depends on ‘the courage to accept acceptance’.<sup>568</sup> Accepting the divine self-love, which includes the existential human being, and thus entails the divine acceptance of the human being, is the ultimate precondition of the ‘courage to be’.<sup>569</sup> This unites the ‘courage to be as oneself’ and the ‘courage to be as a part’, which Tillich understands, respectively, as affirmation of the self as a ‘separated, self-centred,

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<sup>565</sup> Fromm, ‘Selfishness and Self-Love’, p.7.

<sup>566</sup> Fromm, ‘Selfishness and Self-Love’, p.13.

<sup>567</sup> Tillich, *TCB*, pp.23, 89.

<sup>568</sup> Tillich, *TCB*, pp.155ff.

<sup>569</sup> Tillich, *TCB*, p.86.

individualised, incomparable, free, self-determining self' and as affirmation of the self as 'participant', that is, of oneself as 'a part of something from which one is, at the same time, separated' yet without which one would not be oneself.<sup>570</sup>

Tillich identifies the courage to be as the act of affirming being 'by taking non-being upon oneself'.<sup>571</sup> As indicated in the previous chapter, he deems that it is only through participation in the divine 'power of being which prevails against non-being' that being can be affirmed in spite of non-being.<sup>572</sup> Though affirming the self, the courage to be is not an individualistic or autonomous assertion of power over another self, but rather entails the human being's participation in the divine self-affirmation.<sup>573</sup> Tillich's discussion of courage reflects, and corresponds with, the notion that self-love depends on a prior reception of the divine love, which Tillich identifies as faith.<sup>574</sup> It also suggests, however, that this perfect love need not necessarily be received *consciously*: faith can be implicit as well as conscious and explicit.

It is imaginable that the person with merely implicit faith affirms the true, essential self despite lacking conscious knowledge of its nature; this is not the case with Sartre's attempt at affirming himself in spite of declaring the non-being of the self. This is because Sartre seeks to affirm himself in the face of doubt and meaninglessness solely by way of the courage to be as oneself, or independently of the courage to be as a part.<sup>575</sup> Considering the other to be a potential threat or compromise to one's self-development, Sartre seeks to control the other and thereby disallows the surrender that is entailed in daring to make oneself part of a larger whole, such as a community or society. Although ready to affirm the supposed non-being of the self, Sartre lacks the courage to expose himself to the other *despite* the anxious perception of them as a threat to the self. This, I

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<sup>570</sup> Tillich, *TCB*, pp.86-89, 113, 86.

<sup>571</sup> Tillich, *TCB*, p.86.

<sup>572</sup> Tillich, *TCB*, p.181.

<sup>573</sup> Tillich, *TCB*, p.89, 181.

<sup>574</sup> Tillich, *ST III*, p.298.

<sup>575</sup> Tillich, *TCB*, p.152.

take Tillich's argument to imply, is intertwined with a lack of courage on the part of Sartre to accept the divine acceptance, and thus to allow himself to be grasped by, and to participate in, the unconditioned. Without this, the trust necessary for participating in the human other is impossible. Such courage, however, is a response to a prior 'experience of love' and, thus, to a reception of love.<sup>576</sup>

### 5.5 Tillich's selfless love

With the above account of love, it has become evident that Tillich challenges polarisations of self-love and other-love when he considers these loves to be not only mutually dependent but, ultimately, co-incident. I now wish to suggest that in doing so, he offers a notion of selfless love which does not destroy or deny the human self and its needs, but which builds up the self and enables its flourishing.

In his account of the human self, Tillich argues that the human being in existential estrangement is self-*less* in that the object-like, static self, which Sartre rightly associates with bad faith, cannot be identified with the human being's true and full self. When identifying with such a self, the human being is identifying with an illusion. At the same time, Tillich has been shown to infer precisely from the unreality of such a self that true selfhood depends on a turn outwards and, more specifically, on participation in the other and on desire for their Good. It is precisely where the human being seeks to individualise herself without participating in the other—an endeavour Sartre is guilty of—that the human being is guilty of pursuing the false, illusory self. The above discussion of Tillich's account of love made clear that this means that the human being's eros-love, her desire for fulfilment of self, can be satisfied only where it is placed under the criterion of, and thus be conjoined with, agape-love. This, in turn, implies receiving the other-centred, agapeic love of the Spiritual Presence

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<sup>576</sup> Pattison, *God and Being*, p.32. See 'The New Being', and, as Pattison points out, 'Love is Stronger than Death' (Tillich, *NB*, pp.15-24, 170-174; Pattison, *God and Being*, p.32 (fn.)).

The full selfhood and, with this, the flourishing of Tillich's human being thus depends on a love that is selfless at least in a two-fold sense: it is based on the recognition that we are self-less insofar as we lack a self which is ours independently of our relations with the other; and it consists in an orientation to, and participation in, the other whose fulfilment it desires; this orientation, in turn, is possible only where the transforming love of God, the divine agape which itself is selfless in the second sense, has been received through the 'courage to accept acceptance'. The reception of this love, and the selfless love arising from this reception may, as Tillich suggests, be only implicit or unconscious. Yet it is precisely with a view to enabling this courageous reception that Tillich so strongly encourages the human being's willingness to affirm himself.

Tillich's selfless love thus entails no denial of the needs and desires of the self, but emerges out of insight into the nature of true selfhood and implies a turn towards what is other than—though related to—the self. The nature of the essential self (as well as that, so the doctrine of the Trinity signifies, of being-itself) suggests that even where the divine love has been received and existential estrangement overcome, true love—even true self-love—remains other-centred. This is because true love is rooted in the human subject's conscious or unconscious recognition of her lack of self-sufficiency and dependency on the other such that love never clings to the self but always loves the self *as*—and yet more strikingly *through*—another. Coincident with true love of self, selfless love in this more *self-giving* sense in no way denies but builds up the self.

Affirming the true, *relational* self in and through affirming the other, whom this self is distinct from and belongs to, Tillich's selfless love is perhaps best described as transcending the distinction between self- and other-love. Such selfless love is utterly distinct from, and indeed fundamentally at odds with, mere selflessness where this is understood as self-neglect or self-denial. As *love*, which Tillich has been shown to define as desire, it is the result not of a duty heteronomously imposed on the self, or of a

hierarchical subordination and devaluation of the self, but out of a desirous, passionate, free and insightful movement of the lover outside and beyond himself. It is in utter continuity with, incorporates, and satisfies, the lover's need and desire for fulfilment. At the same time, it remains, so Tillich seems to suggest, turned towards the other also insofar as it does not revel in itself. Like Gabriel Marcel, who suggests that the joy of generosity vanishes once one enjoys one's own generosity, Tillich indeed seems to imply that the fruits of true love, the up-building of the self, depend on a perpetual other-centredness, by way of which the self is most of one with itself.<sup>577</sup>

With the above account of selfless love, Tillich retains a continuity with the central Christian notion of love as self-giving. The above is indeed in keeping with Tillich's suggestion that, just as love's oneness precludes attempts to weigh eros and agape up against each other, true love is not of a calculating kind but entails a readiness for 'holy self-waste'.<sup>578</sup> In his sermons, Tillich suggests that God's action in the world, but also human acts of love, have shown love to emerge from an 'abundant heart', which can involve the 'waste of an uncalculated self-surrender', a self-waste 'beyond the limits of law and rationality' 'in service of a new creation'.<sup>579</sup> Tillich describes the divine 'wasteful self-surrender' as a traditionally Lutheran insight which has largely been lost to a 'religious and moral utilitarianism which always asks for the reasonable purpose'.<sup>580</sup> Law, conventions and a rigid self-control have all served to stifle occasions to waste ourselves and to repress the 'creative abundance of the heart', Tillich argues.<sup>581</sup> In arguing that people's sickness lies not only in their receiving too little love but also in their lack of possibilities 'to waste themselves', Tillich relates even the notion of self-

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<sup>577</sup> Gabriel Marcel (2001) *The Mystery of Being*. Vol II: Faith and Reality (tr. G. S. Fraser). St. Augustine's Press, Southbend, p.119.

<sup>578</sup> Tillich, *NB*, p.47.

<sup>579</sup> Tillich, *NB*, p.47.

<sup>580</sup> Tillich, *NB*, p.47.

<sup>581</sup> Tillich, *NB*, p.48.

waste back to a Christian concern for human flourishing: self-waste is, he seems to suggest, a fundamental human need, engrained in essential being.<sup>582</sup>

However, as already indicated, Tillich's notion of selfless love must not be understood as a singularly Christian idea; it arises also out of his engagement with Sartre's existentialism. It can be seen as resting on an acceptance of Sartre's insight that the human self is not simply a stable reality but a developing project and that true selfhood depends on a confrontation of non-being. Tillich's selfless love implicitly accommodates even Sartre's notion that, in *existence*, the other is typically experienced as a threat to one's own selfhood. At the same time, Tillich's account of selfless love implies that this perception of the other must be considered an existential misconception, and suggests, instead, that it is precisely and only through lovingly opening oneself to the other that non-being can be confronted satisfactorily—that is, that the threat of non-being can be overcome.

Finally, Tillich's combined ontological and existentialist perspective has been shown to leave him with an account of love which can accommodate Nietzsche's insistence that the fullness of being entails power and freedom. Tillich, to be sure, places power in inter-dependence with justice, and freedom with destiny, but does so precisely out of a valuation of, and for the sake of, power and freedom. Similarly, Tillich's account of love implies a qualification of the 'Dionysian immediacy' of Nietzsche's drive for self-affirmation, but nonetheless accommodates this drive in principle.<sup>583</sup> Tillich moreover agrees with Nietzsche that the human being cannot attain full and flourishing selfhood without confronting non-being and, thus, without incurring a risk. For Tillich, however, the path towards full selfhood is not an individual, but a social project and depends not only on a confrontation but also on an *affirmation* of that which appears to—and, in an *enabling* manner, does—limit the self. Though Tillich's perspective cannot therefore unite

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<sup>582</sup> Tillich, *NB*, p.47.

<sup>583</sup> Kleffmann, *Nietzsche's Begriff des Lebens*, p.582

a Christian understanding of love with the proposals of its Nietzschean critics entirely, it has been shown to incorporate significant aspects of these proposals and, thus, to constitute a challenge to the notion of an unbridgeable rift between the two.

With his account of love, Tillich thus mediates between Nygren and Nietzsche while also qualifying the claims of both. He does so by proposing a love, which leads neither to autonomous nor to heteronomous, but to what Tillich calls ‘theonomous personal fulfilment’—that is, to a fulfilment rooted in a reality which is distinct from but also the ground of the self.<sup>584</sup> Contrary to the ‘humanistic idea of man which actualises what man can be directly and without sacrifice’ this fulfilment depends on a recognition of dependency that manifests itself as sacrifice of ‘all human potentialities [...]’.<sup>585</sup> At the same time, it is rewarded by a return of these potentialities ‘back into the limits of man’s finitude [...]’ and thus by a greater freedom than could be attained through autonomous self-assertion, Tillich implies.<sup>586</sup>

## 5.6 Difficulties

Before bringing the present discussion of Tillich to a close, various difficulties in his account must be addressed. Primary among these is Tillich’s already hinted at tendency to under-develop, or even de-emphasise, the dimension of the personal, with respect both to God and to the human being.

### 5.6.1 Depersonalising tendency

In the previous chapter we saw that Tillich defines the fullness of human selfhood as one of personhood, which he considers to be interdependent on participatory communion with other persons. In this chapter it became clear that Tillich also has a notion of divine being as consisting in personal relations (the Trinity). He also claims to

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<sup>584</sup> Tillich, *ST III*, p.289.

<sup>585</sup> Tillich, *ST III*, p.289.

<sup>586</sup> Tillich, *ST III*, p.289.

value the Protestant emphasis on the ‘unmediated, person-to-person encounter with God’.<sup>587</sup> These features of Tillich’s thought suggest that he is sensitive to the special dignity articulated in the notion of *personhood*. As Tillich himself implies, the dimension of the personal is expressive of both the human being’s capacity and destiny for being a distinct and centred individual and, mutually dependent on this, of her potential for participatory relatedness. As such, the dimension of the personal lies at the foundation of a love that is oriented towards the other while building up the lover’s own self. Signifying, more traditionally put, the seat of an intellect and a will, the person is the reality of being that is most capable of knowing another and willing his good. The notion of the personal is expressive both of that which the human being is destined for and of that which enables the realisation of this telos. As we found Tillich himself say, the human being’s essentially personal nature not only means that her individual selfhood depends on communion with others, but also that, in its *fullness*, such communion is possible only with other *persons*.<sup>588</sup>

Despite the above acknowledgements, Tillich shies away from fully uncovering the implications of the personal dimension. In line with his general tendency towards abstraction, Tillich famously considers God, whom he considers a symbol for being-itself, neither ‘a person’ nor ‘less than personal’.<sup>589</sup> Tillich’s uneasiness with the notion of the personal God, which he considers to be a ‘confusing symbol’, entails, to be sure, a worthy intention of avoiding portrayals of God as *a* being.<sup>590</sup> However, McKelway’s and others’ complaints that Tillich insufficiently addresses the particular historical person Jesus suggest that Tillich’s unease about the personal leads him towards a veritable neglect of the personal self-revelation and presence of the Christian God.<sup>591</sup> This is

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<sup>587</sup> Tillich, *DF*, p.116.

<sup>588</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.195.

<sup>589</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.271.

<sup>590</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.271.

<sup>591</sup> McKelway, *Systematic Theology of Paul Tillich*; R. Allan Killen (1956) *The Ontological Theology of Paul Tillich*. J.H. Kok N.V. Kampen, p.275; Hamilton, *System and the Gospel*, p.186.

further underlined by Tillich's relative inattention to the Trinity, and thus to God's own personal relationality. While Tillich does dedicate some space to this doctrine, he fails to explore the extent to which the love between the three persons of the Trinity can, and arguably should, serve as a central interpretative Christian framework for understanding the nature of love.

Tillich's under-emphasis on the Christian belief that God acted in a distinct individual in history causes him to underplay that, as Hamilton points out, Christian salvation consists in personal knowledge of a personal life.<sup>592</sup> Similarly, it prevents Tillich from fully stressing the extent to which 'the revelation of the inaccessible ground and abyss of being' is geared towards, and seeks to grasp, 'our centre of personality'.<sup>593</sup> Asking 'how one still can have a personal encounter with something or someone that is more than a person', Hans Schwartz has gone so far as to conclude that Tillich considers it 'impossible to have a relationship with God in the proper sense of the word'.<sup>594</sup> R. A. Killen has, similarly, claimed that 'a God who is not a person [...] cannot really love or be loved'.<sup>595</sup> These may be exaggerations, brushing over the fact that Tillich does speak of the divine agape and of human love for God. Even if one does not go this far, however, Tillich's account of God does correspond with an impersonal relationship between God and the human being that would seem to do injustice to Tillich's own observation that the personal nature of human being means she attains the fullness of her being in the context of communion with other persons, a point returned to again below. Finally, Tillich's neglect of the Trinitarian love relations and his related failure to speak of the human being's relation with being-itself as one of communion effects a neglect of the role communion between human beings plays in conveying the presence

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<sup>592</sup> Hamilton, *System and the Gospel*, p.189.

<sup>593</sup> Hans Schwartz 'Open Questions Concerning a Personal God in Paul Tillich's Systematic Theology' in Gert Hummel (1989) *God and Being. The Problem of Ontology in the Philosophical Theology of Paul Tillich*. De Gruyter, Berlin, p.189.

<sup>594</sup> Schwartz, *Open Questions*, pp.188, 186.

<sup>595</sup> Killen, *The Ontological Theology*, p.275.

of God.<sup>596</sup> As discussed in the subsequent section, this compromises also the place of mutuality and reciprocity in love.

Tillich's own increasing conviction that there is no non-symbolic language for God calls into question the validity of his relative eschewal of personal language for the sake of the language of being.<sup>597</sup> While the notion of a personal God risks anthropomorphism and can, arguably, be misunderstood as referring to an individual being, it must also be recognised that every symbol can be distorted and bears certain drawbacks. That the personal should nonetheless hold a special place in Christian discourse about God is, however, underlined by Tillich's own insight that, in the case of the human being, that full participation which constitutes a precondition for salvation is possible only with other persons. The personal is, moreover, evocative of a unique combination of potential intimacy with the other and of the lasting mystery that this other remains for the self. Tillich's failure to portray the relationship between God and the human being as one of interactive and communicative *personal* relationship and his related neglect of the nature of inter-personal human relationships is related to another difficulty particularly relevant to the present discussion.

### 5.6.2 Reciprocal relation

If the *inter-personal* relationship is, as Tillich himself admits, that which most develops the self and which therefore enables human flourishing, then one must add that the inter-personal relationship is also the relationship with the greatest potential for reciprocity in love. That a giving and receiving of love is particularly conducive to the flourishing of

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<sup>596</sup> According to Kleffmann, Tillich attempts to make room in theology for Nietzsche's understanding of life, or for the human being's drive towards overcoming non-being through self-creation, by applying this to God. Insofar as this is the reason for Tillich's tendency to speak of God in the terminology of being and non-being rather than as personal, Kleffmann is right to conclude that this is not fully successful. It causes Tillich to do injustice *both* to Nietzsche's concept of life, which Tillich thereby turns it into a 'transhistorical, statically thought precondition', an a priori, which in fact no longer captures the essence of Nietzsche's dynamic struggle; *and* to the Christian understanding of true life as dependent on a concrete and personal communication between man and God (see Kleffmann, *Nietzsche's Begriff des Lebens*, esp. pp.581-583).

<sup>597</sup> E.g. Thatcher, *The Ontology of Paul Tillich*, p.160.

the self is, to an extent, suggested by Tillich's own notions that human flourishing rests on the gift and reception of the divine agape, that reception of this in turn demands a sacrifice (of one's worldly possibilities for the sake of unity with God),<sup>598</sup> and that full participation implies communion. It is further suggested by the deeply engrained human desire to give and to receive love (particularly from one's beloved), and by the fact that experiences of the consummation of love typically entail the satisfaction of this desire. Stressing that reciprocity is a mark of love in its fullness underlines that true love cannot entail a one-sided exploitation by or sacrifice of one individual to another—that selfless love does not imply a denial of the self but that it calls for, and culminates in, the satisfaction of its deepest desire, the desire for its love to be returned.

Tillich's depersonalised understanding of God, however, stands in the way of demonstrating and endorsing this particular value of reciprocal love, which is further explored in the final chapter of this thesis. As already indicated, Tillich does not develop a notion of an ongoing loving and communicative *relationship*—or, indeed, friendship—between God and the human being. The human being is 'grasped' by the enigmatic 'Spiritual Presence' (itself a term arguably detracting from the traditional notion of the Holy Spirit as one of the three *persons* of the Trinity) and 'taken it into' the divine community.<sup>599</sup> But the Spiritual Presence is not described as entering into a personal communion with the human being. Tillich does not, for instance, unravel the sense in which God, in the Holy Spirit, personally addresses, and engages with, the human being. Likewise, he portrays the human being's relation to being-itself, as one more of passivity than of activity. Tillich identifies eros, which he considers to be the primary human love for God, with the 'state of being driven', and thus with the passive element which, he argues, makes it possible to call love a 'passion' (which he associates with Kierkegaard's

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<sup>598</sup> Tillich, *ST III*, pp.288f.

<sup>599</sup> Tillich, *ST III*, p.137.

above-mentioned notion of 'infinite passion' for God).<sup>600</sup> Eros is thus likened to a pull which the human being is inevitably subject to. Human agape towards God is even more unambiguously portrayed as a case of faithfully but passively receiving the divine love. Tillich does, it is true, speak also of 'faith as ultimate concern [as] an act of the entire personality', indeed as 'the most personal of all personal acts' and as a 'conscious act', yet he does not fully tie this in with his account of *agape* as faith.<sup>601</sup> More importantly, his insistence that this 'act' is authentic where it is oriented towards the 'element of the unconditional and of ultimacy' further supports the impression that Tillich relativises the sense in which the relation with the unconditioned is one of personal encounter.<sup>602</sup>

Tillich's sense that the human being's aspirations towards self-transcendence are the result primarily of an impersonal life urge, and his sense that being-itself need not be encountered as personal, compromise the extent to which his notion of love can be said to affirm the individual as a free agent capable and desirous of personal, and indeed reciprocal, relationships of love. As already noted, this would seem to affect relationships amongst humans (in addition to their relationship with God). When it comes to conveying the Spiritual Presence, no particular value seems to be attached to the kind of reciprocal relationships that human beings tend to desire and value so highly. The judgment that Tillich does not consider reciprocity an essential element of true love is supported by his merely peripheral interest in love as *philia*. Tillich does not, moreover, fully work out the way in which love is always a response to a gift and in which it, in turn, provokes such a response. Instead of emphasising that the fullness of love implies reciprocity between self and other, Tillich's abstract terminology of individualisation and participation suggests something more of a one-directional movement from self to self and self to other. In light of the feminist perspectives on love referenced in Chapter 3, such a neglect of the importance of mutuality would only seem to buttress feminist

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<sup>600</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, p.310; Tillich, *LPJ*, p.27. Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, pp.97, 59.

<sup>601</sup> Tillich, *DF*, pp.4f.

<sup>602</sup> Tillich, *DF*, p.11.

concerns about a loving turn towards the other.<sup>603</sup> In this respect, the validity of what I have characterised as Tillich's selfless love is compromised.

## 5.7 Conclusion

In the previous chapter we had found Tillich suggest that, even if the other appears as a threat to the existential self and its freedom (as experienced by Sartre), the flourishing of the human self nonetheless depends on its participatory relation with this other. Tillich had thereby complemented Sartre's description of the existential self as a distinct individual in *conflict* with the other, with a vision of the full, redeemed self as a distinct individual *fruitfully related* to the other. Only a participatory relationship with the other can enable the conquest of non-being that is ultimately necessary for the human being's flourishing as an individual, Tillich argued. In the present chapter, we examined Tillich's proposed solution to how his vision of what he called 'personality-in-communion' might be realised. As I interpreted Tillich's thought, 'personality-in-communion' depends on, and entails, a selfless kind of love, which is first and foremost a divine love that reaches out to the existential human being and transforms her own love. It is on the basis of receiving this love that the human being becomes truly able to affirm her own being by entering into relations of selfless love with others.

With the above, Tillich in no way challenged Sartre's observation that the human being cannot, of herself, overcome the threat of nothingness and be the ground of her own being. Both Tillich and Sartre could indeed be said to consider the human being 'self-less' insofar as she has no self of which she is the ground. Yet as has become evident Tillich does not infer from this lack of self-sufficiency that the human being's flourishing depends on her control of the other, but that the human being must lovingly

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<sup>603</sup> Above I already referenced Barbara Hilkert Andolsen, Margaret Farley, Elizabeth Johnson and Rosemary Radford Ruether as feminists concerned with emphasising mutuality as a central element in true love—and as authors doing so in reference to the doctrine of the Trinity. I will briefly return to these feminist perspectives below.

participate in the other and desire her fulfilment. This is the meaning of Tillich's assertion of the inter-dependence of individualisation and participation, and of eros and agape. Tillich's existential self points beyond itself, both in the sense of envisaging a state of being other than the status quo, and in depending on the other who lies beyond the self for attaining this.

Tillich has also been shown to incorporate into his thought Nietzsche's, Freud's and Sartre's assertion of an intrinsic human drive towards a greater fullness of life, and their concern for the freedom and empowerment of the individual. At the same time, he complements his affirmation of these features with an ontology, which re-connects the self with love. This has been shown to imply the recognition that the human being cannot attain the desired individuality and freedom single-handedly but only on the basis of a loving turn towards, and affirmation of, what lies outside and constrains the individual self (and vice versa). Human flourishing as Tillich conceives it thus depends not only on the selfless love of God but also on the human being's selfless love. At the same time, Tillich has been shown to insist that the individual's desirous drive for freedom, individuality and self-fulfilment has a place in, and properly speaking even fosters this selfless love. In sum, Tillich has persuasively accommodated the human individual's powerful life urge (which he associates with eros) on the one hand, and the distinctively Christian emphasis on love's divine origin and its other-oriented nature (which he associates with agape) on the other.

In doing so, Tillich has been able to bring closer together the two conflicting discourses examined in Chapter 3 of this thesis. In grounding love in the ontological interdependence of self and other, who meet in a transcendent ground of being, he has been able to bridge the divide between love of self and love of other, and between eros and agape. He has done so by distinguishing not so much between self-assertive and self-surrendering love but between more and less truthful (or fallen and redeemed)

manifestations of these elements of love, and by connecting self-affirmation with openness to the other. His resulting picture incorporates both the existentialist concern to counter bad faith, and Christian ideas of fallenness and redemption.

In light of the above I have argued that Tillich proposes a love which is selfless insofar as it is based on a recognition that the true self is not contained, autonomous reality but one that develops precisely in and through a loving orientation to and participation in the other. This selfless love is at odds with the denial or destruction of the self, and instead builds up the self and thereby enables human flourishing. His account thus offers substantial support for the notion that selfless love and the flourishing of the self are not only non-contradictory but interdependent. At the same time, it has also been found to imply several problems, which we must return to in the concluding chapter of this thesis. First, however, we will consider a non-theological perspective on the question of selfless love and human flourishing. For this, we now turn to the thought of Iris Murdoch.

## Chapter 6 – Iris Murdoch’s account of the self

In developing an account of the self, Iris Murdoch, like Tillich, draws on existentialist and psychoanalytical thought. As will become apparent below, this is true in particular for her acceptance of Sartre’s assertion of the instability of the self and its dependence on the other, for his sense that the fullness of human selfhood is obstructed by the human tendency to create illusions of stability and independence, and for his insight that true (and, for Murdoch, moral) human selfhood depends on hard work, or self-discipline. Murdoch, equally, adopts Freud’s stress on human desire as a central interpretative category for understanding the nature of the human being and yet, like Tillich, will be shown to consider Freud’s own analyses to apply merely to a corrupted and distorted human state.

At the same time, Murdoch is more critical of Sartrean existentialism than Tillich, although the harshness of her statements on Sartre sometimes cloud the extent of his influence on her thought. Murdoch’s attempts to distance herself from Sartre arguably derive from her intention to maintain an atheistic position but to do so without lapsing into the kind of assertions of absolute freedom and the glorifications of the will, which she perceives to be a common effect of the decline of Christian theism visible in Sartre. Like Tillich, Murdoch wants to avoid the extremes of heteronomy and autonomy. In doing so she draws on an eclectic range of thinkers and, perhaps more than Tillich, develops her ideas over against those of other authors. This is given added urgency by the fact that, writing slightly later than Tillich, in a yet more secularised environment, and as an atheist rejecting traditional Christian notions of the soul, Murdoch cannot and does not take the reality of the self for granted. She, instead, arrives at the notion of the self via an exploration of why it matters contrary to what she perceives many of her contemporaries to suggest. It is on account of this particularly disputatious nature of her

thought, and the philosophically contested nature of the self, that the following discussion of her account of the self begins with an outline of the voices she argues with.<sup>604</sup>

## 6.1 Why the self matters

### 6.1.1 The bracketing out of consciousness and value

Murdoch observes that, motivated by a desire for rational and public certainty and clarity, philosophy since Kant, which she boldly classifies into ‘existentialism (here [she] take[s] the work of Sartre as typical) and linguistic empiricism (the tradition of Moore and Wittgenstein)’ has increasingly bracketed out the inner life of the human individual and, with this, value.<sup>605</sup> She roots this modernist, as she calls it, neo-Kantian, development in Kant’s attempt to ‘vindicate the idea of unity’ by basing knowledge of reality on the objective foundation of human reason.<sup>606</sup> Murdoch sees this as an inadequate solution to attaining a noble goal. She takes issue with Kant’s resulting notion of the self as ‘radically divided’ into the ‘noumenal rational self’ and the ‘phenomenal self’, the latter of which is the reality we commonly conceive of as our self but which is unnecessary for our acquisition of knowledge and, instead, is itself a product of our

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<sup>604</sup> Notably, Murdoch does not, as Stephen Mulhall correctly points out, portray other thinkers ‘as occupying consistent and logically-watertight positions’; nor does she herself offer a ‘single, self-contained and coherent conceptual system [...]’ (Stephen Mulhall ‘Constructing a Hall of Reflection: Perfectionist Edification in Iris Murdoch’s ‘Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals’, *Philosophy* Vol.72, No.280 (1997), p.237). Doing so would contradict her view of the elusiveness of the whole or the unified, and of the consequent messiness of moral life and reflection. The following analyses have to be read against the background of this caveat.

<sup>605</sup> I agree with Altorf that Nussbaum misunderstands Murdoch when reading her as proposing ‘that there is a philosophical style that is content-neutral’ and ‘of plain hard reason, pure of appeals to emotion and sense’ (although Nussbaum qualifies this assessment in Martha C. Nussbaum, ‘Love and Vision: Iris Murdoch on Eros and the Individual’ in Maria Antonaccio, William Schweiker (eds.) (1996) *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago) (Martha Nussbaum (2001) *The Fragility of Goodness. Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*. Revised Edition. CUP, Cambridge, p.16; Marje Altorf (2008) *Iris Murdoch and the Art of Imagining*. Continuum, London). Neutrality is indeed the precise opposite of what Murdoch proposes. Murdoch for instance strongly criticises Plato’s aspiration to ‘develop [...] a view of ethical understanding that separates intellect as much as possible from the disturbing influences of sense and emotion’ (Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, p.xv).

<sup>606</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.250.

perception, 'spiritless and causally determined' and removed from the actual reality underlying it.<sup>607</sup> Since Kant associates this phenomenal self with the messy and unstable jumble of consciousness, his account of the human being prepares the dismissal of the conscious self as irrelevant to knowledge and, hence, also morality, Murdoch argues. For Kant, it is on account of the transcendental ideas of reason, which is unknowable in that the categories of understanding cannot be applied to it, that we can be said to have anything like a self.

Murdoch by no means rejects Kant's anthropology entirely, taking up and developing for instance the role he assigns to the imagination and to human responsibility. As Antonaccio argues, she moreover incorporates a sense of Kant's valuation of the individual agent into her morality.<sup>608</sup> Nonetheless, she considers Kant's elevation of the noumenal rational self over the phenomenal self to imply a dismissal of the inner life of consciousness, which a) fails to make sense of how human beings experience themselves, which b) falsely suggests that we can perceive facts without value and which c) implies the beginning of what she considers to have become a wide-spread and highly problematic 'horror of the contingent', including the human individual.<sup>609</sup> Although she considers Kant's notion that the 'response to duty demands an enlightened assessment of the relevant world' to redeem him from his negative attitude towards the contingent individual at least to some extent, she rejects the notion that we respect each other as 'co-equal bearers of universal reason' rather than as 'particular phenomenal eccentric individuals'.<sup>610</sup> That by which the human individual actually defines herself—'character'—is 'unreal' for Kant, for whom 'resort[ing] to detail is to obscure the issue and make excuses', Murdoch argues.<sup>611</sup> She substantiates this criticism by arguing that,

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<sup>607</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, pp.149, 155.

<sup>608</sup> Maria Antonaccio 'Imagining the Good: Iris Murdoch's Godless Theology', *Annual Society of Christian Ethics* Vol.16 (1996).

<sup>609</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.269.

<sup>610</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.262.

<sup>611</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.269.

with the exception of *Achtung*, which is an emotion not between persons but a feeling towards the moral law, Kant (in her view wrongly) considers desires and emotions morally irrelevant and even obstructive.<sup>612</sup>

Murdoch also considers Kant's separation of the human being into 'man as knower of the phenomenal world (exercising theoretical reason)' and 'man as moral agent (exercising practical reason)' to imply a problematic separation of fact and value.<sup>613</sup> Since values can neither be arrived at theoretically nor tested empirically they have no place in either of Kant's two notions of truth claims. Although she, again, considers the sort of assessment of a situation that is required by our response to duty to imply a restoration of 'the colours of morality and value', she objects that Kant's principal aim is, nonetheless, to isolate our knowledge of the world from any value claims, which are in turn detached from reality.<sup>614</sup> The notion that one could make room for value at a later stage as, say, a personal addition disregards what Murdoch perceives to be the fact that 'all awareness includes value as the (versatile) agility to distinguish true from false'.<sup>615</sup> Since Kant, a crucial aspect of the human person and her consciousness has thus been getting lost. In the long run, this approach results in pictures of the self as an 'historical individual, language user, victim of identity crises [...] which are not uninteresting, but which, if dealing with morality at all, treat it 'as a social or historical, etc. phenomenon, rather than worrying about the self as moral being', Murdoch argues.<sup>616</sup> Equally, Kant's isolation of knowledge and value has enabled existentialist reductions of value to 'the empty substanceless movement of freedom (choice, decision) itself'.<sup>617</sup>

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<sup>612</sup> Murdoch's reading of Kant as uninterested in emotions and human relations may be unfair. See Pamela Anderson, Jordan Bell (2010) *Kant and Theology*. T&T Clark.

<sup>613</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.149.

<sup>614</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.261.

<sup>615</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.221.

<sup>616</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.166.

<sup>617</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.260; *EM*, p.134.

### 6.1.2 Neo-Kantian developments

Kant's search for a stable, unified basis of knowledge and his attempt to provide this by bracketing out our inner life of emotions and desires, has, Murdoch argues, been definitive for all consecutive accounts of the human person and her relation to reality. Murdoch identifies one strand of perspectives on the self as belonging to the tradition of linguistic empiricism, which she considers to include Anglo-Saxon analytic philosophy, utilitarianism, behaviourism, and structuralism. This, she argues, rests on Wittgenstein's concern to preserve philosophical clarity, which led this philosopher, too, to dismiss the inner life as too fleeting, obscure and private to constitute a sufficient foundation for knowledge. One's possible inability to 'logically prise experiences apart' and the co-existence of 'seeing, thinking and interpreting' in our inner life renders this life irrelevant to philosophy, as Murdoch considers Wittgenstein to have argued.<sup>618</sup> As a consequence, the contents of 'consciousness' are not considered: as Murdoch points out, Wittgenstein avoids the term.

In discounting Descartes' solitary knower Wittgenstein is trying to avoid not only the individual but also value, thereby upholding the separation of fact and value, Murdoch further surmises. Morality is relegated to a separate, 'peripheral' and 'personal' realm, 'discussed in terms of emotive language, imperatives, persuasions, and other tentative formulae'.<sup>619</sup> According to Murdoch, the emphasis on the obscurity, vagueness and unknowability of the inner life has increasingly promoted behaviourism and, more among structuralists, the notion that the inner life is an illusion, or indeed that any theory of the 'self' must be 'eliminated'.<sup>620</sup> This leaves Murdoch with the question whether there cannot 'be too fierce a removal of entities deemed to be unnecessary and unknowable'.<sup>621</sup>

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<sup>618</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.279, 278.

<sup>619</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.150.

<sup>620</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.150

<sup>621</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.270.

Wittgenstein, she argues, ‘banished not only [...] a naïve error (or grammatical fiction) but the whole multifarious mixed-up business of our inner reflections, thought-being, experience, consciousness’.<sup>622</sup> The result, and Murdoch considers this to become apparent particularly in literature, is that ‘the clearly delineated human person vanishes, an impressionistic stream of consciousness flows instead, then even the idea of consciousness itself may seem to vanish, objects and scenes dissolve into words’.<sup>623</sup>

As already indicated in Chapter 2, what Murdoch perceives to be the second major strand of contemporary philosophy, Sartrean existentialism, initially appeared more promising to her. Sartre recognises the need for and ability of the human being to counter deterministic forces. He (like Hegel) also recognises the central role the workings of consciousness, human desires and fantasies play in the human being’s self-identity and self-expression, and in obstructing self-liberation. Murdoch also admires Sartre for his courageous confrontation of the ‘blankness of contingent things’ and their effect on human consciousness.<sup>624</sup> Murdoch bemoans, however, that Sartre does not know how to *value* contingent individuals.<sup>625</sup> As Gordon rightly observes, Murdoch, like Gabriel Marcel, calls for seeing Goodness and Beauty in the contingent and, as we will see, considers Sartre’s impatient failure to do so a failure of love.<sup>626</sup> As already noted above, she also finds that the Sartrean notions of sincerity, of absolute freedom, and of will as an entirely autonomous source of value constitute unviable ways of realising truthful being. They, again, rest on a separation and juxtaposition of fact and value. Sartre’s identification of consciousness with value, and of value with an invention of the

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<sup>622</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.279.

<sup>623</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.250.

<sup>624</sup> David Gordon (1995) *Iris Murdoch’s Fables of Unselfing*. University of Missouri Press, Columbia, p.19.

<sup>625</sup> The contrast between Murdoch’s and Sartre’s treatment of the individual is discussed by Diogenes Allen in ‘Two experiences of existence. Jean-Paul Sartre and Iris Murdoch’, *International Philosophical Quarterly* Vol.14 (1974). Allen quotes the thoughts of Sartre’s character Roquentin in *La Nausée* that ‘the diversity of things, their individuality, were only an appearance, a veneer’ and that true vision implies seeing the mere fluidity of things (Allen, p.181). As I have suggested, Murdoch does not reject Sartre’s sense of underlying fluidity and disorder entirely, yet she neither makes this absolute nor considers it a moral option to see things in this light. As Allen shows, she calls for seeing the ‘glorious’ nature of individuals, particularly those outside ourselves.

<sup>626</sup> Gordon, *Fables of Unselfing*, pp.19f.

will, means that the human being is not only reduced to the cold, empty and supposedly free and rational will, but also severed from the world of fact surrounding her.

Thus, while Murdoch welcomes the existentialist interest in consciousness and in the relation between self and other, she rejects his willingness to ‘withdraw his man to a point at which he is independent of what seems to him the inhuman determinism of the modern world [...] even if it means depicting him as an empty shell’.<sup>627</sup> If the problem with linguistic-behaviourist man is his inevitable ‘surrender to convention’, the problem with existentialist man is his morally inadequate ‘totalitarian’ way of relating to others, and his neurotic self-obsession.<sup>628</sup>

### 6.1.3 Murdoch’s perspective on contemporary approaches to the self

Insofar as the above challenges to traditional notions of the self are based on ‘sound anti-Cartesian critical arguments about sense data, momentary inner certainties, or the role of memory images in remembering’, Murdoch takes them very seriously and indeed predicates her exploration of the self on the acknowledgement that the notions of substance, unity and self-identity implied in traditional understandings of the self (or soul) are no longer self-evident and need, at the very least, be given a new defence.<sup>629</sup> However, she resists concluding that the self, or notions of substance, can simply be dismissed. This is particularly because philosophical arguments for the irrelevance of consciousness, and the disunity or even illusory nature of the self have not altered the fact that human beings—even where, like in Hume’s case, they profess to the disunity and instability of the self—nonetheless continue to think of themselves as unified and stable beings in everyday life.<sup>630</sup> Where the ‘unity or identity of the self [...] is increasingly seen as a pseudo-problem’ a critical aspect of human life, indeed the very

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<sup>627</sup> Murdoch, *Sartre*, p.55.

<sup>628</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.268; Wolfram Völker (1978) *The Rhetoric of Love: Das Menschenbild und die Form des Romans bei Iris Murdoch*. Grüner, Amsterdam, p.38.

<sup>629</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.157, 202.

<sup>630</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.253.

foundation of human experience, is ignored and our ability to express it lost.<sup>631</sup> Murdoch, similarly, observes that ‘the layman lives at peace with “consciousness”, with all its obscure implications of “ownership” and “presence”’.<sup>632</sup> In nonchalantly setting aside ‘consciousness, or inwardness, as a bearer of moral substance’, or attempting to provide a ‘neutral’ analysis of consciousness, philosophy brackets out precisely those features which make consciousness philosophically difficult, interesting and important—i.e. its ‘detailed mobility’, ‘its polymorphous complexity and the inherence in it of constant evaluation’.<sup>633</sup>

In sweeping aside that part of us which we, on a day-to-day basis, experience as the very centre of our being, philosophy not only shuns the difficult task put before it, and loses its ability to account for the complexity of human life, but also becomes insensitive to the *moral* significance of the fact that ‘the mind is like a ragbag, full of amazing incoherent oddments’.<sup>634</sup> The dismissal of consciousness is a problem Murdoch sees as inter-related with the identification of the ‘true person’ with the ‘empty choosing will’, and of morality as a matter of ‘movement rather than vision’.<sup>635</sup> Assertions of the omnipotence of the will are, again, out of touch with human experience in that they can make no moral sense of Sartre’s observation that, when we are confronted with a situation, we usually find ourselves unable to step back and decide between different courses of moral action.<sup>636</sup> The contemporary understanding of the will wrongly implies that human decisions are made in the context of an isolated moment, and fails to recognise that when a certain situation arises we are, by virtue of the moral person we are, already bound to a certain course of action which possesses a distinct and objective moral quality.

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<sup>631</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.166.

<sup>632</sup> as quoted by Widdows, *The Moral Vision*, p.35.

<sup>633</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.166; Murdoch, *MGM*, p.237.

<sup>634</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, pp.166, 237.

<sup>635</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.34.

<sup>636</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.35.

Murdoch attributes the above particularly to what she argues is the ‘terror’ both Sartrean existentialism and linguistic empiricism have ‘of anything which encloses the agent or threatens his supremacy as a centre of significance’ and to their related desire to develop a neutral, value-free perspective on reality.<sup>637</sup> This, she argues, does injustice to the world as it really is. Not only is it impossible simply to introduce value into an account of the world when one sees fit but we cannot even *perceive* the world without value. The mere distinction between truthful and false accounts of reality implies a value judgement, Murdoch argues. The failure to recognise this results not in value-neutral descriptions of the world but in the tendency to turn fact into value. Murdoch thus concludes that neither linguistic empiricism nor Sartrean existentialism has presented us with an empirically, philosophically, and morally adequate notion of the self and, in her view inseparable from this, of the moral life.<sup>638</sup> Yet, she considers thinkers who lie outside what she considers the neo-Kantian paradigm, such as Gabriel Marcel, Simone Weil or the Christian tradition more generally, to have equally failed at presenting us with any more credible, ‘satisfying or powerful picture of ourselves and each other’.<sup>639</sup>

The above critique sets the parameters for Murdoch’s own quest for a viable account of the self—an endeavour which has been described as ‘a central interest of Murdoch’s thought for forty years, and [...] perhaps the greatest source of her influence on ethical inquiry’; and as ‘the starting point for Murdoch’s broader philosophical vision, which depends on the capacity of the individual to have meaningful inner experience and to

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<sup>637</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.269. Murdoch’s argument implies a tension here: on the one hand she accuses linguistic empiricism of a surrender to the oppressions of convention, on account of which the individual is lost, on the other she accuses it of excessively shielding the individual from external influence. As will become more apparent in the following discussion, the crux here lies in the fact that Murdoch considers the reality of the individual to be founded in the transcendent, which must be respected and loved if the individual is not to be suppressed. While this motivates Murdoch’s criticism of linguistic empiricism therefore, this tension is also indicative of Murdoch’s tendency to render other philosophical thought forms in very broad, if not at times inaccurate, brushes—a tendency legitimately criticised for instance by Sabina Lovibond (Lovibond, *Iris Murdoch, Gender and Philosophy*, p.39).

<sup>638</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.46; *EM*, p.269. Not unlike Tillich, Murdoch discerns the failure to see and respect the other outside the self already in Hegel’s system.

<sup>639</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.270.

recognise and experience different levels of consciousness'.<sup>640</sup> Bemoaning the fact that 'we have never had [...] a satisfactory Liberal theory of personality, a theory of man as free and separate and related to a rich and complicated world from which, as a moral being, he has much to learn', it is such a theory which she sets out to develop.<sup>641</sup> This implies in particular the challenge of how one can, after the collapse of old certainties about the reality of a soul, account for the continuing experienced unity of the conscious self, of 'a moral and spiritual centre', of the 'individual' as the most basic moral category.<sup>642</sup> Her account of the self thus strives to integrate modern 'doubt about the empirical self' and its unity with the ordinary person's experienced sense of a self, and thus to discern 'how we are to discuss in a more realistic way a demythologised and (apparently) disunited self'.<sup>643</sup>

In doing so, Murdoch bases her considerations on her insight that 'consciousness is a form of moral activity: what we attend to, how we attend, whether we attend is morally significant'.<sup>644</sup> Insisting, contra Kant, 'that ordinary modes of phenomenal awareness are morally relevant', Murdoch argues that it is precisely in 'our dense familiar inner stuff, private and personal' that morality begins.<sup>645</sup> An example she names is the inhibition of malicious thoughts.<sup>646</sup> Meanwhile, and as will become apparent below, Murdoch's concern to establish the moral significance of the inner life does not lead her to propose that the moral subject examine his consciousness in much depth or detail. She indeed considers the fascination with one's own consciousness the somewhat ironic result of the modern dismissal of the *moral significance* of consciousness. As one commentator rightly points out, the counter-Sartrean challenge Murdoch sets herself is

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<sup>640</sup> Maria Antonaccio (2000) *Picturing the Human: The Moral Thought of Iris Murdoch*, OUP, Oxford; p.86. Widdows, *The Moral Vision*, p.21.

<sup>641</sup> as quoted by Baldanza, 'Iris Murdoch and the Theory of Personality', p.179.

<sup>642</sup> In Widdows, *The Moral Vision*, p.33.

<sup>643</sup> Conradi, *The Saint and the Artist*, p.107; Murdoch, *MGM*, p.162.

<sup>644</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.167.

<sup>645</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.149 in Antonaccio, 'Imagining the Good', p.228; Murdoch, *MGM*, p.153.

<sup>646</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.153.

precisely to take consciousness into view without ‘going deeper into [it]’, indeed to enable the individual ‘to go out from it’.<sup>647</sup>

In light of her assessment of the philosophy of her time, Murdoch furthermore seeks to give a more viable account of human experiences of both freedom and determination by others. The existential assumption that human freedom is maintained only if the human being is seen as ‘standing outside the structural necessities of essence’ in that she is ‘neither logically nor physically nor morally determined by them’ corresponds with what she, much like Tillich, considers to be a misunderstanding of freedom and determinism as two theoretical options between which we must choose.<sup>648</sup> Just as the world is no ‘logical or naturalistic mechanism’, freedom cannot, Murdoch argues, be identified ‘with a casting off of bonds, with emotional unrestraint [...]’.<sup>649</sup> Like Tillich, Murdoch seeks to steer a course between subjections of the human being to heteronomous rule and ‘a self-important autonomy’.<sup>650</sup> Like Tillich, she considers this to depend on understanding the human being in relation to what Tillich, whom she quotes repeatedly in this respect, calls ‘the unconditional element in the structure of reason and reality’.<sup>651</sup>

Although rejecting belief in God, whom Murdoch understands to be an ‘answering judging rewarding Intelligence and a comforting flow of love’, and certain of its decline, Murdoch is strongly critical not only of the loss of the concept of the self but

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<sup>647</sup> Frederick Hoffman, ‘Iris Murdoch: The Reality of Persons’, *Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction* Vol.7, No.1 (1964), p.49. Gordon is not entirely right to suggest that Murdoch prefers ‘inwardness and sensitivity’ over the insight that ‘reality is “something outside us”’, and that this leads her to have greater sympathies for her character Michael than James in *The Bell* (see Gordon’s criticism of Kaehele and German in Gordon, *Fables of Unselfing*, p.30). In fact, Murdoch considers ‘inwardness’ a highly ambiguous matter, which can imply either a relation to Good (as it arguably does in Michael) or self-obsessiveness (a fault Michael is not free from). As will become more evident below, she certainly prefers to identify reality with what lies outside us.

<sup>648</sup> Tillich, ‘The Nature and Significance’, p.746. Murdoch expressly denies ‘a contest between total freedom and total determinism’ in an Interview with William Slaymaker (in Gillian Dooley (2003) *From a Tiny Corner*, p.140).

<sup>649</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.460; Murdoch in Interview with William Slaymaker, in Dooley, *From a Tiny Corner*, p.140.

<sup>650</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.460.

<sup>651</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, pp.381, 432, 511f.

also of the increasing loss, in modernity, of a transcendent reference point.<sup>652</sup> According to Murdoch, the notion of a personal God, which Murdoch implies only ever refers to a highest being,<sup>653</sup> precisely obstructs morality by serving the need for consolation and, thus, the selfish ego and its self-aggrandising fantasies. Murdoch sees in the notion of God a subordination of the transcendent to the immanent, and shares Nietzsche's view of belief in God as the result of a cowardly human unwillingness to face the facts of life, such as the reality of death, and what she perceives as the ultimate lack of rewards, the absence of final justice, and the world's subjection to chance and necessity.<sup>654</sup>

However, as with respect to dismissals of the self, Murdoch is highly cautious regarding the conclusions one might draw from the collapse of the theistic metaphysical framework. Contrary to Nietzsche, she does not deem this to warrant a disregard for, or denial of, metaphysics and the transcendent. Although no "elsewhere" in the Christian sense' exists, we still need metaphysics to address the problem of the one and the many, and to forge 'a basic connection between knowledge and morals', Murdoch argues.<sup>655</sup> This is because morality is prevented from collapsing into mere behaviourism or subjectivism only where Good is understood to be a transcendent objective reality, that is, a 'good "going beyond" one's egoistic self', and sharing the divine status of 'a single perfect transcendent non-representable and necessarily real object of attention'.<sup>656</sup> According to Murdoch, philosophy after Kant has increasingly moved in the direction of denying such a reality, thereby robbing human life of any distinct directionality and rendering defunct the notion of aspiring to moral goodness. In their attempt to liberate the moral human being from 'any structure larger than himself', contemporary

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<sup>652</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.344. On the question of God in relation to Murdoch's metaphysics see also Franklin Gamwell 'On the Loss of Theism', Stanley Hauerwas 'Murdochian Muddles: Can we get through them if God does not exist?', William Schweiker 'The Sovereignty of God's Goodness' all in Antonaccio, Schweiker, *Search for Human Goodness*; Stephen Mulhall "'All the World Must Be "Religious"": Iris Murdoch's Ontological Arguments' in Rowe, Horner, *Iris Murdoch and Morality*, pp.23-34.

<sup>653</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.77.

<sup>654</sup> There is a certain parallel here to Tillich's notion that sin, which for Murdoch is selfishness and the concomitant tendency towards illusion, originates in anxiety about death.

<sup>655</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.399.

<sup>656</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.498; *SoG*, p.55.

philosophers have reduced the idea of the Good to a function of the human will.<sup>657</sup> Good has been turned from a demanding objective reality into an ‘empty space into which human choice may move’.<sup>658</sup> Although agreeing with G.E. Moore’s claim that the notion of Good always eludes our categories and is ultimately indescribable and undepictable, Murdoch, similarly, bemoans what she considers to be the attempt made by Moore’s followers, to infer from this elusiveness that Good is not the objective transcendent but a matter of subjective choice and opinion.<sup>659</sup>

Considering metaphysics the foundation of morality, Murdoch seeks to rescue this from the ruins of the illusion of a personal God—without challenging the notion that human life is ‘self-contained’.<sup>660</sup> With recourse to Plato and Kant (and their respective notions of the Good as a ‘universal’ or as a ‘categorical imperative’), she argues that ‘the Good, not will, is transcendent’.<sup>661</sup> It is her metaphysic of transcendent Good, which she develops through recourse to Anselm’s ontological argument, that we must now turn to before being able to give an account of her understanding of the self.

## 6.2 Murdoch’s metaphysic: the transcendent Good

### 6.2.1 The Ontological Proof

As Altorf rightly points out in her comprehensive discussion of Murdoch’s rendition of the proof, Murdoch admits that the proof is ‘an affirmation of faith which a man can

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<sup>657</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.268.

<sup>658</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.95. Murdoch’s criticism of this is illustrated in a conversation between the school masters Bledyard and Mor in *TS*, referred to again in the following chapter. Upon being challenged, by Bledyard, on his affair with a young artist, Mor flatly states that ‘all I can say is that this is my situation and my life and I shall decide what to do about it’. The morally superior Bledyard rejects the implied suggestion that such a view is ‘a sort of virtue, [...] as if to be a free man was just to get what you want regardless of convention. But real freedom is total absence of concern about yourself’—a position Murdoch shares and that is discussed below (Murdoch, *TS*, p.213).

<sup>659</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.95.

<sup>660</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.77.

<sup>661</sup> Steiner in Foreword to Murdoch, *EM*, p.xi.

only give to himself.<sup>662</sup> Following the philosopher J.N. Findlay, whom Murdoch considers to bring out the ‘deep meaning’ of the proof, Murdoch considers the ontological argument to point not to God but to the reality of transcendent Good.<sup>663</sup> This has rightly led Insole to attribute to her a ‘reversal’ of the ontological proof.<sup>664</sup> The reason for this, I would suggest contra Insole, is not, however, that she reads the argument as pointing to an always elusive, ‘infinitesimal point’, any substantiation of which reduces Good to selfish fantasy.<sup>665</sup> The notion of an elusive and infinitesimal point does not necessarily contradict the notion of God, whom Anselm arguably understands as precisely such a reality.<sup>666</sup> Rather, it is Murdoch’s fixed and a priori understanding of God as an anthropomorphic reality, ‘a thing among others’, which leads her to consider the ontological argument to point to Good rather than God.<sup>667</sup> In any case, Murdoch argues that the argument indicates the human being’s necessary relation to ‘what is absolute’, to an ‘unconditioned structure’, thereby clarifying that ‘morality is not one empirical phenomenon among others’.<sup>668</sup> Murdoch quotes Weil at several points in her discussion of the ontological argument, pointing out, for instance, that ‘Weil [...] speaks of “an orientation of the soul towards something which one does not know, but whose reality one does know”, and an “effort of attention empty of all content” [...].’<sup>669</sup>

With Simone Weil, Murdoch indeed considers the ontological argument to express the fact that, wherever the notion of good is invoked, ‘absolute good and our contact with it’ is proven in that absolute Good forms the necessary foundation to such

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<sup>662</sup> Marje Altorf (2008) *Iris Murdoch and the Art of Imagining*, p.99.

<sup>663</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.412.

<sup>664</sup> Christopher Insole, 2006, ‘Beyond glass doors. The sun no longer shining’ English Platonism and the problem of self-love in the literary and philosophical work of Iris Murdoch’, *Modern theology* Vol.22, No.1 (2006), p.132.

<sup>665</sup> Insole, ‘Beyond glass doors’, p.132.

<sup>666</sup> See e.g. J. Burton Fulmer ‘Anselm and the Apophatic: “Something Greater than Can Be Thought”’, *New Blackfriars* Vol.89, No.1020 (2008).

<sup>667</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.405.

<sup>668</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.412.

<sup>669</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.401.

invocations.<sup>670</sup> Such invocations in turn are an intrinsic aspect of human life, featuring for instance in attempts ‘to do something well or [where we] are conscious of failure’.<sup>671</sup> As Murdoch says, ‘we know of perfection as we look upon what is imperfect’.<sup>672</sup> Reality is pervaded by the notion of goodness and cannot be perceived in independence from the Good. Without this illuminating reference point present to human consciousness but nonetheless external to the human subject, the world becomes a mere extension of the subject and, thus, a projection of its, as Murdoch sees it, selfish desires and fantasies. Where the human subject does not place itself under the Good and perceive things in its light, she neither perceives reality nor remains a part of it. Indeed, she herself becomes less real. This means that, in correlation to her changing relation to Good, which manifests itself in how she looks at the world, the human person is ‘always in motion toward or away from what is more real’.<sup>673</sup>

Like Anselm, Murdoch combines a transcendental claim that human judgments and perception depend on an intrinsic relation between consciousness and Good with the empirical argument that the human being is also oriented towards Good as the standard of perfection, which ‘the gradual apprehension of lesser degrees of goodness in its surroundings’ leads it to aspire to.<sup>674</sup> Thus, while Murdoch does consider Kant’s categorical imperative to legitimately represent the ‘absolute’, she endorses also a Platonic sense of the magnetic nature of Good. As Murdoch suggests, the Good’s pull becomes evident in the fact that, despite persistently failing to arrive at the Good, the human being inevitably turns continually back towards it. While Murdoch’s understanding of consciousness and Good is heavily influenced by Plato, whom she considers to have known ‘that morality, an orientation between good and evil, was in a unique sense fundamental and ubiquitous in human life’, Murdoch also begins both of

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<sup>670</sup> Weil in Murdoch, p.401.

<sup>671</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.430.

<sup>672</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.427.

<sup>673</sup> In Antonaccio, ‘Imagining the Good’, p.231.

<sup>674</sup> Antonaccio, ‘Imagining the Good’, p.231.

her two chapters on the ontological proof with a quote from Tillich.<sup>675</sup> This states that ‘nothing is more important for philosophy and theology than the truth [the ontological argument] contains, the acknowledgement of the unconditional element in the structure of reason and reality’ and indicates a significant, though under-explored, overlap between her project and Tillich’s.<sup>676</sup> Paralleling Tillich’s understanding of God as a ‘depth dimension of man’, Murdoch affirms that ‘what is higher is, as Eckhart observed, inside the soul’ and arguably shares even her this-worldly perspective with Tillich.<sup>677</sup>

Meanwhile, Murdoch’s penchant for the proof leads her, more than Tillich, to affirm also the transcendent otherness of the Good. Good, Murdoch argues, is ‘above being, non-personal, non-contingent [...]’ and, no ‘existing thing (or person)’, and lacks that ‘fundamental status’ which allows the gods ‘to be contrasted with ordinary existence’.<sup>678</sup> It is because Murdoch’s Good precedes thought and language that she tends to drop the article with respect to the Good, referring to it primarily as ‘Good’ or ‘goodness’.<sup>679</sup> Good is not an object but an Idea, a ‘reality principle’, that which lies at the origins of reality insofar as it unlocks reality for us by illuminating it.<sup>680</sup> Murdoch metaphorically speaks of the Form of the Good not only as ‘a source of life’ but also as a ‘sun [...] in whose light the truth is seen’.<sup>681</sup> It constantly eludes our concepts: it is impossible to look at directly, or to grasp, describe or depict since its very nature dictates that it is always ‘still somewhere beyond’.<sup>682</sup> At the same time, this only morally unambiguous reality (whose ontological status nonetheless remains highly ambiguous) is the absolute end-point of our existence, which our selfishness continually steers us away from. Its utter otherness and externality ensures that it cannot be bent to serve human

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<sup>675</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.402.

<sup>676</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, pp.391, 431.

<sup>677</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.399. As Antonaccio points out, Murdoch even refers to the Good’s pervasion of reality, including that of consciousness, as the ‘deep structure’ of human life (in Antonaccio, ‘Imagining the Good’, p.224).

<sup>678</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, pp.37, 479.

<sup>679</sup> However, Murdoch does sometimes also refer to ‘the Good’, e.g. *MGM*, p.464, *SoG*, p.96.

<sup>680</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.474.

<sup>681</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.389.

<sup>682</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.91.

ends, whether these are the arbitrary purposes of the will or theistic notions of the transcendent as giving consolations of love and eternal life. ‘The ordinary person does not, unless corrupted by philosophy, believe that he creates values by his choices’, writes Murdoch.<sup>683</sup> Values issue from the objective transcendence of Good. This Good is the non-negotiable endpoint of our existence whose demands are absolute, yet it does not promise any rewards: it has ‘no externally guaranteed purpose and must be obeyed “for nothing”’.<sup>684</sup>

### 6.2.2 Good and the Individual

In order to understand how a transcendent and elusive Idea can be obeyed, it is important to grasp the extent to which Murdoch considers the above defence of the Good to be a defence also of the moral significance of the individual. Murdoch is convinced that it ‘is fairly evident’ ‘that a belief in the unity, and also in the hierarchical order, of the moral world has a psychological importance’: though the consoling notions of unity and order must be prevented from becoming a false consolation, there must be a ‘best decision’, Murdoch argues.<sup>685</sup> She considers this to imply a particular connection between goodness and oneness. As Murdoch argues, ‘the unity and fundamental reality of goodness is an image and support of the unity and fundamental reality of the individual’.<sup>686</sup>

This affects, on the one hand, the question of where and how Good can be recognised. In her literary work, Murdoch suggests that ‘intimations’ of the ineffable Good are ‘scattered’ in the individual particulars of the world, whether these be objects or persons.<sup>687</sup> Insight into and obedience to Good thus implies and expresses itself in

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<sup>683</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.95.

<sup>684</sup> e.g. Murdoch, *MGM*, p.312.

<sup>685</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.55.

<sup>686</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.427.

<sup>687</sup> Murdoch, *TA*, p.171; *MGM*, p.167. In her introduction to *Nuns and Soldiers*, Karen Armstrong also describes art as giving intimations of the ‘reality that is wholly separate from [oneself]’ (Armstrong in Murdoch, NS, unpaginated).

vision of and respect for individuals.<sup>688</sup> Murdoch's notion of the Good's hidden presence in the individual particulars of the world is part of her attempt to avoid assertions both of heteronomy and of autonomy and arguably constitutes her alternative to Tillich's notion of theonomy. Although ultimately one, Good contradicts a heteronomous outlook insofar as it is dispersed, and not encountered in one distinct and known place. It does not impose itself on and is not simply given to the human being but must be discerned in the many. It disallows propagations of autonomy insofar as it is not to be found within the self of the moral subject but is, again, scattered in a greater variety of places which do not, we will find Murdoch argue, include the self as we commonly think of it. Murdoch's account of Good thus indicates her sympathy for Kant's awareness of 'the dangers of blind obedience to a person or institution' and simultaneous conviction that reality is external to and encountered outside of what we commonly take to be the self.<sup>689</sup>

Notwithstanding her dismissal of seeking Good within oneself, Murdoch does, on the other hand, consider the notion that 'the unity and fundamental reality of goodness is an image and support of the unity and fundamental reality of the individual' to affect the status of the individual human self. Murdoch's reading of the ontological argument implies that where the reality of Good is recognised, that of the self is also vindicated. The Good's rootedness in consciousness means that for Murdoch 'the idea of the Good and the idea of the self as a thinking consciousness are grasped in one and the same act of understanding'.<sup>690</sup> This is because Good is implicitly and invisibly present in, and recognised on account of, what one might call a person's moral sense, which

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<sup>688</sup> In light of the above, Robjant is right to suggest that Murdoch's Platonism stands in contrast to Nietzsche's claim, invoked by Lovibond, that 'Plato is a coward in the face of reality [...] he flees into the ideal' (David Robjant, 'Is Iris Murdoch an Unconscious Misogynist? Some Trouble with Sabina Lovibond, The Mother in Law, and Gender', *Heythrop Journal* Vol.52, No.6 (2011), p.1027; Lovibond, *Iris Murdoch, Gender, and Philosophy*, p.11 quoting Nietzsche from *Twilight of the Idols*). Murdoch's Good is, as Robjant points out citing Murdoch, 'not something obscure. We experience both the reality of perfection and its distance away' and it demands precisely that we turn to rather than flee from the world (Murdoch in Robjant, *Is Iris Murdoch an Unconscious Misogynist*, p.1027; Murdoch, *MGM*, p.508).

<sup>689</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.30.

<sup>690</sup> Antonaccio, *Imagining the Good*, p.232.

constitutes the very core or structure of the human being. Although human knowledge of Good is such that we never push through to the source, we are not usually ‘in doubt about the direction in which Good lies’.<sup>691</sup> There is an intrinsic connection between Good and consciousness, which is a manifestation of our selfhood, or of our distinctive and private irreducibility.

Murdoch’s establishment of the transcendent Good through the transcendental argument has been found to form the foundation of her response to contemporary philosophy’s lack of interest in the self. It is this response, i.e. Murdoch’s plea for and substantiation of the self, which it is now time to further unpack.

### **6.3 Murdoch’s self**

Resting on the ontological argument, Murdoch’s metaphysics of Good has implied an assertion of the interconnection between consciousness and Good, and thus between consciousness and value: ‘to be conscious is to be a value-bearer or value-donor’.<sup>692</sup> This is connected with the importance also of ‘reflective’ human experience to ‘moral decision and action’.<sup>693</sup> All of us are, Murdoch argues, perfectly aware of the extent to which our constant experiential stream of thought serves as a background to moral activity; of the influence the object of our consciousness has on us, of how we can be obsessed by bad thoughts and of the, albeit infinitely difficult, possibility of steering our consciousness. Whether we actively use our consciousness to fully inhabit the present moment by attending to it or whether we allow it to drift and be dominated by anxieties has moral implications, Murdoch argues. Some cognitions are more true to reality, are ‘purer’, than others.<sup>694</sup> Murdoch’s close association of Good and reality implies that the

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<sup>691</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.95.

<sup>692</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.256.

<sup>693</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.259.

<sup>694</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.243.

messy workings of our consciousness, our inner motivations, our deepest attachments and desires, the objects of our attention, in fact determine nothing less than who we are. Seeking to explicate the respective falsity and legitimacy of the ways in which the human being experiences herself as having continuity, self-identity or self-being—in short, anything like a self—Murdoch turns both to Plato and to Freud.

### 6.3.1 Reading Plato in light of Freud

According to Murdoch, whose career coincides with the height of psychoanalysis, Freud's analyses demonstrate the moral dimension of consciousness.<sup>695</sup> Although Freud himself is of course uninterested in regarding the human being and her consciousness in a moral light, his thought uncovers the typically selfish nature of inner human activity, Murdoch finds. Murdoch argues that Freud's human being is a 'machine' which 'in order to operate needs sources of energy' and which is 'predisposed to certain patterns of activity'.<sup>696</sup> In particular, the human being is under the power of ambiguous attachments and desires, which pull him in conflicting directions. As Freud recognises, it is not only difficult to control and to understand these desires, but the human being is unwilling to understand and re-order them. The 'egocentric system of energy', which constitutes what Freud calls the psyche, tends to lead the human being to generate and hide behind illusions which bolster and console the self, but which detract it from its true being and make it obscure to itself.<sup>697</sup> With the above, Freud has, Murdoch argues, 'presented us with a realistic and detailed picture of the fallen man', indeed with 'what might be called

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<sup>695</sup> A highly critical Freudian perspective on Murdoch's use of and reaction to Freud, though one failing to recognise the ambiguity of Murdoch's reception of Freud, i.e. her positive as well as her negative response to Freud, is found in Jack Turner (1993) *Murdoch vs. Freud. A Freudian Look at an Anti-Freudian*. Peter Lang, New York; 'Murdoch vs. Freud in A Severed Head and Other Novels' *Literature and Psychology* Vol.36, No.1-2 (1990).

<sup>696</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, pp.76f.

<sup>697</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.50.

a doctrine of original sin'.<sup>698</sup> The human being he presents is a 'historically determined individual relentlessly looking after itself'.<sup>699</sup>

In light of this confirmation of human sinfulness by one of modernity's own protagonists, it is all the more disingenuous that modernist philosophers 'deny (Sartre), ignore (Oxford and Cambridge) or attempt to render innocuous (Hampshire)' the pervasive selfishness and self-obsession of human beings, Murdoch argues.<sup>700</sup> Recognising this selfishness would force contemporary philosophers into a total revision of their 'conceptions of will and motive', she argues.<sup>701</sup> In her own conceptualisation of the self, Murdoch by contrast draws heavily on Freud's account of the inner life as desirous, disordered, and prone to illusions. At the same time, she, like Tillich, criticises Freud (like Sartre) for giving us an account only of the existential human being. She finds that, rather than complementing his insights into selfishness with pointers to a way out of selfishness, Freud's understanding of psychological health indeed commends a morally inadequate perpetuation, if not perfection, of selfishness. Although he agrees that the human being must be purged of certain illusions, his goal in doing so is not the attainment of truth. Freud is interested in making human beings 'workable' rather than 'good', and considers such workability to depend on ordering desires according to the dictate of reason, which he identifies with the ego, Murdoch observes.<sup>702</sup> For this purpose, he for instance condones the typical human practice of 'adopt[ing] substitutes for "early pleasures"' and, consequently, of clothing oneself in consoling illusions.<sup>703</sup> Indeed, he seeks merely to perfect this practice with a view towards a more efficient functioning of the ego.

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<sup>698</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.50.

<sup>699</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, pp.50, 76.

<sup>700</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.50.

<sup>701</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.50.

<sup>702</sup> If Murdoch is, as I will argue in the following chapter, hesitant to explicitly endorse a concern for human flourishing and well-being then this is arguably also due to her observation that in Freud this comes at the cost of truth and goodness.

<sup>703</sup> See e.g. Gordon, 'Iris Murdoch's Comedies of Unselfing' *Twentieth Century Literature* Vol.36, No.2 (1990).

While agreeing that the human situation calls for an ordering of desires and a corresponding increase in knowledge and vision, Murdoch rejects the criterion according to which Freud proposes to harmonise the self as being at odds with reality, which she has been shown to identify with objective Good. She moreover takes issue with the supposed need and possibility of an objective observer (such as the psychoanalyst, whom she sees as a replacement for God), and with the turn inwards towards the self, which for her necessarily means a turn away from the Good. By elevating the ego and making it, rather than transcendent Good the standard the human being should orient herself on, Freud positively ‘bars the way to the top’, to perception of reality from a purer vantage point.<sup>704</sup> Murdoch does not consider Freud’s account of the human being a satisfactory endpoint, therefore, but the most powerful contemporary description of our state of what Tillich would call estrangement from Good. Freud’s account indeed helps to bridge modernity and tradition by reconstituting the notion of sin (or selfishness) on the basis of new insights into the human being’s inner life.<sup>705</sup> In order to complement this with an account of the redeemed and truthful life, Murdoch turns to Plato.

Regardless of the ultimate validity of Freud’s often-challenged<sup>706</sup> claims to a certain Platonism, Murdoch’s attempt to bring the two thinkers together in a manner which is both mutually enriching and critical is aided by Freud’s decision to refer his psychoanalytical picture of the psyche as constituted of ego, superego and id to Plato’s ‘tripartite division of the soul’ (appetite, spirit and reason).<sup>707</sup> Murdoch integrates Freud’s

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<sup>704</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, pp.418f.

<sup>705</sup> It is arguably Freud, for instance, who enables Murdoch to integrate her early Marxism into her lasting Platonism by centring on the need for an inner revolution.

<sup>706</sup> See e.g. F.M. Cornford whose work Murdoch was familiar with (e.g. Murdoch, *EM*, p.451; F.M. Cornford, ‘The Doctrine of Eros in Plato’s Symposium’ in F.M. Cornford, *The Unwritten Philosophy*).

<sup>707</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.418. As Gordon points out, A.W. Price, in his essay ‘Plato and Freud’ ‘found more congruence than she does between the two tripartite pictures of the soul, equating Freud’s ‘ego’ with Plato’s charioteer (not with ‘bad horse’) ‘superego’ with the good horse of ‘spirit’ and ‘id’ with the bad horse of ‘passion’ (Gordon, *Fables of Unselfing*, p.40; see also A.W. Price ‘Plato and Freud’ in C. Gill (ed.) (1990) *The Person and the Human Mind. Issues in Ancient Philosophy*. Blackwell, Oxford, pp. 247-270). However, not only is it true that ‘this doesn’t offer much to build on for, as Gerasimos Santas point out in *Plato and*

‘mechanical model of the psyche [as consisting of conflicting desires] [with Plato’s moral one].’<sup>708</sup> She pictures the human self as consisting in an ascending hierarchy of different dimensions where ‘the lowest part of the soul is egoistic, irrational, and deluded, the central part is aggressive and ambitious’, while ‘the highest part is rational and good and knows the truth which lies beyond all images and hypotheses.’<sup>709</sup> These ‘different parts’ correspond, she argues, with different ‘modes of desire’, which, in turn, imply different ‘levels of awareness.’<sup>710</sup> Where, as is naturally the case, the lowest part of the soul dominates, these desires take on an unrestrained mode, with each pulling in the direction of its own self-interest. This corresponds with a very low level of awareness of reality, even with illusion: reality, including that of the self, is ‘veil[ed].’<sup>711</sup> Murdoch considers both ‘fictions of a theological nature’ and neo-Kantian ‘imagined inflation[s] of self’, such as the presumption of omnipotent freedom, to be the result.<sup>712</sup>

The central product of this deluded state is, Murdoch implies, precisely Freud’s ego, understood as a saving reality in which the various desires are to be united and thereby fulfilled. According to Murdoch, this ego is in fact a fiction, the product of ‘daydream[s]’ and ‘fantasies’, which suggests merely a false unity of desire, which creates further fictions, and which thereby prevents the human being from standing in reality.<sup>713</sup> Emanating from but concealing the actual conflict of desires, the ego can—in the terms of Plato’s allegory—be imagined as the blinding fire, the vision of which prevents the human being from seeing anything else, including the illuminating Good. As will become more apparent once I have discussed Murdoch’s understanding of eros, Murdoch distinguishes this ego from the true self, which the illusion of the ego veils and distorts,

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Freud, “Unlike Plato, Freud did not have an ethical theory” but Murdoch also rejects precisely the notion that Plato seeks to turn the ego into the charioteer, suggesting instead, and as shown below, that the human being must allow herself to be compelled by reality (Gordon, *Fables of Unselfing*, p.40; see also George Santas (1991) *Plato and Freud: Two Theories of Love*, Wiley-Blackwell, London).

<sup>708</sup> Conradi, *The Saint and the Artist*, p.96.

<sup>709</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.389.

<sup>710</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.389.

<sup>711</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.427.

<sup>712</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.77.

<sup>713</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.91.

and which becomes fully visible, even fully real, only where the human being is oriented towards Good.

### 6.3.2 A mechanism of attachments

The above has already indicated that Murdoch understands the human being to be constituted by desires.<sup>714</sup> It has also already become apparent that Murdoch considers the natural state of these desires to be one of conflict, and that she considers attempts to resolve this conflict via assertions of the ego to necessarily fail because the ego is a mere illusion *generated* by the conflict of desire. Meanwhile, Murdoch's sense that the human being is constituted by desire appears to lead her to understand even the true self as a dynamic reality, which lacks any given or intrinsic unity and which can easily fragment. Up to this point, her understanding of the self appears to be strongly influenced by Sartre. The French philosopher, too, distinguishes between an illusory, object-like self, which we commonly attribute to ourselves, yet which is a product of bad faith; and a true self, which is an unstable, developing reality veiled by this false self. Murdoch departs from Sartre, however, when she implies that the true self is nonetheless also substantial and that its fullest manifestation entails also a degree of unity and stability.

This departure arguably results from her recognition of the moral dimension of these desires. Murdoch's Platonic-Augustinian argument implies that desires have a root, which they go out from and which they in turn affect. The human subject can only govern her desires because of a stable or continuous core underlying them, while, at the same time, being affected and changed by the objects of her desires. As Murdoch implies, the human person indeed simultaneously retains and alters her identity throughout changes in her attachments. Though the attachments of her desires determine the extent to which she stands in reality, the human being nonetheless moves

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<sup>714</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.76.

‘through a continuum within which [she is] aware of truth and falsehood, illusion and reality, good and evil’.<sup>715</sup>

It is on these grounds that Murdoch posits the reality of a distinct and lasting substance, which she regards as a necessary prerequisite of a moral philosophy. Since the individual cannot choose *not* to attach herself Murdoch identifies the soul or self as a ‘substantial and continually developing mechanism of attachments’.<sup>716</sup> Only on the basis of such a ‘more positive conception of the soul’ is it made clear that the human being is necessarily, by virtue of her nature, relational, yet that she can and must determine her attachments such that she is related not to an immoral and, in the spirit of Sartre’s notion of ‘bad faith’, disempowering illusion but to that which is other than self and in which she encounters the Good which her standing in reality depends on.<sup>717</sup> Murdoch thus retains Freud’s and Sartre’s notion that we are blinded by what in fact constrains us but, as will become increasingly apparent below, inverts this by arguing that the solution lies not in self-assertion but in a turn away from self and towards the other, where she encounters Good. Only where the desirous human being is oriented and attached to this unified transcendent reality are her conflicting desires harmonised and does she thus attain her real self-identity. Murdoch supports this normative view through the Platonic claim that the different desires are in fact intrinsically and teleologically for the Good. Whether we are aware of it or not, it is the Good which, in the words of Murdoch’s Platonist philosopher, Max Lejour, in *The Unicorn*, is ‘the unimaginable object of our desire’.<sup>718</sup> According to Max, it is because we are thus connected with unseen Good that the concept of Good could become immanentised and subjectified or, as he says, ‘vulgarised by existentialists and linguistic philosophers when they make good into a

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<sup>715</sup> Emphasis added. Murdoch, *MGM*, p.250.

<sup>716</sup> Emphasis added. Murdoch, *SoG*, p.69.

<sup>717</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.69.

<sup>718</sup> Murdoch, *TU*, p.100.

mere matter of personal choice'.<sup>719</sup> Murdoch's Platonism thus causes her to alter Weil's notion that we must let our desire exist in a void by suggesting that we must shift our attachments to the nonetheless also elusive and unspecifiable Good.

The moral status and, indeed, the very selfhood of Murdoch's human being has thus been shown to depend on what her desires are attached to. As I now seek to show, Murdoch develops this account through recourse not only to Freud, and to Plato's understanding of the soul, but particularly to the Platonic notion of eros-love. Without foreclosing the discussion of Murdoch's account of love in the following chapter, we must now turn to her interpretation of eros-love, without which a discussion of her account of the self cannot be completed.

## **6.4 The self and love**

### **6.4.1 Eros energising the self**

Although 'love' is one of her perhaps most frequently used terms, Murdoch gives no systematic account of it. As will become more apparent in the following chapter, Murdoch attempts to integrate a broad variety of perspectives on love, including particularly Plato's notion of Eros, a Christian sense of other-centred love, and the fact that people think of their love for another as 'one of the most important things in any life'.<sup>720</sup> Arguing that 'love', as important a concept as it is, 'can be used to understand any desire or tendency', Murdoch is strongly aware of the concept's ambiguity.<sup>721</sup> On the one hand, 'love' is in close conceptual proximity to the transcendent Good and is, accordingly, often given something of the aura of the sacred; on the other hand, love is also prone to corruption and 'often distorted by egoism', Murdoch observes.<sup>722</sup> Able to

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<sup>719</sup> Murdoch, *TU*, p.100.

<sup>720</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.342.

<sup>721</sup> Emphasis added. Murdoch, *MGM*, p.342.

<sup>722</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.342.

‘name something bad’, the term cannot serve as a substitute for ‘Good’, Murdoch suggests, distancing herself from Christianity.<sup>723</sup> With reference to the Symposium whose imagery she considers ‘exalts perfect Good over imperfect love’ she argues that love does not share the sovereignty of Good and ultimately belongs to the immanent human realm rather than to the transcendent.<sup>724</sup> It is precisely love’s ambiguity or malleability, which Murdoch considers to be captured in the concept of Eros.

We have already seen that Murdoch considers the transcendent Good to be that reality which ‘all men love and wish to possess for ever’.<sup>725</sup> Its attractiveness is such that it exerts a magnetic pull on the self. Eros is, according to Murdoch, the proper human ‘response’ to this magnetism of Good: much like Diotima in the Symposium, she considers it ‘the desire for the perpetual possession of the Good’.<sup>726</sup> As Murdoch characterises it, Eros is an energetic force seated deep within the human being. In principle, it provides the force necessary to break through selfishness and its product, the ego, and is thus the precondition for our attachment to Good. It propels the human being onto her path towards Good by—potentially at least—causing her to fall in love with Good, and thus to leave behind all concern with self. Eros thereby enables ‘moral progress’, which results in what Murdoch herself refers to as ‘metanoia’ or a ‘new state of being’—a phrase which calls to mind Tillich’s notion of the ‘New Being’.<sup>727</sup> As such, Murdoch’s Eros can legitimately be characterised as the energetic principle animating the ‘mechanism of attachments’, which she identifies as the self. As the energy which directs desire towards Good, Eros is crucial to human selfhood.

In line with the above characterisation of the relation between Good and Beauty, Eros works first and foremost through this visible correlate of Good: it is through Beauty that impersonal Good, which does not actively reach out to the human subject,

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<sup>723</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.99.

<sup>724</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.343.

<sup>725</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.415, *MGM*, p.343.

<sup>726</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.343.

<sup>727</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, pp.165, 54.

‘inspires love’.<sup>728</sup> In seeking to lead the person towards the Good, Eros thus ‘takes on the form of a yearning to create in and through Beauty’.<sup>729</sup> When the human being encounters a beautiful object, Eros causes her to fall in love with this. The individual focuses her attention on something utterly outside her self, and is led to ‘forget’ her self.<sup>730</sup>

#### 6.4.2 The fallibility of Eros

Although claiming that ‘what I have called Eros pictures probably a greater part of what we think of as “the moral life”’ and although considering its connection with Good to be definite and necessary in that ‘what is desired is desired as, genuinely, good’, Murdoch recognises that Eros does not have an infallible sense of direction.<sup>731</sup> It can mistake a false good for Good and thus lead the human being to attach herself to something unreal.<sup>732</sup> Though constituting the necessary basis for binding the self to Good and, hence, for redeeming the fallen human being, Eros can thereby also support the individual’s natural selfishness. When causing a person to fall in love, Eros can for instance cause her to mistake her own attempts to swallow the other up (say, by loving them as an extension of herself) for true love, which respects the other in their individual distinctness.

Eros is, indeed, a ‘trickster’, ‘a sort of magician and sophist’, an ‘alchemist’ as much as it is ‘a lover of wisdom’ and a potential ‘figure of grace’, Murdoch argues.<sup>733</sup> She is sympathetic to Plato’s vision of ‘erotic love as an education’ bringing us continually closer to the Good, yet is perhaps more guarded than her teacher.<sup>734</sup> Given the energy Eros provides and its ability to ‘wrench[] our interest out of ourselves’ it may open us up

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<sup>728</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.343.

<sup>729</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.415.

<sup>730</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, pp.415, 516. Cf. *Phaedrus*, 252 a, b, 259ff.

<sup>731</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, pp.497, 343.

<sup>732</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.343.

<sup>733</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, pp.420, 415, *MGM*, p.24.

<sup>734</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.345.

to true reality and teach us ‘that other worlds and other centres really exist and have rights’.<sup>735</sup> And yet, she warns, in causing us to fall in love it can also ‘be a form of insanity whereby we lose the “open scene”’, that is where we fixate our attention on one individual reality—usually our ego-self in disguise—at the cost of seeing, respecting and loving reality itself.<sup>736</sup> Murdoch observes that it is difficult to be unselfishly in love but writes also that ‘without Eros man is a ghost. But with Eros he can be—either a demon or—Socrates’.<sup>737</sup> Eros can be ‘an ultimate consolation and an ultimate saviour’; it can cause our downfall through retreat into consoling illusion as much as it can be the foundation of our life in the light of the Good.<sup>738</sup> Eros must be kept distinct from Good. While the Good is ‘the spiritual goal’, ‘the absolute’, and of a ‘transcendent, impersonal and pure’ nature, Eros-love is the spiritual path and, as such, something ‘more mixed and personal’ than Good, Murdoch suggests.<sup>739</sup> It is by no means true therefore that ‘Murdoch misses or pretends not’, as Zuba suggests, ‘to see love as a problem’ rather than just as a ‘solution’ (though, as we shall see in the following chapter, it is that too).<sup>740</sup> As one commentator observes, ‘for Murdoch love—perhaps more than any passion or experience by humankind—is prone to self-deception’.<sup>741</sup>

It is the distinction between Eros directed towards false goods and Eros directed towards Good, which Murdoch has in mind when she speaks of unpurified and purified or ‘lower’ and ‘higher’ Eros, which she, controversially, considers to be relatively more personal and ‘impersonal’ respectively.<sup>742</sup> Where a false good is mistaken for the Good and Eros causes the person to fall in love with this, Eros enshrines our natural selfishness. It then fosters the disharmony of desires, which stands in the way of moral

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<sup>735</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.345.

<sup>736</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.345

<sup>737</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.487.

<sup>738</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, pp.346, 343

<sup>739</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.343.

<sup>740</sup> Zuba, *Iris Murdoch’s Contemporary Retrieval*, p.147 (footnote).

<sup>741</sup> Scott Moore ‘Murdoch’s Fictional Philosophers: What They Say and What they Show’ in Rowe, Horner, *Murdoch and Morality*, p.104.

<sup>742</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.75.

goodness and, as I will argue in the following chapter, of a person's flourishing. Where Eros does succeed in leading the self to attach itself to the Good, it does so not so much through discriminating between supposedly good and bad desires and destroying the latter but rather through ordering and thereby purifying what is otherwise 'blind, obsessive, mechanical [and thus unreal] desire'.<sup>743</sup> Contrary to some commentators, Murdoch does not, therefore, call for a suspension of 'physical sexuality' but for its transformation.<sup>744</sup> She seeks to connect even the 'commonest human desire to the highest morality and to the pattern of divine creativity in the universe'.<sup>745</sup> This arguably happens when sexual desire is directed towards Good, which cannot be possessed or used for gratification. Such desire is purged from all elements of selfishness and respects the other for who they are.

Murdoch thus attempts to modify Plato insofar as she considers 'purified sexual energy', which she associates with 'good Eros' and which has the potential of 'lead[ing] us to Enlightenment', precisely not a desire which 'impatiently bypass[es] [the other's] individuality in search of the Good'.<sup>746</sup> Contrary to Nussbaum's reading, Murdoch envisages purified sexual desire as a desire, which sees and desires the other for and as who they are, with their idiosyncracies, and on their terms. As I will argue in the following chapter, this is compromised by an 'impersonal' element in Murdoch's Eros, which Nussbaum is right to criticise.<sup>747</sup> Nussbaum is wrong, however, to infer from her observation that Murdoch shows a 'slight disdainfulness towards characters [in Murdoch's own novels] who do not re-educate their instincts'—a disdainfulness which

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<sup>743</sup> Peter Conradi 'Platonism in Iris Murdoch' in Baldwin, A, Hutton, S (ed.s) (1994) *Platonism and the English Imagination*, CUP, Cambridge, pp.330-42, p.333; Murdoch, *MGM*, p.139.

<sup>744</sup> See e.g. Dorothy Winsor 'Solipsistic Sexuality in Iris Murdoch's Gothic Novels', *Renascence: Essays on Value in Literature* Vol.34, No.1 (1981), p.52.

<sup>745</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.415.

<sup>746</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, pp.246f; Nussbaum, 'Love and Vision', p.38.

<sup>747</sup> Nussbaum, 'Love and Vision', p.45.

does not make Nussbaum herself feel ‘altogether like[d]’—that Murdoch’s philosophy does not ensure respect and love of others with their idiosyncracies.<sup>748</sup>

Rather, Murdoch’s impatience with such characters can, firstly, be seen as indicative of an, in Murdoch’s own eyes, spiritual but surely excusable and almost inevitable failure to artistically realise her self-set goals. After all, Murdoch admires novelists such as Shakespeare and George Eliot precisely for their ‘godlike capacity for so respecting and loving her characters as to make them exist as free and separate beings’.<sup>749</sup> However, Murdoch’s impatience in this respect, secondly, testifies also to her ambitious project of seeking to show both the need to love and accept others as they are and the need to discipline one’s own desires.<sup>750</sup> This tension comes to the surface in *The Sandcastle* where Bledyard criticises Mor for his affair with a young artist. Uncomfortable with the criticism, Mor objects that ‘I seem to remember your saying not so long ago [...] that human beings should not judge one another’, only to be rebuffed by Bledyard, who persuasively argues that ‘sometimes [...] it is unavoidably our duty to attempt to attempt [*sic*] some sort of judgment—and then the suspension of judgment is not charity but the fear of being judged in return’.<sup>751</sup> If Murdoch left her reader all too comfortable or unchallenged, she, like many novelists, would surely consider herself an unsuccessful artist.

In this spirit, Murdoch’s morally better characters, such as Dora Greenfield (*The Bell*) or Tallis Browne (*A Fairly Honourable Defeat*), are shown to strive for greater awareness and insight into truth and to keep loving those around them regardless of their unfaithfulness and other faults. What is more, Murdoch, similar to Weil’s understanding of love as examined in Chapter 3, considers it possible for, and indeed the distinctive mark of, true love to love someone as they are and to simultaneously recreate

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<sup>748</sup> Nussbaum, ‘Love and Vision’, p.49.

<sup>749</sup> e.g. Murdoch, *EM*, 275.

<sup>750</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, pp.284, 276.

<sup>751</sup> Murdoch, *TS*, pp.211f.

them. This indicates the extent to which Murdoch, more than Joyce, whom Nussbaum contrasts her with, stays close to the Christian project. Murdoch's understanding of art as a major occasion for the human being's awakening from comfortable illusions and self-aggrandisements means that she does not consider it the task of the novel to make the reader himself feel loved but to morally inspire him.

Eros-love can thus only fulfil its task of 'disciplin[ing]' desire if the Good is recognised: the human being 'desires in accordance with what he sees'.<sup>752</sup> Eros' ambiguity, however, its passionate and rash nature, its interconnectedness with the disharmony of desires means that it does not necessarily have this right vision. Indeed, Eros *itself* appears to require 'purification' if it is to enable the purification of sexual and other desire, and thus to lead the person to her telos, the Good.<sup>753</sup> For this it depends, I will shortly argue, on a training of vision and imagination that schools a person's perception of the Good. Before discussing this in the following chapter, I shall relate the insights gained about Eros back to Murdoch's account of the self.

## **6.5 True and false self**

### **6.5.1 The unity and disunity of the self**

Murdoch's account of the centrality of Eros for morality and selfhood provides her with the basis of her anti-behaviourist argument that a human being's outward acts are a function of her inner life. Without Eros' capacity to cause us to fall in love with Good we might know Good but would remain 'idle spectators of what we know'—unwilling or unable to let our knowledge change us and thus to put it into action, Murdoch argues.<sup>754</sup>

In response to Sartre's observation that 'quand je délibère les jeux sont faits', Murdoch argues that our actions are preceded by, and indeed dependent on, the orientation of this

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<sup>752</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.39.

<sup>753</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.399.

<sup>754</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.516.

inner force. Her notion of Eros allows her to capture the moral centrality as well as the messiness of the inner life. As we saw, Eros's connection with the transcendent Good is not mechanical or definitely determined and its sense of direction not infallible. The ambiguity of Eros helps to clarify some of the terminological confusion which surrounds Murdoch's discussion of the self and which complicates an understanding of her account of the self.

Murdoch speaks of the self primarily as a fantasy we must turn away from—indeed, which must be 'silence[d] and expel[led]'.<sup>755</sup> This is for instance true when Murdoch says that 'the self, the place where we live, is a place of illusion', or that beholding reality properly requires us 'to look and look until one exists no more'.<sup>756</sup> At the same time, we have found Murdoch wanting to uphold the notion of a substantial self. I now propose that, rather than denying the reality of the self in general, Murdoch denies merely the self as we commonly perceive of it, i.e. the self as a stable, intrinsically unified entity independent of anything outside itself.<sup>757</sup> This illusory self, which we commonly identify as, and which I have, above, referred to exclusively as the 'ego' (a term Murdoch herself also applies to this fantasy and which one commentator has identifies as 'vanity or conceit'), results from a misdirection of Eros towards a false good and, thus, towards unreality.<sup>758</sup> Concealing the conflict of desires and denying human mortality, it implies a 'comforting sense of a unified self, with organised emotions and fearless world-dominating intelligence, a complete experience in a limited whole'.<sup>759</sup>

While this illusory self may be comfortable in the short run, Nussbaum is right to note that 'being walled up inside one's own fat cosy ego without means of egress to the

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<sup>755</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.63.

<sup>756</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, pp.91, 63.

<sup>757</sup> A similar plea for the notion that, 'in contradiction to what she herself says', Murdoch's 'self cannot be only or significantly ego' or a 'fantasy mechanism' has recently been made by Samantha Vice (Vice, 'The Ethics of Self-Concern', p.65). Vice rightly points out that 'Murdoch's own commitment to the importance of quality of consciousness and the task of self-perfection requires and indeed presupposes some degree of self-concern' (Vice, *The Ethics of Self-Concern*, p.61).

<sup>758</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.91. Gordon, *Fables of Unselfing*, p.9

<sup>759</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.88. Correspondingly, the 'idea of the unreality of the self mediates the idea of death', Murdoch argues (Murdoch, *MGM*, p.139).

other or to the Good' nonetheless constitutes Murdoch's understanding of hell—that is, of separation from Good and, thus, from reality.<sup>760</sup> It is, I suggest, this illusory self which Murdoch finds to be 'absent[t]' in Good and which she thus claims must be 'suppress[ed]' or even die.<sup>761</sup> With this, Murdoch's account reflects Weil's notion that our common sense of self must be deconstructed precisely so as to lay bare the true essence of the self.<sup>762</sup> Her above-noted claim that desire is not to be destroyed but reordered and purified, as well as her fondness for the ontological argument, which she considers to state the interdependence of Good and conscious self, corroborates the notion that she distinguishes this self from the real self. That which I have argued forms the moral centre or the substantial core of the human being, the mechanism of attachments, not only remains after the suppression from self, but is led to its true end, the Good, which allows its to flourish.

Murdoch is highly elusive about the precise nature of this true, good self. A clue to what she may have in mind in requiring the death of an illusory self, or when demanding an 'unselfing', lies in a passage where Murdoch, in the context of comparing Zen meditation and Weil's 'décreation', refers to an absence of self from the mind.<sup>763</sup> Where a person centres her consciousness—and indeed her Eros—on the self she fails to sufficiently recognise reality, including her own, for what it is and develops a false sense of self, and an ego-self. The true self as Murdoch conceives of it, surfaces only where Eros, which Murdoch considers the precondition for knowledge, is directed away from self to Good. This is because the self is, according to Murdoch, 'such a dazzling

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<sup>760</sup> Nussbaum, 'Love and Vision', p.37.

<sup>761</sup> Nussbaum aptly adds that 'heaven is the place of true and selfless vision; and purgatory the place of moral effort that attempts to deliver us from the one to the other', a process to be outlined in the following chapter (Nussbaum, 'Love and Vision', p.37). Murdoch, *SoG*, p.64; *EM*, p.218; for the 'death of the self' see *UN*, p.167.

<sup>762</sup> If my interpretation that all that Murdoch's wants to die is an illusion, a fantasy, about oneself is correct, then Lovibond's suggestion of a tension in Murdoch between the 'death of selfish desire' and 'the conversion of such desire from a 'lower' into a 'higher' form' does not apply; not only does Murdoch speak of the death of the self rather than that of, as Lovibond suggests, selfish desire but Murdoch's 'kill[ing]' is to be metaphorically understood (Lovibond, *Iris Murdoch, Gender and Philosophy*, p.93).

<sup>763</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.245.

object that if one looks there one may see nothing else'.<sup>764</sup> Highly critical of Hegelian attempts to strive for higher self-awareness and even of Freud's confrontation of and proposed solutions to the conflict within the psyche, Murdoch indeed argues that where the human being is turned towards its self, Good cannot fulfil its role in illuminating reality. There is a sense in this of Kant's notion of the ultimate inscrutability of the true self, though for her this results not so much from a limitation of Reason but from the erotic, and thus necessarily other-oriented nature of the self.

At the same time, Murdoch clearly does not think that knowledge of self is altogether impossible. Above we saw that although Murdoch speaks of the '(illusory) unity' and the 'real disunity' of the self, she seeks to take seriously the ordinary person's sense of a unified self.<sup>765</sup> This everyday perception of an element of 'positive being', 'self-being' and 'separateness' cannot, Murdoch seems to suggest, be simply dismissed as an instance of bad faith or low Eros, though it may well contain elements of this.<sup>766</sup> Considered in light of Eros as Murdoch analyses it, the ordinary person's sense of a unified self must be ambiguous. It may for instance entail a misguided love of oneself as a being possessing *prima facie* unity, and the reality of which does not depend on anything outside itself. In such a case the intrinsic and unconditioned unity of Good is falsely applied to the self, such that the human being mistakes the false (ego-)self for Good.

At the same time, our sense of a unified self *may*, it seems, also entail an element of truth, i.e. the conscious or unconscious awareness of the substantiality of one's self, without which one would not be responsible for and could not move beyond one's illusory self. The reality of Eros, or human desire, supports our sense of a core of self-being and, simultaneously, to the dependency of this core, which Murdoch arguably identifies with the mechanism of attachments, on what is other than itself. Murdoch's

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<sup>764</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.30.

<sup>765</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.88.

<sup>766</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.97; *EM*, p.253, 274.

notion that Eros must not be directed towards the self makes full knowledge of the true self impossible, but it does not necessarily disallow granting the human sense of unity any authority therefore. While the false attribution of complete and autonomous unity to the self corresponds with a perception of a false multiplicity, or of the particulars of the world as ‘dark menacing chaos’, Eros’s proper orientation should promote a true, though dynamic and relational unity—that is, a harmonisation of the self’s various desires in their actual telos, the Good.<sup>767</sup> This would correspond with a perception of other particular individuals as beautiful and expressive of unified Good.

The kind of unity proper to the true self is thus a unification of desire in and through Good. It is distinct from pretensions to intrinsic and self-sufficient unity and, instead, obtained precisely on account of the realisation that the human self is precisely not a self-contained and self-sufficient whole but that it depends precisely on its openness and orientation to another. It is an ‘enlightened’ state which enables the perception of true multiplicity, ‘the diversity of creation in the light of truth’.<sup>768</sup> This correlates with vision of reality, including that of other people, of one’s transience and mortality, and of what Murdoch considers to be the fact that the human being is ‘subject to necessity and chance’ and lacking an ‘external point or telos’.<sup>769</sup>

I thus suggest that if Murdoch considers the notion of a unified self potentially dangerous, then this is not so much because the true self lacks *any* kind of unity but because an a priori assumption of unity obstructs that willingness for complete openness to and pervasion by Good prescribed by the substantial self, which is properly attached to Good. Equally, I would argue that it is in order to enable the self’s relationality with what is outside itself, and thus its standing in reality, that Murdoch speaks of the true self as incomplete. This is, as Lorna Sage points out, illustrated in Murdoch’s character Charles (*The Sea, the Sea*) who ‘realises, almost too late, that life is a matter of immersion

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<sup>767</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.165.

<sup>768</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.165.

<sup>769</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.77.

in one's surrounding element, and that if you separate yourself off—the manipulative, inviolate “I”—you're more likely to sink than swim'.<sup>770</sup>

### 6.5.2 The self and the art object

Murdoch's discussion of the art object arguably supports this interpretation of her account of the self. She considers the art object 'a kind of “thing” [but] also a kind of “soul”' (a term Murdoch uses inter-changeably with 'self').<sup>771</sup> The art object 'may', she argues, 'seem to be a limited whole enclosed in a circle, but because of contingency and the muddled nature of the world and the imperfections of language the circle is always broken'.<sup>772</sup> In presenting itself as a unity, it images what I have called the ego-self.<sup>773</sup> Very good art, writes Murdoch however, 'mirrors not only the (illusory) unity of the self but its real disunity' by 'proclaim[ing] its incompleteness and point[ing] away' from itself.<sup>774</sup> Applying Kant's notion of the sublime to (good) art Murdoch argues that 'the world overflows the art object', 'it transcends it'.<sup>775</sup> The art object is thus 'porous or cracked, another reality flows through it, it is in tension between a clarified statement and a confused pointing, and is in danger if it goes too far either way'.<sup>776</sup> The self as Murdoch conceives it shares precisely this ambivalence of appearing to be a limited whole, but being—at least in its true manifestation—open, and permeated by an external unity. Where this relationality is denied the human person does injustice to her substance. Contrary to the proper other-relatedness of her self she will then, perhaps unknowingly and under the impression of being oriented towards Good, try to possess, dominate and,

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<sup>770</sup> Lorna Sage (1992) *Women in the House of Fiction. Post-war women novelists*. Macmillan, Basingstoke, p.81.

<sup>771</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.163.

<sup>772</sup> Emphasis added. Murdoch, *MGM*, p.88.

<sup>773</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, pp.86, 88.

<sup>774</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.88.

<sup>775</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.88.

<sup>776</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.88. Murdoch already made a similar point in *The Fire and the Sun*, where she describes the structure of the art object as 'pierced' and 'flow[ing] into life'—terms evocative of Diotima's description of the lover and his eros as examined in Chapter 3 (see e.g. Murdoch, *EM*, p.460).

ultimately, swallow up outer reality, rather than inserting herself into this and perceiving and respecting it in all its particularity and otherness.

## 6.6 Conclusion

Murdoch, we have seen, considers the true human self to be both substantial and pervaded by the other, on relationship with whom it depends. The above analyses have suggested that this need not constitute a contradiction: as Murdoch conceptualises it, the very substance of the self is a mechanism of attachments which is necessarily and intrinsically related and incomplete, and which points beyond itself. Contrary to human life in general, which Murdoch considers to be ‘self-contained’, Murdoch’s true self is not, therefore, a unity in the sense of a self-sufficient whole.<sup>777</sup> At the same time, Murdoch’s account allows for the fact that we nonetheless continue to recognise ourselves in the ‘idea of unity’, which is created by the imagery of art and religion, and which is analogous with ‘an active unified self’.<sup>778</sup> The substantiality of the self means that for all the incompleteness of the human being, there is an element of ‘self-being’. This ensures that continuous identity and capacity for agency, without which human incompleteness could not be recognised and moral development not undergone. Without some such ‘positive conception of the soul’ the human being is both aggrandised and profanised: ‘freedom is corrupted into self-assertion’ and ‘right action into ad hoc utilitarianism’, Murdoch argues.<sup>779</sup> At the same time, this ‘good self’ is ‘very small’.<sup>780</sup> It constitutes merely the foundation for that unification of desire in Good which corresponds with full selfhood, and truly only becomes itself in and through that openness and those relationships, which its substance commands. These relations include both individual objects and persons and the objective and transcendent Good,

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<sup>777</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.77.

<sup>778</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.162.

<sup>779</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.69.

<sup>780</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, pp.97, 66.

which is encountered in and through them, and which may and should, as I suggest in the concluding chapter of this thesis, itself be understood as an open and relational reality. The self is thus no given or pre-existing datum but a moral and spiritual project continually attaining greater levels of reality.

With this picture of the self, Murdoch has incorporated into her Platonic metaphysics and anthropology Freud's emphasis on the desirous nature of the human being, Weil's notion of a need for purgation from ego, as well as Sartre's insight that the human being lacks intrinsic stability and must fight for true selfhood by liberating himself from enslaving illusions.<sup>781</sup> As will become more apparent in the following chapter, Murdoch considers such liberation to depend not on a mere assertion of will but on the hard and slow work of attention. Unlike Sartre, she does not consider the will a creator of reality but rather to be compelled by reality where this is obeyed. This is such a marked point of disagreement between her and Sartre that it arguably coloured her entire perception of existentialism in a way, which does injustice to the influence Sartre had on her.<sup>782</sup> However, contrary to what some commentators have suggested,<sup>783</sup> Murdoch does not reject or deny the role of the will in purifying and re-ordering our desires. Though perhaps giving a certain preference to the more embodied notion of 'active imagination', she indeed describes this purification 'as an exercise of will'.<sup>784</sup> This interrelation between the will and purification from ego (to which the imagination is in fact key) means that even the process of unselfing amounts to an affirmation of the

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<sup>781</sup> As Völker points out, Murdoch's attempt to take into view human desire and the disconcerting contingency of things implies a stress also on 'the power of irrational forces in man' and in the world and thus a 'turn towards a philosophy of life in the tradition of Nietzsche, Dilthey, Bergson where all non-rational processes of experience, i.e. drives, affects, passions, emotions are given the function of "Erkenntnis"' (Völker, *Rhetoric of Love*, p.51). For her, however, this amounts to a qualification also of 'the position of man as an autonomous agent' (Völker, *Rhetoric of Love*, p.51).

<sup>782</sup> See e.g. her statement, 'I have no sympathy with existentialism, what I see as a rather crude unrealistic picture of solitary egoistic will' in Afaf Khogeer, Interview with Iris Murdoch in Khogeer (2006) *The integration of the self: women in the fiction of Iris Murdoch and Margaret Drabble*. University Press of America, Lanham, pp. 221-224, p.222.

<sup>783</sup> Cf. John Wilson 'Can One Promise to Love Another?' *Philosophy* Vol.64, No.250 (1989); Tony Milligan, *Iris Murdoch's Romantic Platonism*. PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, p.160. Accessed on 21.10.2011 at <http://theses.gla.ac.uk/1298/01/2005milliganphd.pdf>.

<sup>784</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.199.

individual, not least by entailing an act of the will.<sup>785</sup> Yet Murdoch, contrary to Sartre and, perhaps, Kant does not consider the individual to be affirmed on account of the mere *assertion* of the will or the *creation* of values but through the willed turn away from self, and towards *recognition* of the other and their unconditional value. With this, we are moving to what is needed for Eros, which is responsible for ‘the orientation of desire’ and for ‘join[ing] us to the world’, to effect the right ‘changes in what is desired’.<sup>786</sup> This brings us to Murdoch’s notion of selfless love.

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<sup>785</sup> In light of this, Antonaccio’s suggestion that the imagination as Murdoch conceives it ‘is not linked to the idea of “unselfing”, but rather affirms the importance of the individual’ draws an unfitting contrast between the process of unselfing and an affirmation of the individual (Antonaccio, ‘Imagining the Good’, p.236).

<sup>786</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, pp. 497, 496.

## Chapter 7 – Iris Murdoch’s account of love

In the previous chapter we saw that Murdoch considers true human selfhood dependent on the human being’s ‘extremely difficult realisation that something other than oneself is real’.<sup>787</sup> Arguing that this requires the person’s orientation and attachment to Good, which is encountered in the individual persons and things of the world, Murdoch, like Tillich, thus understands true human selfhood as a matter of relationship. Also like Tillich, she does not consider right relationality to be a common existential reality, however. The kind of relationship corresponding with full selfhood depends on the human being’s purgation from the ego-self, which tends to constitute the existential human being’s self-identity. As I sought to show, Murdoch connects the notion of the ego with the conceited and illusory assumption that the self is a unified and self-contained whole independent of others. The ego-self emerges as soon as the human being turns its Eros-love towards itself, which, according to Murdoch, means away from Good. The human being is prone to, but in fact corrupted and enslaved by, such an orientation of Eros. It causes her to live in detachment from Good, which in turn prevents her from perceiving, and relating to, reality.

As will become more clear in the following, Murdoch’s proposed solution to this flawed state is ‘a long deep process of unselfing’ effecting a ‘metanoia’.<sup>788</sup> Modelling this on what she, with T.S. Eliot, considers to be the artistic task of ‘continual self-sacrifice’, and discussing it in the Weilian language of ‘décreation’, selflessness, and renunciation, it is perhaps no surprise that this has caused feminist irritation—most recently and vehemently in Sabina Lovibond, some of whose criticisms I shall return to below.<sup>789</sup> However, whatever the faults of Murdoch’s proposals, insensitivity to, or even

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<sup>787</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.244.

<sup>788</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.54.

<sup>789</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.283; Sabina Lovibond, *Iris Murdoch, Gender and Philosophy*, e.g. p.86. Gabriele Griffin (1993) *The Influence of the Writings of Simone Weil on the Fiction of Iris Murdoch*. Mellen Research University Press, San Francisco, pp.52, 101.

denigration or oppression of, the human subject and her needs, is not, I will now argue, among them. The kind of selfless love that, as I now propose, forms the heart of Murdoch's moral philosophy does not imply a lack of concern for the human subject and her flourishing. Rather, Murdoch's selfless love promotes the flourishing of the human person as Murdoch understands her. Murdoch's commendation of selfless love is indeed the direct consequence of her conviction that the human being can take her stand in reality, including her own, only where she is attached to what is outside herself. What this selfless love and the flourishing it leads to looks like, and what role Eros plays therein, constitutes the subject matter for the following discussion. This first requires us to gain a better understanding of the insufficiency of Eros as Murdoch understands it.

## **7.1 Love's different aspects**

### **7.1.1 The Insufficiency of Eros-love**

It has become clear that, contrary to conventional depictions of Plato's doctrine of Eros as self-centred, Murdoch, like Tillich, interprets Eros's proper function as one of orientating the human being towards the other. At the same time, she, like Tillich, has come to find Eros unreliable in this respect. Energising the human being, it is implicated in, or at least affected by, human selfishness. As already noted, Eros' ambiguity—the simultaneous potential and liability of the erotic force imbuing the human being—becomes particularly evident where the human being falls in love with another person. On the one hand, Eros then ruptures a person's self-absorption and enables the 'sudden realisation that another human being exists in an absolute sense'.<sup>790</sup> The momentous removal of the world's centre from oneself to another provides an opportunity for the person to be led out of herself and to radically centre herself on another. Falling in love can thus effect a spiritual, quasi-religious transformation of consciousness. On the other

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<sup>790</sup> Karen Armstrong, Introduction to Iris Murdoch, *NS*, no pagination.

hand, and as Murdoch illustrates in countless examples in her novels, falling in love is also one of the experiences most easily distorted into selfishness.<sup>791</sup> Eros may suggest to the lover that he is in love with another even when and where he is in fact in love with a false good (i.e. with a, typically hidden, form of self). It then reinforces his tendency towards egoistic self-imprisonment and his desire ‘to derealise the other, devour and absorb him, subject him to the mechanism of our own fantasy’.<sup>792</sup> Eros, then, can conceal a selfish love by suggesting a ‘violent mock-ascesis or a false loss of self’, which, as Peter Conradi describes it, makes the subject oblivious to the imminent attempt of the ego to resurface and swallow the other.<sup>793</sup> Thus able to induce illusions of selflessness, Eros can lay the ground for an all the more vehement surfacing of selfishness.

Part of Eros’ problem in turning away from the self and towards a correctly discerned Good arguably lies in the way Eros operates. Murdoch portrays it as a somewhat unconscious, instinctual force which breaks into human consciousness from inner depths. Particularly in the case of falling in love, the eruptive force of this energy, which appears to lack a self-reflexive mechanism, can thus be so sudden, overpowering, and impassioned with its object that it leaves little room for a critical assessment from outside and for taking into view reality as a whole. Though providing the energy we need in order to bind ourselves to anything at all, Eros has moreover been shown capable of mistaking ego for Good, and, thus, of enhancing the subject’s inability to see. Arguing that immorality and illusion mutually reinforce each other in that ‘I can only choose within the world I can see, in the moral sense of “see”’, Murdoch famously considers such a diminishment of our field of vision to result in a moral decline.<sup>794</sup> The functioning

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<sup>791</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, pp.416f, 517. Examples of a failed ‘falling in love’ include Bradley in *TBP*, Mor’s love for Rain Carter in *TS*, Jake’s love for Anna in *UN*, Henry’s love for Stephanie in *HC*. For the potential need to ‘fall out of love’ see *MGM*, p.345.

<sup>792</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.417.

<sup>793</sup> Conradi, *The Saint and the Artist*, p.142.

<sup>794</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.36.

of Eros is interdependent with a person's perception of reality. The more schooled a person's vision is, the more capable Eros is of binding her to the Good.

We are thus left with the seeming paradox that Eros can only perform its task of enabling spiritual and moral change through orientating the person away from self on the basis of being directed away from self itself. As proposed above, Eros *itself* must be purified 'from ego and its false images' and thus corrected or, perhaps, trained in selflessness by something other than itself.<sup>795</sup> In the following I want to bring together Murdoch's notion of Eros with her proposed practice of 'attention' by arguing that the former is purified through the latter, and that the two complement each other. I seek to show that it is in this sense that Murdoch—though aware that (Eros-)love can be part of the problem of human self-delusion—nonetheless considers love as a whole to redeem the human being of this delusion.

### 7.1.2 The practice of attention

Murdoch explicitly 'borrow[s]' the term 'attention', which occupies a central place in her philosophy, from Simone Weil.<sup>796</sup> Murdoch understands attention as a conscious and active practice or 'moral discipline' and likens it to prayer.<sup>797</sup> It constitutes the 'effort to counteract' our often 'convincingly coherent' but false pictures of the world through making use of the 'continual slight control over the direction and focus of [our] vision', and as such, has a moral quality which is missing in the more neutral concept of looking.<sup>798</sup> 'Looking' can, Murdoch implies, refer to many kinds of perception, thus leaving room for the imposition of the beholder's own, possibly denigrating prejudices onto the object.<sup>799</sup> Attention, by contrast, is unambiguously good; it 'imperceptibly [...]

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<sup>795</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.347.

<sup>796</sup> Murdoch, *SOG*, p.33.

<sup>797</sup> Murdoch, *SOG*, pp.63, 53.

<sup>798</sup> Murdoch, *SOG*, pp.30, 36.

<sup>799</sup> For the difference between looking and attention see Murdoch, *SOG*, p.36.

builds up structures of value around us'.<sup>800</sup> Given our above discussion, it is clear that Murdoch's attention must refer to a glance directed outwards, away from self. It thus contradicts the psychoanalytic endeavour of examining the self. Through use of his mental faculties, the beholder consciously focuses his gaze on an object outside himself to the point of forgetting himself. In doing so, he leaves himself behind and lets the reality outside speak for itself, thereby discovering the particularity, even oddness of what is so close to him as to, usually, remain invisible. In assuming this posture, the human being admits her ignorance of reality and creates the conditions for a revelation of reality. Attention, then, involves humility and a putting one's trust into reality which derives from the correct assumption that reality lies beyond the self and its tendency towards self-absorption. Aware that the individual persons and objects outside the self are more real than the ego and its prejudices, the attentive subject, most importantly, seeks to see others not on her own egoistic terms but for who they really *are*.<sup>801</sup> By steering a person's vision away from herself and by causing it to remain patiently with an object outside herself, the practice of attention enables a gradual movement towards spiritual and moral change.

Murdoch famously illustrates her notion of attention in her much-cited example of a critical mother-in-law (M) who, through a slow reformation of her vision, succeeds in altering her negative view of her daughter-in-law (D). M, Murdoch writes, becomes aware that her negative image of D may be based on prejudice, that is, that she looks at D from the perspective of her own preconceptions about what her ideal daughter-in-law should be like. Aware of the likely contingency of this perspective, M decides to 'look again', however.<sup>802</sup> She seeks to broaden her field of vision (in the moral sense of the term 'vision' used here) so as to acquire a less 'distorted' and more real 'vision' of D.<sup>803</sup>

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<sup>800</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.36.

<sup>801</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.36.

<sup>802</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.17.

<sup>803</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.36.

This requires M to pay ‘careful and just attention’ to the reality before her.<sup>804</sup> It means attempting to see D ‘as she really is’, that is, as a concretely existing individual more real than M’s (inevitably selfish) preconceptions of her.<sup>805</sup> According to Murdoch’s metaphysic, seeing the reality of D means seeing D not in the light of M’s self but in the light of the Good. Such a change in perception implies a discovery of value—indeed, of the fact that reality is saturated with the Good. M might, for instance, come to ‘discover[...]’ D ‘to be not vulgar but refreshingly simple, not undignified but spontaneous, not noisy but gay’ etc.<sup>806</sup> Where M perceives D more justly—that is, where she sees her more as she really is—she will have moved closer to the Good and thus have become a better person herself. Contrary to the philosophers Murdoch calls linguistic empiricists, nothing would necessarily have changed outwardly, nor would the change have come to M easily. Rather, she would have engaged in an invisible ‘internal struggle’, a gradual reformatory process.<sup>807</sup> This kind of private effort for right (which, as Robjant rightly points out, does include empirically truthful<sup>808</sup>) vision is, Murdoch claims, the basis of morality. Paying attention to D rather than merely looking at D enables M to cleanse her perception of those elements which are not in fact intrinsic to D, but which M imposed on D as a result of her own self-absorbed bias.

### *Attention, obedience and necessity*

Following Simone Weil, Murdoch associates such attention to the other with obedience.<sup>809</sup> As an ‘exercise of love’, a ‘patient, loving regard, directed upon a person, a

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<sup>804</sup> Emphasis added. Murdoch, *SoG*, pp.36, 17.

<sup>805</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.36. Murdoch illustrates this in her novels, such as when Tim’s increasing unselfishness, which leads him to end his fraught love relation with Daisy, finally allows him to see her in all her beauty and for who she (Murdoch, *NS*, p.391). By contrast, Mary, rather more a ‘nice’ than a ‘good’ character in *NG*, realises that she does ‘not love [Theo, who is more of a ‘good’ character] enough to see him clearly’ (Murdoch, *NG*, p.88).

<sup>806</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.17.

<sup>807</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, pp.22, 17.

<sup>808</sup> Robjant, ‘Is Iris Murdoch an Unconscious Misogynist’, p.1023.

<sup>809</sup> As Völker points out, the concept of ‘obedience’ can be traced back further to Meister Eckhart (Völker, *Rhetoric of Love*, p.51).

thing, a situation’, attention corresponds with will understood not as ‘unimpeded movement’ but more as ‘obedience to reality’, Murdoch argues.<sup>810</sup> Attention is about suspending the inclination to grasp reality and, instead, allowing reality to compel the will, to become ‘compulsively present to it’.<sup>811</sup> This constitutes a counter, then, to Sartrean notions of the will as the creator of reality, who exerts the self’s ideas and preferences, by arguing that ‘will is obedience not resolution’.<sup>812</sup> Murdoch’s understanding of obedient attention indeed implies that she considers the will’s task to lie precisely not in developing the individual project Sartre envisaged but in providing a check on the temptation of unjust bias, and thus to enable obedience to reality.<sup>813</sup> In its true expression, the will guides a person’s passions and desires, her imagination and capacity for reflection in accordance with actual reality.

With Weil, Murdoch considers obedience of will to result from an experience of ‘necessity’.<sup>814</sup> In and of themselves the things of the world are contingent rather than necessary, Murdoch implies. Where we are confronted with them, however, we properly encounter them as necessary in the sense of incontrovertibly other and preceding our will. It is in this way that persons, objects, or works of art reflect the necessity of Good and that ‘the futility of selfish purposes’ is exposed.<sup>815</sup> With reference to the *Timaeus*, moreover, Murdoch observes that ‘the world itself obeys an alien law’, which she defines as the law of necessity.<sup>816</sup> In this way, too, the necessary is reflected and can be encountered in the world. In speaking of obedience to reality as an intrinsic aspect of vision of reality, Murdoch takes up the suggestion that reality is encountered where it is perceived and accepted as other and resistant to one’s will—in short, where it is

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<sup>810</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, pp.39, 41.

<sup>811</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.38.

<sup>812</sup> Weil in Murdoch, *SoG*, p.39.

<sup>813</sup> In order to be instigated, Murdoch’s practice of attention arguably requires an initial element of wilfulness exceeding the sort of obedient will she concentrates on. Nonetheless, this need not qualify her counter to the neo-Kantian isolation of the will: as will become more apparent throughout the following discussion, it is a will integrated with Eros and reason.

<sup>814</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.39.

<sup>815</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.109.

<sup>816</sup> Emphasis Murdoch. Murdoch, *MGM*, p.108.

perceived as necessary.<sup>817</sup> In Weil's terms, this confrontation with necessity is experienced 'as subjection to a koan'.<sup>818</sup>

Similarly to Kant and Weil, whom Murdoch draws on in developing her account of obedience and necessity, Murdoch insists that goodness must be pursued 'for nothing', that obedience to reality is demanded irrespective of consolations or rewards, but that it depends on the willingness to confront and accept the 'pointless necessity of the world', even and especially where this is experienced as a void.<sup>819</sup> At the same time, and as will become more apparent in the discussion below of Murdoch's notion of the relation between love and human flourishing, Murdoch considers goodness to be its own reward—to lead to a kind of happiness as well as to a potential experience of the 'void'.<sup>820</sup> Contrary to Kant, Murdoch does not envisage a positive emotion like pride to fulfil any kind of motivating role in the moral quest. Yet her association of Beauty with ethics (and vice versa) implies that the moral life of unselfing rests on being attracted to something, and that joy about the Beauty of the world acts as a catalyst for the process of unselfing.

This does not mean that the human being is not morally called to a willingness to undergo feelings of emptiness or of Kantian 'awe and fear'.<sup>821</sup> Murdoch's Weil-inspired notion of obedience to the sovereign and objective Good certainly has a severity to it that corresponds with her notion that beholding reality properly requires us 'to silence and expel self', 'to look and look until one exists no more'.<sup>822</sup> Nonetheless, she does not consider Good to impose itself on the human being. The human being much rather becomes aware of, and is attracted to, the Good such that she 'surrender[s] [herself] to

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<sup>817</sup> As Sage points out, "Otherness" has for Murdoch here none of the sinister significance it had acquired for Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*; this is not least because it is the otherness 'of people', not of women, that Murdoch stresses' (Sage, *Women in the house*, p.73).

<sup>818</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.108. *The New Oxford American Dictionary* defines a koan as 'a paradoxical anecdote or riddle, used in Zen Buddhism to demonstrate the inadequacy of logical reasoning and to provoke enlightenment'.

<sup>819</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.108.

<sup>820</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, pp.498f.

<sup>821</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.108.

<sup>822</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.63; In Conradi, Introduction to *EM*, p.xxiv.

its authority with a love which is unpossessive and unselfish'.<sup>823</sup> We will moreover see that in thus surrendering herself the individual *acquires* freedom rather than suffering its curtailment. In these respects, a special role attaches to Beauty, as for instance conveyed in 'great art', Murdoch argues.<sup>824</sup> Murdoch considers Beauty 'a clue to Good' because she considers Beauty to have something of the 'removed, transcendent nature' of Good, which she sees in contrast with the Christian notion of a personal and communicative God.<sup>825</sup> Beauty shares something of the 'structure' of goodness insofar as it, too, can neither be 'acquire[d] [nor] assimilate[d]', but is 'indomitable'.<sup>826</sup> Both Beauty and Good are 'to be desired, yet respected, adored, yet not possessed'.<sup>827</sup> As an 'image of Good', Beauty is also 'a way to Good; or a substitute for it'.<sup>828</sup> It is because of the crucial role assigned to Beauty by Murdoch that she considers 'the metaphor of vision so indispensable in discussions of aesthetics and morality' and, indeed, preferences the category of vision over that of will (without however rejecting the notion of will).<sup>829</sup>

### *A just and loving gaze*

Attention, as Murdoch conceptualises it, can achieve obedience to reality on account of implying the conscious direction of 'a just and loving gaze [...] upon an individual reality' outside of the moral subject.<sup>830</sup> The just quality of attention appears to signify its freedom from 'prejudice' and 'temptation'; it constitutes the attempt 'to control and curb imagination, to direct reflection' so that no room is left for the tentacles of the ego and

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<sup>823</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.86.

<sup>824</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.418. Thus, Dora in *TB*, Simon in *FHD*, Paula and Richard in *NG*, and others pursue truth and Good partly in galleries.

<sup>825</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.343.

<sup>826</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.417.

<sup>827</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.417.

<sup>828</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.344. A more recent defence of the moral value of Beauty, which repeatedly refers to Murdoch, can be found in Elaine Scarry's *On Beauty and Being Just*, where Scarry argues that beauty makes aesthetic fairness and ethical fairness manifest (Elaine Scarry (2001) *On Beauty and Being Just*. Duckbacks, London).

<sup>829</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.453.

<sup>830</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.33.

its fantasies.<sup>831</sup> While justice as Murdoch conceives it thus stands for seeing reality for what it is, she does not understand such vision in terms of value-free accuracy. This would imply a morally neutral perspective on reality, which Murdoch considers to be an impossibility. Rather, just vision issues from a relation with authoritative reality, in which the moral subject subjects himself to reality. This enables him to erect the mentioned structures of values inherent in reality around himself and, thereby, to conform himself to reality and make himself a part of it—an endeavour which makes sense only if reality is seen not as an accumulation of valueless facts, but as entrenched with Good. While reality does not violently impose itself on us, attention to it causes the human being to recognise its attractiveness and, hence, to willingly surrender to it.

Significantly for our present discussion, Murdoch also characterises attention as ‘loving’, thereby associating it, as I now propose, with Eros. The connecting link between attention and Eros—that which connects both these phenomena with love—is, I would suggest, that both are properly directed ‘upon an individual reality’.<sup>832</sup> Thus, Murdoch has posited that Eros-love is properly directed towards Good, which is encountered in individuals and, similarly, refers to ‘attention directed upon individuals’ as ‘an exercise of love’.<sup>833</sup> That Murdoch’s definition of attention as ‘a just and loving gaze [...] upon an individual reality’ links attention with love, and thus with Eros, is underlined by her definitions of love as ‘the perception of individuals’, as the ‘non-violent apprehension of difference’ and as ‘the discovery of reality’.<sup>834</sup> All of these statements closely resemble Murdoch’s characterisation of attention as described above. The resemblance is further underlined by Murdoch’s claim that ‘the beautiful in nature’, which above was found to inspire Eros, ‘demands and rewards attention to something

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<sup>831</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.39.

<sup>832</sup> Emphasis added. Murdoch, *SoG*, p.33.

<sup>833</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, pp.2, 41.

<sup>834</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, pp.215, 218.

grasped as entirely external and indifferent to the greedy ego'.<sup>835</sup> While attention may not itself be love, Murdoch clearly portrays it as a central precondition or aspect of truthful love. Thus, Murdoch for instance describes Eros as 'the continuous operation of spiritual energy, desire, intellect, love, as it moves among and responds to particular objects of attention'.<sup>836</sup> A combined reading of Murdoch's statements on Eros and attention suggests that the proper response to the beautiful entails both. I now seek to further substantiate my proposal that Eros and attention each have the potential to lead the individual towards Good but need one another to do so.

### 7.1.3 The complementarity of Eros and attention

In Murdoch's characterisations, Eros appears as a primeval instinctive energy, which overpowers the self, while attention seems more of a cognitive, conscious, and learnt practice. Eros acts upon and directs the human being suddenly, thereby putting her in a somewhat passive role, whereas attention constitutes an active and, indeed, more willed form of self-direction that works slowly and goes on continuously. This contrast suggests that Eros and attention complement one another. It is because a person 'desires in accordance with what he sees' that Eros can only lead towards Good if the person's vision is focused on the individual.<sup>837</sup> This direction of vision seems to be provided in and through the practice of attention. Attention provides the sort of 'discipline of desire' Murdoch correlates with goodness by a discipline of perception.<sup>838</sup> As she writes, 'our desires, our life-energy or Eros, can be purified through our attention to God, or to some magnetic Good unescapably active in our lives'.<sup>839</sup> Attention to the Good that is manifest in individuals thus ensures that love makes the transition from low to high Eros—that is, attention makes possible the 'maturation' which implies 'falling out of

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<sup>835</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.417.

<sup>836</sup> Emphasis added. Murdoch, *MGM*, p.496.

<sup>837</sup> Murdoch, *S&G*, p.39.

<sup>838</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.39.

<sup>839</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.109.

intense “love” [...] and in love with the separate world and the separate people it contains’.<sup>840</sup> In this sense, attention is not only spurred by Eros but also issues in it: attention to otherness issues in that ‘imaginative recognition of, that is, respect for, [...] otherness’ which Murdoch identifies with ‘love’.<sup>841</sup> In turn, Eros motivates and animates the attentive act through which M alters her vision of D. Without the erotic attraction and pull towards Good, M would lack any sense of an alternative, better way of seeing D and any motivation to pursue this possibility. Most significantly, attention without Eros lacks the warmth, the desire of the heart necessary for human beings to connect and affect one another. Thus, although Mary in *The Nice and the Good* ‘felt compassion for [Uncle Theo] and willed to help him’ she cannot in fact help because ‘her relationship to him remained abstract. The sad truth was that Mary did not love him enough to see him clearly’.<sup>842</sup> Right and clear vision depends on the desirous, emotive love of Eros as well as on the right directedness provided by attention.

If I am correct to infer the complementarity between Eros and attention, it appears reasonable to suggest that the more completely a person’s Eros is integrated with attention the more perfect her love will be. This accords with and explains Murdoch’s notion of qualitatively different degrees of love, as implied in her claim, taken on from Weil, that while love placed us in the (Platonic) cave it is also love, albeit of higher sort, which gets us out of it.<sup>843</sup> It also explains, I suggest, what Murdoch means when she says, with Plato, that it is ‘chaste love’ which ‘teaches’.<sup>844</sup> Murdoch, the above suggests, does not here have in mind a necessarily asexual love (or some distortion of the notion of ‘chastity’) or a love in any way undermining the subject’s desire for Good; she has in mind, rather, an Eros-love capable of fulfilling its goal because guided by a practice ensuring the self’s turn towards the individual other. Moreover, Eros and

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<sup>840</sup> Conradi, *Saint and Artist*, p.142.

<sup>841</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.216.

<sup>842</sup> Murdoch, *NG*; p.88.

<sup>843</sup> Conradi, *Saint and Artist*, p.141.

<sup>844</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.417.

attention combined reflect, respectively, ‘the idea of perfection’ and ‘the idea of the individual’, which, Murdoch argues, come together in love.<sup>845</sup> Finally, the notion that Murdoch understands love in terms of a combination of Eros and attention is underlined by her suggestion that we learn the meaning of love (and related concepts) gradually, in concrete contexts.<sup>846</sup> This makes little sense if applied to the sudden, eruptive force of Eros alone, but rather insinuates this love’s requisite training and formation through the attentive gaze at the individual reality presenting itself to the moral subject.

In a similar vein, the complementarity of eros and attention also indicates why Murdoch condemns the attempt to achieve what Conradi calls a ‘fast unselfing’.<sup>847</sup> Left to itself, Eros would be prone to promoting such an insufficient, deceptive askesis, such as when it causes a person to conflate falling in love with the death of the ego. While falling in love can be an important step towards the death of the ego-self, its typical pace and suddenness means it is never more than, precisely, a first step. Murdoch sometimes depicts characters in her novels who fall in love and think of themselves as entirely concerned with the other, but who are then revealed as truly perceiving the beloved other only once they have lost them or their love. This is, for instance, true of Bradley, in *The Black Prince*, who ‘suffers first the partial askesis involved in falling desperately in love [...]’ and is ‘then further “unselfed” by losing her, and by being falsely punished for a murder he may have willed but did not commit’.<sup>848</sup> Pushing this even further in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, Murdoch portrays the very purity of Tallis’s love for his estranged wife Morgan as deriving from its persistence in the face of remaining unreciprocated. While such depictions imply an astute observation that we often love others only as potential

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<sup>845</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.27.

<sup>846</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.28.

<sup>847</sup> Conradi, ‘Platonism in Iris Murdoch’, p.336.

<sup>848</sup> Conradi, ‘Platonism in Iris Murdoch’, p.342. A similar example is Tim in *Nuns and Soldiers*, who begins his process of unselfing when falling in love with Gertrude but only moves on to the second stage of this process after she has, on learning about his mistress, left him. Typically for Murdoch, Tim’s second, mature stage of unselfing involves a confrontation with death (Murdoch, *NS*, pp.173-190, pp.375).

objects of gratification or consolation, there is a problematic tendency, here in Murdoch, to consider goodness dependent on confrontation with the 'blank face of love', with death, or a void—a matter to be returned to below. For our present purposes, it must be noted that Murdoch's plot lines confirm the impression that she considers the passionate Eros to be a crucial feature on the path towards Good but in need of being coupled with, and purified by, a more ascetic and unambiguously unselfish attention to the world.

The above pointers to the complementarity of Eros and attention in Murdoch's thought, and to the implied need for purification of Eros, cast doubt on whether the limited notice critics have, according to Conradi, given to Murdoch's notion of Eros really is to be explained by the 'puritan moralism' Conradi accuses them of.<sup>849</sup> While her concept of Eros certainly deserves significant consideration, its place of importance in Murdoch's thought is shared with the moral-spiritual practice of attention, which she identifies as 'the characteristic and proper mark of the active moral agent'.<sup>850</sup> My above discussion moreover suggests that despite Murdoch's undeniable emphasis on Eros, and contrary to Conradi's insinuations, her own thinking evinces something of the ascetic, if not puritanical, features she openly attributes to Plato. She gives an account of Eros as destined to bring about a loss of self and demands a temperance of Eros through a regulatory practice transcending our natural, instinctual life, and through relationship with the disembodied Good. The conscious other-centredness of attention prefigures and enables Eros's intended centredness on the Good. Eros purified is, it almost seems, a realisation of the total other-centredness of attention on an instinctual level. Thus, Murdoch for instance sees no room in purified Eros for an active concern with one's own flourishing or well-being, a point further discussed below. As we have found her insist, goodness must be pursued, 'for nothing'—that is, without any hope of, or desire for, rewards or benefits. This points to a first significant difference between Tillich's and

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<sup>849</sup> Conradi, *Saint and Artist*, p.256.

<sup>850</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, pp.67, 33.

Murdoch's respective projects. Although Tillich, too, has been shown to portray true Eros as other-centred, his attempt to reinstall a notion of Eros was nonetheless geared precisely towards affirming the validity of desire for self-fulfilment.

In light of the above, Conradi's judgment that '[Eros] is the very centre of [Murdoch's] thought' does not fully capture Murdoch's claim that love must be 'a central concept in morals'.<sup>851</sup> It bypasses the complexity of Murdoch's concept of love, the fact that it is only in the context of attention that low Eros becomes high Eros. Similarly, Sage's impression, that 'attention is too neutral and altruistic a word' for Murdoch's morality, is not entirely fitting.<sup>852</sup> As I argued above, Murdoch rules out the possibility of neutral perception and considers attention soaked in value. At the same time, Sage is right to point to the importance of desire and passion in Murdoch's thought.<sup>853</sup> This, my above argument suggests, does not compromise the validity or centrality of attention but indicates the need for a coupling of attention and Eros. If attention can be characterised as enabling the subject's ascent towards the Good desired by Eros through promoting the self's descent from self-aggrandising illusions, the simultaneous distinctness and complementarity of Eros and attention calls to mind Christian understandings, like Tillich's, of the relation between Eros and Agape. Murdoch's sense of the complementarity of Eros and attention means that her concept of love can, like Tillich's, be understood to imply a defence of selfless love conducive to human flourishing. It is this, which I seek to show in the following.

## 7.2 Murdoch's selfless love

Unlike Tillich, Murdoch explicitly refers to 'virtuous selfless love', which she contrasts with 'bad egoistic love', and explicitly associates the terms 'selfless' and 'unselfing'.<sup>854</sup> The

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<sup>851</sup> Emphasis added. Conradi, *Saint and Artist*, p.256; Murdoch, *SoG*, p.2.

<sup>852</sup> Sage, *Women in the house*, p.78.

<sup>853</sup> Sage, *Women in the house*, p.91.

<sup>854</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, pp.16, 341.

above discussion has indicated that true love, as Murdoch conceives of it, can be described as selfless in more than one sense. Like Tillich, she, firstly, accepts Sartre's sense that the notion of an intrinsically unified and self-subsistent self is an unattainable fiction. The human being is, in this sense, self-less. Murdoch has, secondly, also argued that the human being is commonly nonetheless attached to such an idea and identifies herself precisely with such an illusory self. This delusion prevents the human being from being aware of, and bringing to its proper and full manifestation, the kind of self that *does* imbue or found her being, a porous self whose reality derives from its relation to, and pervasion by, the Good. Murdoch explicitly associates goodness with a selflessness understood primarily in terms of a distinct relation with the other when she writes that 'the good life becomes increasingly selfless through an increased awareness of, or sensibility to, the world beyond the self'.<sup>855</sup>

Grounding love in this two-fold selflessness—that is, in the inevitable lack of a unified and self-contained ego, and in the erotic other-centredness necessary to overcome this false self and proper to the true self—Murdoch, too, proposes a love which can legitimately be characterised as a selfless love. Love as Murdoch envisages it is necessitated by the illusory nature, and lack of, a self-contained ego-self, and by the proper other-relatedness of the true self. Accordingly, love implies the moral subject's orientation towards the individual other—that is, the subject's just and loving regard and respect for the other who is thereby seen for, and granted the space to be, who he is. This other-centredness enables the 'décreation' of the false self, which in turn enables greater attachment to Good. It is self-reinforcing therefore. Although Murdoch observes that 'human love is usually self-assertive', Murdoch repeatedly dissociates goodness from self-assertion, at least in an 'irresponsible and undirected' sense.<sup>856</sup> Her understanding of purified love must thus be at odds with the self-assertion Sartre and Nietzsche

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<sup>855</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.53.

<sup>856</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, pp.47, 56, 71, 77, 100.

propagate. Murdoch's selfless love also appears to lack any element of active self-love. This at least is suggested by the fact that in her extensive discussions of love the subject of self-love never features. Murdoch's strong sense of human selfishness would appear to mean that in attempting to love ourselves we would tend to love merely the false, illusory self, thus in fact harming ourselves. Murdoch is furthermore more insistent than Tillich that the inward orientation of one's vision and attention must be entirely free from hopes for self-gain or from what Tillich refers to as the desire for self-fulfilment. Her already noted claim that Good must be sought for nothing may indeed be taken to imply that she is unconcerned with, or dismissive of, the moral subject's capacities, powers, needs and desires. It may even appear to suggest that she envisages the subject's dissolution in the Good.

I would nonetheless suggest that Murdoch's selfless love converges with self-love in a manner similar to Tillich's, examined above. That her selfless love does not deny but incorporate and fulfil the human being's desirous, emotive and instinctual dimensions, is indicated by the central and enabling role Eros plays in it, and by the fact that it is through this selfless love that Eros attains its proper telos and satisfaction. The fact that Murdoch's selfless love liberates the human being from illusion and enables that attachment of self to Good, which constitutes the precondition for seeing reality, further indicates that it affirms and builds up the lover's self. The following discussion will substantiate my claim that Murdoch's selfless love in fact indeed excludes selflessness in the sense of a total loss or denial of the self, and that it does not deny but satisfies the human being's longing for freedom and desire for individual fulfilment.

### **7.2.1 Selfless love and the human self**

In the previous chapter, I, firstly, showed how Murdoch defends the unique importance of the human subject in its particular distinctiveness when calling for respect for distinct

individuals as the fundamental constituents of reality. Murdoch was found to assert an element of self-being, of existing over against the world, and to want to safeguard precisely the privacy and irreducible particularity of consciousness rather than dissolving everything into an indistinct and continuous stream of consciousness. When Murdoch speaks of the good human being as an unselfed or selfless being, she does not, we have found, have in mind a person whose subjectivity is dissolved. In this respect, her distinction between the true and the false self mirrors Sartre's distinction between consciousness and the ego. Secondly, Murdoch's selfless love does entail a degree of self-relatedness. It is true that she is, again, wary of the risks implied in a turn towards self and does not, therefore, actively encourage or celebrate self-relatedness. The case of M and D indicates, however, that she is aware of the importance for instance of self-reflectiveness. M's work on her perception of D arguably rests not only on her erotic attraction to Good, but also on a self-relatedness which makes her aware of this attraction and which thus prompts her renewed attention to D. Self-relatedness in the sense of reflexivity is, indeed, critical to the moral life as Murdoch describes it. As Antonaccio shows, Murdoch, in attributing particular moral significance to the imagination, furthermore endorses at least implicit *self*-affirmation, as well as affirmations of the other.<sup>857</sup>

Murdoch's selfless love, thirdly, implies an endorsement rather than, as has recently been suggested<sup>858</sup>, a dismissal of the human being's capacity for decisive agency, as expressed particularly in the will and in the imaginative faculty of the human being. This becomes apparent if one understands her selfless love in terms of the interdependence of Eros and attention, as I have argued one must. If attention implies the 'control[ing] and curb[ing] [of] imagination', then this is because the imagination is a

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<sup>857</sup> Antonaccio, 'Imagining the Good', p.235.

<sup>858</sup> Lovibond, *Iris Murdoch, Gender and Philosophy*, p.86.

function of Eros and can therefore be a source of good or bad.<sup>859</sup> Antonaccio's definition of imagination as 'an act of freedom and an exercise of will that enables contact with a moral absolute by overcoming the egoism of natural existence' brushes over this need for imagination to be purified.<sup>860</sup> It is nonetheless true that where Eros is, as it should be, coupled with attention the imagination does constitute a faculty in which the human subject exercises its agency in a manner liberating both self and other. The reformation of M's vision of D would not, for instance, have been possible without her imaginative capacities guided by attention, that is, without a combination of Eros and attention. Achieving this imaginative agency furthermore demands an act of the will, without which the effort of attention cannot be exercised. Insole's claim, therefore, that Murdoch demonises anyone who 'demonstrate[s] a Kantian commitment—as Murdoch understands it—to the capacities of the rational and autonomous subject' is not entirely fair.<sup>861</sup> Murdoch, though admittedly sensitive to the dangers potentially implied in a glorification of our capacity for decisive action, nonetheless realises the importance of autonomous action. This is illustrated in the fact that a more passive character like Ann in *An Unofficial Rose* lacks the unambiguous goodness of Bledyard in *The Sandcastle* or of Tallis in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*—that is, of figures who dare to speak out against what they perceive to be wrongdoing or who undertake 'decisive action' against injustice or in situations of danger.<sup>862</sup> It is also underlined by her pointing out that 'humility is not a peculiar habit of self-effacement, rather like having an inaudible voice, [but] selfless respect for reality and one of the most difficult and central of all virtues'.<sup>863</sup>

In line with the above, Murdoch's notions of self-sacrifice and of suppression of desire must not be understood as geared towards a repression of the real needs and

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<sup>859</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.39.

<sup>860</sup> Antonaccio, 'Imagining the Good', p.239.

<sup>861</sup> Insole, 'Beyond glass doors', p.133.

<sup>862</sup> Gordon, *Fables of Unselfing*, p.37. Bledyard speaks out against Mor (Murdoch, *TS*, pp.211-13) and Tallis defends Simon and Axel when attacked by homophobic youths in a restaurant and acts to defend Hilda when she is in danger (Murdoch, *FHD*, p.232). Other examples of characters who become more independent and active as they move closer to Good are Dora in *TB* or Tamar in *BB*.

<sup>863</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.93.

desires of the self but towards a repression of those desires which, though perhaps perceived as conducive to human flourishing, in fact enslave the self. It is her strong sense of human ignorance and of the human tendency towards self-delusion which leaves Murdoch convinced that self-sacrifice and the suppression of desire are necessary aspects of the moral life. Murdoch's insistence that our general selfishness corresponds with ignorance implies that it corresponds with ignorance about our own Good. Thus, her insistence that we must be good for nothing, that is, good for the sake of nothing, does not indicate a denial of the reality of rewards for the self. Rather, it constitutes a warning that where we embark on the path towards Good by seeking rewards we make precisely the selfish presumption of already knowing Good (in this case our own) which inhibits that humble turn and surrender to the other through which alone Good is encountered. Equally, it is her conviction that the human being will be, precisely on account of her selfish and self-deluding tendencies, unwilling to undergo such discomforts, which leads Murdoch to advocate all the more vigorously a readiness to bear them.

It cannot, I now suggest, be inferred from Murdoch's commendation of a dying to self and from her insistence that goodness must be pursued for nothing, that she shows herself uninterested in, even dismissive of, the needs and flourishing of the moral subject. As I now argue, she indeed considers moral goodness to bear fruits conducive to full selfhood and thus beneficial to the flourishing of the moral subject—fruits which are neither accidental, nor secondary, but intrinsic to moral goodness (because goodness and true selfhood correlate).

## 7.2.2 The fruits of selfless love

### *Reality and truthfulness*

The primary benefit Murdoch ascribes to selfless love of Good as encountered in the other is, perhaps, the lover's arrival in reality. Murdoch claims that the absence of self from the mind is "good for us" because it involves respect, because it is an exercise in cleansing the mind of selfish preoccupation, because it is an experience of what truth is like'.<sup>864</sup> It is only upon being connected with Good that the human being sees and accepts what is real—'boundless and not totally definable' particulars separate from the self.<sup>865</sup> As the lover's ego is decreased to the point that only that 'bit of [her]' is left which is 'real and knows truth', she not only acquires a better perception of the individuals around her but also becomes more real and more individual herself.<sup>866</sup> Thus, Baldanza has read Murdoch as saying that 'it is only in [...] love [of the problematical otherness of other people] that we can discover ourselves'.<sup>867</sup> This involves an ability also to bear one's own mortality, which Murdoch considers to imply one's own contingency. The acceptance of reality brings to an end both the futile efforts to attain intrinsic stability already denounced by Sartre, and the efforts to dominate the other which Sartre continues to embrace: where the human being sees the world in the light of Good, which she recognises to be the source of her own self, she necessarily respects the world's individuals in their otherness and separateness—in their individuality.

Murdoch illustrates the effect attentive love has on the human being in her description of learning a language. 'If I am learning, for instance, Russian', Murdoch argues, 'I am confronted by an authoritative structure which commands my respect. [...] My work is a progressive revelation of something which exists independently of me.

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<sup>864</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.245.

<sup>865</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.274.

<sup>866</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.515.

<sup>867</sup> Baldanza, 'Iris Murdoch and the Theory of Personality', p.189.

Attention is rewarded by a knowledge of reality. Love of Russian leads me away from myself towards something alien to me, something which my consciousness cannot take over, swallow up, deny or make unreal.<sup>868</sup> Murdoch, similarly, suggests that ‘will as obedience to reality’ constitutes the precondition for art.<sup>869</sup> The artist will confirm, she argues, that he can only succeed at his task and produce qualitatively good art if he submits his will to reality. As Murdoch suggests in her account of art as a conveyer of the transcendent Good, it is only if he allows reality to reveal itself to him, that he can reveal reality to the viewer. Without allowing himself to be thus drawn out of himself, the human being will remain unable to engage in the creative and rewarding work of learning a language or of creating good art. Murdoch adds that this fruit of love corresponds with the sense, brought about by the ‘realisation of a vast and varied reality outside ourselves [...], initially of terror, and when properly understood of exhilaration and spiritual power’.<sup>870</sup> Another fruit of selfless love, and of the greater connection with reality enabled by this, is the attainment or realisation of true freedom, which Murdoch defines primarily as a moral and spiritual reality.

### *Moral and spiritual freedom*

Freedom as Murdoch, with Plato, portrays it depends on exactly that combination of Eros and attention which we have characterised as selfless love—that is, on a love which enables the ‘purification of desire’ and which thereby leads to ‘knowledge of the real’.<sup>871</sup> ‘Real freedom is’, Murdoch’s Plato argues in one of her dialogues, ‘not to be a slave of selfish desires’ but to desire the Good.<sup>872</sup> As such, it rests on the imagination Murdoch associates with Eros but also on that imagination being curbed and made obedient to reality through attention. Freedom is the fruit of a continuous work of desirous attention

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<sup>868</sup> Emphasis added. Murdoch, *EM*, p.373. *SoG*, p.87.

<sup>869</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.39.

<sup>870</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.282

<sup>871</sup> Antonaccio, ‘Imagining the Good’, p.234.

<sup>872</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.515.

and has nothing to do, Murdoch argues, with ‘the sudden jumping of the isolated will in and out of an impersonal logical complex’ which Murdoch finds the English analytic philosophers of her day to propose.<sup>873</sup> It is equally distinct from Sartre’s freedom and its feeling of Angst. Murdoch argues that Angst does not, as Sartre thought, indicate the overwhelming scope of freedom but the lack of it. According to her, the perception of such breadth of choice results from a ‘discrepancy between personality and ideals’; the human being here perceives an array of supposed goods, yet finds herself unable to apply herself to any one of them.<sup>874</sup> Angst is thus a justified feeling of ‘alarm’ at the breadth of possible choices.<sup>875</sup>

Resulting from acceptance of, and consequent unity with, reality, true freedom in fact consists in an absence of choice. As such, it is the result of that vision of the goodness and necessity of reality, which Murdoch was already shown to consider correlative with a compulsion of the will, such that only Good can be willed, and is spontaneously acted out. In line with one of Murdoch’s opening statements, in *The Sovereignty of Good*, that ‘freedom and love must be related’, such freedom is a fruit of what I have described as selfless love, and in turn promotes love and goodness.<sup>876</sup> It is ‘a function of the progressive attempt to see a particular object clearly’, an attempt, which purifies desire and thereby liberates the moral subject from being confused and weighed down by the illusory, oppressive and frightening array of choices the person disconnected from reality perceives as real.<sup>877</sup> Murdoch thus paints a picture of the moral life where freedom is not an a priori and ‘isolated ability [...] which we can “exercise” in a pure form’ and without deliberation.<sup>878</sup> Rather, it has first to be acquired—and not

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<sup>873</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.23.

<sup>874</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.38.

<sup>875</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.38.

<sup>876</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.2.

<sup>877</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.23.

<sup>878</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, pp.326, 460. Murdoch considers the above sort of freedom, which is related to love, to be a ‘tragic freedom’ which is ‘an exercise of the imagination in an unreconciled conflict of dissimilar beings’ and which she distinguishes from ‘mediaeval, Kantian, Hegelian and Romantic freedom’ (Murdoch, *EM*, p.217).

through asserting the ego but through the continuous work of love. Murdoch's definition of freedom as the ability to 'exist sanely without fear and to perceive what is real', and her view 'that one who perceives what is real will also act rightly' means that freedom results in greater goodness.<sup>879</sup> Thus, she suggests it is only on the basis of a loving submission of will to reality that will is united with reason and that the human being has 'the freedom wherein the good man spontaneously helps and serves others'.<sup>880</sup>

Such an understanding of freedom as interdependent with the continuous work of love in fact resolves and explains Sartre's perceived lack of freedom or his observation that '*quand je délibère les jeux sont faits*'. Freedom cannot, as we have seen, be exercised suddenly and in single instances; one's decisions and actions result from one's continual development of one's vision of reality and, with this, of one's freedom through love. Freedom as Murdoch conceives it is the exact opposite of an arbitrary openness of options and instead makes sense only 'in the context of the complexity and ubiquity of value'.<sup>881</sup> Indeed, freedom consists in choosing real, objective values through attentive obedience to reality.<sup>882</sup> In the same vein, freedom as Murdoch conceives it necessitates no conflict with the world surrounding the individual and increasingly perceived in terms of incontrovertible scientific facts. Murdoch considers existentialism 'an attempt to solve this problem without really facing it', i.e. 'by attributing to the individual an empty lonely freedom'.<sup>883</sup> Sartre simply posits a freedom to 'fly in the face of the facts'; morality is here thought to be able to 'escap[e] from science only by a wild leap of the will', a notion which reflects neither what we are able to do nor what is required of us, Murdoch argues.<sup>884</sup> As we saw, Murdoch by contrast challenges the very notion that cold, bare

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<sup>879</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.201.

<sup>880</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, pp.39, 38; Murdoch, *MGM*, p.109.

<sup>881</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.326.

<sup>882</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.326.

<sup>883</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.26.

<sup>884</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.26.

facts exist and seeks, instead, to sensitise us to the extent to which the world is imbued by and holds the key to Good, including the good of our freedom itself.

With the above, Murdoch, like Tillich, clearly seeks to steer a course between the extremes of absolute freedom and total determinism, both of which she implies Sartre falls into.<sup>885</sup> Murdoch explicitly rejects the juxtaposition of freedom and determinism as mutual exclusives threatening one another. In striking similarity to Tillich's polarity of freedom and destiny, she considers this to rely on a mistaken identification of freedom 'with a casting off of bonds, with emotional unrestraint'.<sup>886</sup> Such understandings of freedom in terms of what one might call a 'freedom from', result from confusions of political freedom with 'intellectual, emotional or spiritual freedom', Murdoch suggests.<sup>887</sup> It is in the spiritual and, indeed, moral context that it becomes evident that the 'natural urge to want to be able to do what one wants to do' is far too 'ambiguous' a matter to be the defining structure at least of freedom in this 'metaphysical' sense.<sup>888</sup> Such freedom, Murdoch argues, is concerned precisely with 'self-control, with just understanding, with the liberation of the person from irresponsible motives'.<sup>889</sup> As such, it, like moral goodness, consists not in the suppression or cessation of desires but in the purification and right direction of desire towards Good—in a combination of Eros and attention, or of selfless love.

This surely implies an element of being determined, namely, of accepting reality's constraints on the will and of allowing the will to be compelled by these rather than attempting to cast them off. Yet it nonetheless incorporates Sartre's and, as Antonaccio points out, Kant's and Plato's view that freedom consists in a liberation from, and transcendence of, that "lower" level of existence' where the human being is enslaved by

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<sup>885</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.35.

<sup>886</sup> In Dooley, *From a tiny corner*, p.140.

<sup>887</sup> In Dooley, *From a tiny corner*, p.141.

<sup>888</sup> In Dooley, *From a tiny corner*, pp.143, 145.

<sup>889</sup> In Dooley, *From a tiny corner*, p.140. It is in the context of freedom that the origins of feminist difficulties with Murdoch's thought become clear. Her interest is geared exclusively towards spiritual freedom. She remains silent on the nature of political freedom—arguably indeed a shortcoming in a moral philosopher, yet no matter I can address within the confines of this thesis.

“mechanistic” processes’ which ‘block the self’s access to a moral absolute’.<sup>890</sup> Murdoch considers her notion that it is through our attraction to Good that we engage in that love which makes us free to resemble Kant’s understanding of freedom. This latter rests, she says, on the individual ‘being continually “touched” by a higher power which enables him to overcome, or shows him the possibility of overcoming, the (apparent) necessity (determinism) of his phenomenal being’.<sup>891</sup> Murdoch’s, admittedly hesitant, association of freedom and happiness leads us on to a more ambiguous fruit of the moral goodness enabled by selfless love.

### *Happiness, joy and fulfilment*

Murdoch’s respect for both Plato and Kant leaves her with a tension regarding the relation of moral goodness and happiness such that when she feels inclined to say ‘that the free man is happier [...] than the person who is the slave of mean desires’ which ‘torment’ him, she does so hesitantly, and in awareness of this being ‘difficult’.<sup>892</sup> This tension results from the fact that Murdoch, on the one hand, has some sympathies for what she sees as Kant’s conviction that ‘a search for happiness [...] is heteronomous, a surrender to egoistic desires’.<sup>893</sup> She indeed agrees that happiness, though ‘so often spoken of as an intelligible end’, ‘becomes multiform under the pressure of surrounding values’.<sup>894</sup> Where these ‘surrounding values’ are, as is ordinarily the case, of a selfish nature happiness becomes ‘the satisfaction of selfish desires’, which have no place in the good life.<sup>895</sup> Seeking strictly to avoid selfish abuses, Murdoch admires Kant’s stoicism, his consistency in making no concessions which would make the moral person feel more encouraged or consoled in her efforts to dutifully comply with the demands of reason.<sup>896</sup>

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<sup>890</sup> Antonaccio, ‘Imagining the Good’, p.237.

<sup>891</sup> In Antonaccio, ‘Imagining the Good’, p.239.

<sup>892</sup> In Dooley, *From a tiny corner*, p.145.

<sup>893</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.438.

<sup>894</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.326.

<sup>895</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.124.

<sup>896</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.440.

On the other hand, Murdoch not only acknowledges that ‘the quest for happiness and the promotion of happiness’ is a natural feature of human life and love but also observes that ‘Plato’s Eros, by contrast, is potentially a happy lover, at many levels, and the joy which breathes in the art of the dialogues is itself a sign or symbol of the possibility of spiritual happiness’.<sup>897</sup>

It is this ambiguity, which leads Murdoch to a tentative endorsement of two kinds of happiness that can be conceptualised along the lines of her sense that ‘morality divides between moral obligation/duty and spiritual change’.<sup>898</sup> Bearing in mind that duty is, according to Murdoch’s Plato, ‘what we feel when we want the good but love other things more’, an aspiration to happiness can, firstly, be a ‘moral duty’.<sup>899</sup> ‘Keep[ing] people sane and freshen[ing] life’, the desire for happiness is capable of pushing the human being along the path of life, that is, of preventing her from falling into bitterness and keeping her, instead, open to encounters with the world.<sup>900</sup> A human being’s Eros may not yet be oriented towards Good—she may not yet love Good and thus be incapable of spiritual change—but her desire for happiness may at least stimulate that basic engagement with the world without which Eros for Good will not be kindled in the first place. Murdoch arguably illustrates this when John Ducane, primarily a nice man, yet one appearing to be on the verge of goodness, tells his wife Mary that ‘it’s one’s duty to be happy [...]’.<sup>901</sup> As Murdoch recognises, happiness is a natural and valid human desire.<sup>902</sup> Insisting on squelching it would appear to put at risk also our desire for Good, and can thus be as dangerous as a simplistic conflation of Good and worldly happiness. Happiness, in the sense of a carefree, non-anxious state of being, is thus potentially conducive to the process of erotic unselfing in that it is capable of countering obsessive

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<sup>897</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, pp.497, 438.

<sup>898</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.53.

<sup>899</sup> Conradi, *Saint and Artist*, p.88; Murdoch, *EM*, p.519.

<sup>900</sup> Murdoch in Conradi, *Saint and Artist*, p.88.

<sup>901</sup> Murdoch, *NG*, p.345; See also Murdoch’s statement that ‘for some people, happiness is part of organising a good life’, and that ‘one has a right, even a duty, to be happy’ (in Dooley, *From a tiny corner*, p.165).

<sup>902</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.497.

self-concern or brooding—features Murdoch observes to be among the dangers of a more mystical attitude.<sup>903</sup>

Matters arguably change once Eros has come into play and provides the opportunity for spiritual change. If happiness is then made the *criterion* for assessing the validity of human actions, it is bound merely to promote selfishness, Murdoch seems to suggest. This is illustrated in Bledyard's response to Mor's desperate and 'trivial' attempt to defend his affair with Rain Carter with reference to 'human happiness'.<sup>904</sup> Bledyard dismisses the validity of invoking happiness, rejecting the idea of 'some sort of right to happiness' by calling it 'a poor guide' and referring Mor, instead, to 'respect for reality', which he connects with 'apprehend[ing] the distinct being of others', including both that of his wife and children, and of his mistress.<sup>905</sup> Murdoch's vehement rejection of what she regards as 'the utilitarian idea' that 'the question, how will this affect happiness, is always relevant to every moral decision' means that here, in the moral life, 'the idea of a reward is out of place'.<sup>906</sup> Good, we have long seen her argue, must not be loved for the sake of rewards.

However, while the notion of happiness as a *guide* to Eros must be rejected because it turns happiness into a reward, even a demand, this does not mean it has no place in the good life as enabled by Eros. Murdoch's Platonism indeed leads her to consider a deep kind of happiness, joy or bliss among the fruits of true goodness: Eros is 'the desire for good and joy' and its satisfaction thus entails both these qualities.<sup>907</sup> Thus, Mary, in *The Nice and the Good*, for instance muses that 'great love is inseparable from joy' (though it can contain 'an equal portion of pain').<sup>908</sup> Making an unusual distinction between the enjoyment of art and nature on the one hand, and the struggle for moral

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<sup>903</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.70.

<sup>904</sup> Murdoch, *TS*, p.212.

<sup>905</sup> Murdoch, *TS*, pp.212f.

<sup>906</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.65.

<sup>907</sup> Emphasis added. Murdoch, *EM*, p.415.

<sup>908</sup> Murdoch, *NG*; p.332.

goodness (presumably in relations with others) on the other, Murdoch considers the happiness entailed in moral goodness to differ from the immediate gratification granted by enjoyment of art and nature.<sup>909</sup> It is something closer perhaps to the ‘mysterious and obscure’ bliss Murdoch associates with religion—‘a purified joy, which is the vision of good itself’ and which allows us to ‘see the world [...] in the light of good’.<sup>910</sup> This joy, which is identifiable with ‘high Eros’ is ‘a unique form of rapture’ which does not contradict or exclude suffering.<sup>911</sup> It is a bliss which cannot, perhaps must not, be properly pictured by the imperfect soul in that it relies on looking beyond our concern for happiness and wellbeing and which cannot therefore be aimed at. Since Good transcends our worldly conceptions of it, the truly loving man is—if need be—willing to go further, to make greater sacrifices than our worldly ideas of the goal of our desires suggest. While it is true therefore that ‘Murdoch follows Kant in demanding a performance of the good only for the sake of the good, without any consideration of happiness or reward’ her Good does further human happiness.<sup>912</sup>

### 7.2.3 Selfless love and human flourishing

Considering that Murdoch counts a sense of reality, freedom, and happiness among the fruits of selfless love, this love can indeed be considered conducive to, even critical for, human flourishing. Murdoch does not reject rewards for Good as such. A conversation between Ludwig and Matthew in *An Accidental Man* suggests that it is not even merely spiritual but also a basic, material kind of well-being, which she connects with goodness. Here, the young and eager Ludwig states that ‘virtue has always had to be its own reward’, but is countered by his elder, Matthew, ‘Only in a philosophical sense, dear boy. Fortunately for the human race virtue usually offers many other rewards besides her fair

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<sup>909</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.65.

<sup>910</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.123; Murdoch, *SoG*, p.65; Murdoch, *MGM*, p.109.

<sup>911</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.109.

<sup>912</sup> Paul Fiddes ‘The Sublime and the Beautiful: Intersections between Theology and Literature’ in Heather Walton (ed.) (2011) *Literature and Theology. New Inter-disciplinary Spaces*. Ashgate, Farnham, p.139.

self.<sup>913</sup> “No, but really, in the end one is good in order to be good!” Ludwig repeats, and is again challenged by Matthew, ‘Where is the end? Where those men [who gave up their lives for another] stood? I’m not even sure of that any more. One wants things to be better, things ought to be better. There shouldn’t be starvation and fear. That’s obvious. It’s when you try to go deeper than the obvious, when you try to go where God used to be---’.<sup>914</sup>

There is a sense in Murdoch that the reasons for love of Good transcend us. It is clear that Good is, and must be, prompted by the attempt to prevent starvation and fear but that, in addition to these demands, there are more unfathomable reasons which cannot necessarily be grasped by the imperfect mind. These arguably have to do with the Beauty and attractiveness of Good, which gives joy to the soul. Selfless love of Good, ‘the attempt to see the unself, to see and respond to the real world in the light of a virtuous consciousness’, goes deeper than the obvious and stems from a desirous movement of the soul as much as it is geared towards practical services to others.<sup>915</sup> It is only on account of this force stirring the human soul that selfless love of Good does not extend only to or even depend on more material benefits but can, as Murdoch suggests it must, persist even in the face of worldly suffering and death.

Murdoch’s sense of human selfishness surely leads her to think that the process of unselfing, and thus the approximation of Good is endangered where the human being makes his own flourishing the goal or criterion of his actions. Notwithstanding this, Murdoch’s association of love of Good with 1) the ability to see and respect the individual, 2) with the development of real freedom and the peace of mind this implies, and 3) with a joy and happiness related to but ultimately transcending the immediate happiness experienced in attention to art and nature, in fact implies that she considers selfless love of Good to ultimately promote also the lover’s flourishing. For him, the

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<sup>913</sup> Murdoch, *AM*, p.263.

<sup>914</sup> Murdoch, *AM*, p.263.

<sup>915</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.91.

encounter with Good issues particularly in spiritual and moral fruits, which ‘enliven [the soul’s] spiritual faculty, which is intelligent and akin to the good’.<sup>916</sup> Thus, Murdoch’s good characters, few though they are, are marked by a peaceful calm, a freedom from anxiety and a quiet happiness not necessarily visible to the morally untrained eye. This is true for instance of Bledyard in *The Sandcastle* and of Tallis in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*. Murdoch also illustrates ‘the pain and final joy gained from loss of self and loving attention to the world’ in the case of Bradley in *The Black Prince*.<sup>917</sup> As a rule, her saints ‘conceal [...] mysterious radiance beneath their exterior dullness’.<sup>918</sup> That Murdoch considers none of these fruits to deny human desires but to enable precisely their fulfilment is underlined by her claim that Good entails not the destruction of the base desires inhabiting the ‘lower levels’ of the self, but that it gives even to these ‘(indestructible) lower levels their best possible satisfaction’.<sup>919</sup>

The above passages support my argument that Murdoch does not consider the self, and, with this, the flourishing of the human person, to be sacrificed to or lost in the Good, but that she envisages the true self as being established through selfless love of Good as encountered in the other. While Murdoch does not indeed sanction an ‘acceptance of one’s narcissistic needs’, it is mistaken to suggest that Murdoch has no regard for the needs of the individual moral subject.<sup>920</sup> Gabriele Griffin’s suggestions that ‘consent to the absence of the self [...], if exercised by everyone to an equal degree, would presumably result in a complete void’ or that her good life is ‘devoid of sexual contacts’ are equally misguided.<sup>921</sup> Notwithstanding the validity of some of Griffin’s criticisms of Murdoch, discussed shortly below, the above claims are countered by the fact that, as I have argued, Murdoch understands the absence of self to refer to the

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<sup>916</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.404.

<sup>917</sup> Dipple quoted in Conradi, *Saint and Artist*, pp.238f.

<sup>918</sup> Ruth Heyd (1965) ‘An Interview with Iris Murdoch’ in *University of Windsor Review* 1.

<sup>919</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.389.

<sup>920</sup> Griffin, ‘Influence of Simone Weil’, p.99.

<sup>921</sup> Griffin, ‘Influence of Simone Weil’, pp.99, 272.

illusion of the ego-self, such that her process of unselfing through love leaves behind neither a vacuous shell nor a purely spiritual individual. Murdoch's subjects, it is true, depend on the other in that they attain true selfhood only through loving the other. Nonetheless, Murdoch's understanding of the inter-dependence of self and other, though as I shall argue below not unproblematic, should not in fact be entirely displeasing to a feminist mind. The subject depends merely on looking at the other, respecting them, trying to understand them. This is not a dependence in which the other has control over the self. The subject does not depend on the other to, for instance, do something the subject cannot do itself. Quite the opposite: as Murdoch's mythological Christ-figure says, we cannot rely on another, we must do it all ourselves.<sup>922</sup> Murdoch is thus offering an account of self and other which combines relationality and independent agency. It is in this vein that Murdoch, in her account of love, associates attempts at surrendering and letting go with Eckhart's 'denial of self' and with Heidegger's 'concept of *Lichtung*, a clearing, an opening of space to allow Being to be'.<sup>923</sup>

Meanwhile, the flourishing Murdoch envisages such an openness to enable is not necessarily of the kind human beings commonly aspire to. Given her understanding of the human self, Murdoch necessarily considers non-moral conceptions of human flourishing meaningless. Her moral understanding of human flourishing consequently implies the recognition that the fullness of being is not exhausted by personal, private happiness such that a concern with rewards for goodness prevents the moral subject from actually pushing through to Good. Convinced that Good 'cannot be entirely or exhaustively explained in terms of its contributing to a fuller, better, richer, more satisfying human life' and that the human being tends to distort the quest for happiness and wellbeing into a selfish endeavour, Murdoch indeed considers true flourishing incapable of being an explicit goal of the moral life while acknowledging that it is

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<sup>922</sup> Murdoch, *NS*, p.297.

<sup>923</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.345.

nonetheless an aspect of goodness.<sup>924</sup> As Antonaccio characterises it, Murdoch proposes ‘a good that drives the idea of human flourishing to a new level of aspiration, indeed towards an ideal of perfection’, ‘so that we may recognise those goods that only come into view through the renunciation or purification of self’, and which ‘may bring about the fulfilment of a higher good than one had been seeking, a good that enhances the value of human life precisely by going beyond conventional notions of fulfilment’.<sup>925</sup> Murdoch, like Tillich, can thus be judged as presenting us with an account of selfless love that is concerned not with denying the human being fulfilment of its desires, but that is based on the notion that our true desires only surface, and that their satisfaction is only enabled, through the seemingly unlikely way of turning away from self.

Despite its many strengths, in particular her awareness of human selfishness on the one hand and her emphatic valuation of, and effort to safeguard, the individual on the other, Murdoch’s account of selfless love and human flourishing is not without problems. Surrounding particularly Murdoch’s understanding of the relation between self and other and her underlying idealisation of the impersonal over the personal dimension, these are surprisingly similar to some of the difficulties we detected in Tillich.

### **7.3 Difficulties with Murdoch’s account of selfless love**

#### **7.3.1 A devaluation of the personal**

Some ambiguity surrounds, on the one hand, Murdoch’s understanding of individual ‘personality’. She appears, at times, to view this as an emblem of the human tendency towards selfish self-assertion. When she for instance endorses T.S. Eliot’s claim that ‘the progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality’, she

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<sup>924</sup> Murdoch in Brian Nicol (2004) *Iris Murdoch: The Retrospective Fiction* 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Palgrave, London, p.5.

<sup>925</sup> Maria Antonaccio ‘Reconsidering Iris Murdoch’s Moral Philosophy and Theology’ in Anne Rowe (2007) *Iris Murdoch: A Reassessment*. Palgrave, Basingstoke, pp.15-22, p.21.

appears to associate personality with the ego-self.<sup>926</sup> At the end of *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, she indeed states that ‘loss of personality is loss of ego’.<sup>927</sup> Conradi appears to endorse such a reading when suggesting that Murdoch’s good characters ‘have less personality’, citing for instance the example of the saintly Tallis in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, who is being referred to as an ‘unperson’.<sup>928</sup> However, Murdoch’s pronounced and pervasive attempt to rescue the individual casts doubt on whether she does indeed devalue personality in the sense of a person’s distinctive character. A closer look at the features of her good characters’ features indeed supports my above argument that Murdoch considers goodness to result in a heightened individuality—though this is of a different nature than might ordinarily be anticipated.

Murdoch’s good (or better) characters are typically highly eccentric or peculiar: Bledyard (*The Sandcastle*), Tallis (*A Fairly Honourable Defeat*), and Uncle Theo (*The Nice and the Good*) all have highly idiosyncratic living arrangements and ways of conversing with others. They are withdrawn but nonetheless opinionated and outspoken where they deem it important. Bledyard’s vigorous and courageous confrontation of Mor for instance betrays not only the already mentioned degree of agency but, tied up with this, also independence, courage and decidedness—in short, a strong personality. Bledyard is more fully himself and—able to withstand the mockery of the entire school—arguably has greater self-esteem than Mor who, like Rain, considers his ability to realise his aspirations to be dependent on Rain’s affection. What Bledyard lacks is not the personality or agency Lovibond accuses Murdoch of undermining, but self-consciousness of his personality, or a concern with self-image, and an *uncontrolled* urge to assert himself.<sup>929</sup> It is personality in this latter, self-centred, and ‘self-protective’ sense,

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<sup>926</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.283. See also her agreement with Eliot that ‘art is not an expression of personality, it is a question rather of the continual expelling of oneself from the matter in hand’ (*EM*, p.283).

<sup>927</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.501.

<sup>928</sup> Conradi, *Saint and Artist*, p.142.

<sup>929</sup> Lovibond, *Iris Murdoch and Gender*, p.86; Lovibond is right, therefore, that Murdoch’s good person lacks a ‘strong sense of [her] own identity’, a ‘determination to “get anywhere”’, and ‘eloquence or [...] general savoir vivre’ as well as evincing a certain bodily ‘stillness’ (Lovibond, *Iris Murdoch and Gender*, p.86).

which Murdoch arguably has in mind when she suggests that it dies with the ego.<sup>930</sup> By contrast, her claim that we must respect contingency because ‘it is the essence of personality’ suggests that she considers respect for personality in the sense of individual character a critical aspect of goodness.<sup>931</sup>

While Murdoch’s respect for the individual does, in fact, include a respect also for individual personality in the sense of character therefore, we are confronted with a more clearly problematic picture when it comes to Murdoch’s elevation of impersonal love. In what is perhaps a Platonic spirit, Murdoch writes that ‘the highest love is in some sense impersonal’.<sup>932</sup> Conradi confirms this by stating that mature love of reality ‘is a darker, colder, more impersonal commodity’ than the ‘intense’ love of one who is ‘in’ love.<sup>933</sup> Antonaccio, similarly, observes that ‘the idea of impersonality and distance seems to be essential to Murdoch’s concept of the Good’.<sup>934</sup> Thus, in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* Rupert (whose thoughts both Peter Conradi and Scott Moore associate with Murdoch’s own) speaks of love being able to ‘exert its greatest power’ and ‘to redeem’ ‘when it becomes almost impersonal and loses its attractiveness and its ability to console’.<sup>935</sup> Bradley and Julian in *The Black Prince* are made, by their love, to feel ‘quite impersonal’ and Brendan in *Henry and Cato* says that ‘it’s the greatest pain and the greatest paradox of all that personal love has to break at some point’.<sup>936</sup> In the light of her understanding of art as a conveyer of Good it is similarly significant that Murdoch describes the ‘greatest art [as] “impersonal”’.<sup>937</sup>

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Lovibond makes no case however for why these are faults, particularly from the moral perspective Murdoch assumes. Lovibond moreover brushes over the fact that, as illustrated above, Murdoch’s good characters are not for instance ‘still’ or un-eloquent at all times but shun merely pointless and self-absorbed busy-ness.

<sup>930</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.501.

<sup>931</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.283.

<sup>932</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.73.

<sup>933</sup> Emphasis added. Conradi, *Saint and Artist*, p.142.

<sup>934</sup> Antonaccio, ‘Imagining the Good’, p.231.

<sup>935</sup> Conradi, *Saint and Artist*, p.220. Murdoch in Conradi, *Saint and Artist*, p.218. Moore, ‘Murdoch’s Fictional Philosophers’, p.107.

<sup>936</sup> Murdoch in Conradi, *Saint and Artist*, p.262, Murdoch, *HC*, p.348.

<sup>937</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.60.

Murdoch, to be sure, claims that ‘the practice of personal relations is the fundamental school of virtue’, and criticises T.S. Eliot’s decision to identify the reality to be confronted by the moral subject not with “another person” whom we should treat as separate and real’ but with ‘the thing’, ‘the institution’ or ‘the dogma’.<sup>938</sup> She even acknowledges that ‘human love, the love of persons for other persons, is *sui generis*, and among our natural faculties and impulses the one which is potentially nearest to the highest divine attributes’, and that Christ ‘exhibit[s] personal yet selfless love and prov[es] that it is possible’.<sup>939</sup> There is another current in Murdoch’s thought however—a tendency to idealise the ‘impersonal’—which continually qualifies this insight. This is, perhaps, most drastically expressed when she states that ‘the highest love is in some sense impersonal’, and that this is ‘something which we can indeed see in art, but which I think we cannot see clearly, except in a very piecemeal manner, in the relationships of human beings’.<sup>940</sup> As reflected also in Murdoch’s tendency, in her novels, to locate the encounter with Good in visits to art galleries or in contemplation of stones rather than in interpersonal encounters, Murdoch’s strong sense of human selfishness at times leads her to portray interpersonal relations as somewhat unhelpful for the path towards Good, indeed as potentially even obstructing Good. Just as Brendan, in the already quoted passage, goes on to identify personal love with the ego’s love, so Murdoch for instance opposes impersonal art to ‘individualistic’ (in the sense of egoistic) art.<sup>941</sup>

Yet more markedly than in Tillich’s case, Murdoch’s consequent elevation of the impersonal corresponds with her insistence that the Good, and thus reality itself, must be pictured as impersonal. The proper ultimate object of a person’s love and attachment does not reach out to her, cannot be dialogued with, and does not return the individual’s

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<sup>938</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, pp.453, 275.

<sup>939</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p.346.

<sup>940</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.73.

<sup>941</sup> Murdoch in Conradi, *Saint and Artist*, p.142.

love. Instead, it may well be encountered as a 'blank face' or void.<sup>942</sup> Loving Good means resisting the, according to Murdoch selfish, temptation to personalise this Good. Goodness depends on confronting the fact that, as Brendan, like many other characters in Murdoch's novels, says in *Henry and Cato*, 'there is no one there'.<sup>943</sup> Murdoch's consequent view that it is one of the 'paradoxes of a complete religion' 'that the movement of the saving of Eros is toward an impersonal pictureless void' means that love itself is of an impersonal quality: at least ultimately, it is not inter-personal and cannot be returned.<sup>944</sup> The implied devaluation of the personal dimension and potential of the human being calls into question the extent to which her love can be said to do justice to the human being, his needs, desires and potential and to which it thus promotes and enables the flourishing of the individual. As Fiddes puts it in the context of a discussion of Murdoch's account of beauty, 'despite finding the sublime in the beauty of the world, she can only conceive of beauty as awakening us to the supremely Good rather than giving us a personal relation with the Good'.<sup>945</sup>

Schweiker is right to suggest, contra Nussbaum, that in arguing that Good is encountered only in 'loving attention to particular persons' Murdoch claims, and intends, to value and respect others in their particular individuality and personality.<sup>946</sup> Murdoch indeed seeks to ensure that others are not reduced to means to the lover's ascent to Good. Nonetheless, Murdoch does not wholly succeed in valuing both lover and beloved as human *persons*. Nussbaum correctly notices a shortcoming here in Murdoch.<sup>947</sup> The problem is not, however, Nussbaum's sense of not feeling liked by Murdoch when reading her novels (a matter I already addressed in the previous chapter), but the fact that Murdoch withholds lover and beloved from entering into personal relations with the

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<sup>942</sup> Murdoch, *NG*, p.348.

<sup>943</sup> Murdoch, *HC*, p.154.

<sup>944</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.463.

<sup>945</sup> Fiddes, 'The Sublime and the Beautiful', p.139.

<sup>946</sup> William Schweiker 'The Moral Fate of Fictive Persons: On Iris Murdoch's Humanism' in Rowe, Horner, *Iris Murdoch and Morality*, p.187.

<sup>947</sup> See Nussbaum, 'Love and Vision', p.38.

other. Murdoch does not endorse and foster the human being's personal nature, in the sense of her potential and need for ongoing and intimate relationships with other persons. In continuity with her understanding of our relation to Good, her language of 'looking at' and 'respecting' the individual other is geared primarily towards the preservation of distance and separateness. Although Völker may be correct to remark on similarities between Murdoch and Scheler, including particularly the notion that morality consists in the 'I being deflected from itself, directed onto something else and thereby being overcome' she cannot in fact be said to arrive at 'ethical personalism' or at 'a personalist ethic of love'.<sup>948</sup>

### **7.3.2 Lack of reciprocity**

The above-described qualms are illustrated, and indeed aggravated, by the fact that good relationships as imagined by Murdoch lack partnership, reciprocity, and community. Like in Tillich's case, her neglect or even subversion of the personal dimension and potential of the human being is intertwined with a depreciation of the dialogical and reciprocal potential of human relations and, with this, of the legitimacy of the human striving for response to and reciprocation of love, of the desire for exchange, and community. This is manifest for instance in Murdoch's suggestion that 'much, in some cases most, of our spiritual energy and understanding comes from non-reciprocal relationships with what is beyond and other'.<sup>949</sup> While 'un-self-centred', Murdoch's good man is not necessarily in personal exchange, and rarely in communion, with others.<sup>950</sup> Indeed, his movement towards greater 'understanding' is, for her, a movement 'onward into increasing privacy' (a notion arguably in tension with her rejection of the turn towards the self).<sup>951</sup> Although Murdoch's eventual study of Weil arguably leads her to further endorse and develop the

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<sup>948</sup> Völker, *Rhetoric of Love*, pp.43, 42.

<sup>949</sup> Murdoch, *MGM*, p. 478.

<sup>950</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.283.

<sup>951</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.28.

idea that unreciprocated love most aptly leads us towards Good, she entertains the notion of a connection between unreturned love and insight into truth as early as in *Under the Net*, her first novel. Here Anna tells Jake that ‘unsatisfied love is concerned with understanding. Only if it is all, all understanding, can it remain love while being unsatisfied’.<sup>952</sup> Recurringly, her good characters are figures whose relationships are one-sided, who continue to love in spite of the fact that their love falls on deaf ears. As indicated above, Tallis’s love for Morgan is portrayed as a central aspect of his knowledge of Good precisely because it is unwavering despite being unreturned.<sup>953</sup> Bledyard, too, loves Rain Carter silently, without asking for a return, and in spite of her being in love with Mor.<sup>954</sup>

Murdoch thus follows Weil’s sense that goodness depends on an eschewal of the need to ‘receive the equivalent of what we give’, which both authors understand in terms of a confrontation of a void.<sup>955</sup> While Murdoch and Weil are surely right that goodness transcends a mechanism of returns, Murdoch’s (and arguably Weil’s) tendency to turn this insight into an elevation of non-reciprocal relations betrays a sense that reciprocity, indeed the general state of being loved is an occasion for selfishness. A return of one’s love is, Murdoch implies, a consolation, an immediate gratification; and, as one critic summarises Murdoch’s position, ‘love that is consoling cannot redeem, but unconsoling love (beyond our conscious wiles) may be able to redeem’.<sup>956</sup> Thus, it is only once his old love Anna leaves him and disappears that Jake concludes that he loves Anna for the first time: ‘I had no longer any picture of Anna [...]. It seemed as if, for the first time, Anna

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<sup>952</sup> Murdoch, *UN*, p.45.

<sup>953</sup> As Fiddes points out Murdoch’s sense that loving the other entails rejection by them constitutes a parallel between her and Levinas (Fiddes, ‘The Sublime and the Beautiful’, p.139). Much has been written about the similarities between the thought of these two authors. As Zuba for instance points out, both consider the self ‘the enemy not only for the other, but of authentic existence’ and ‘mean much the same by totality’, yet Levinas’s Good is not only the Other but must also be the gift-giver. (Zuba, *Iris Murdoch’s Contemporary Retrieval*, pp.153, 152). While interesting to the question of love, an investigation into the relations between their thought cannot be undertaken in this thesis.

<sup>954</sup> Similarly, the good and noble Count in *NS* silently loves Gertrude; Bradley in *BP* only truly approaches goodness once Julian leaves him; Ann in *UR* renounces Felix, whom she loves; and the Christ-like figure Denis in *TU* loves Hannah silently and in a servile way.

<sup>955</sup> Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p.10.

<sup>956</sup> Moore, ‘Murdoch’s Fictional Philosophers’, p.107.

really existed now as a separate being and not as a part of myself.<sup>957</sup> Wondering about true love rather than the supposedly selfish love he had for Dorina, Austin in *An Accidental Man*, similarly, asks whether ‘he [could] not simply have willed Dorina [...] not greedily desiring a return’.<sup>958</sup> It is the same instinct, which leads Murdoch to attribute special meaning to attention to and respect for objects, which cannot return one’s love.

The implications of this tendency to elevate non-reciprocated over reciprocated love is that Murdoch’s good life is a lonely life. Her good characters typically not only lack a partner but generally live withdrawn, somewhat isolated lives on the fringes of society.<sup>959</sup> They often lack intimate relations even with those immediately surrounding them and typically shun a more personal involvement in their immediate community. Upon realising her true calling in life, that goodness or reality itself commands her to leave her London friends and go to work with the disadvantaged in America, Ann, who was already told by Christ, whom she was not allowed to touch, that she ‘must do it all [her]self’, ‘wept for the loneliness to come’.<sup>960</sup> The Count in *Nuns and Soldiers*, another figure of good, describes his failed love of Gertrude as him having ‘enacted both sides of the relation’, a feat which ‘could be done because she was inaccessible’.<sup>961</sup> Upon her conversion, Tamar in *The Book and the Brotherhood*, like Ann, goes to church, but only ‘secretively, alone with God’.<sup>962</sup> And, as Obumselu points out, Jake ends up seeking a relationship not with Anna, who is something of a soul-mate and whom he loves, but with Anna’s sister, with whom he has the less intimate rapport, yet whose ‘unendearing otherness is’, in Murdoch’s scheme, ‘evidence of contact’.<sup>963</sup>

As Jake says in the same inner monologue cited from above, right relation with another entails not ‘knowledge’ of them nor, one might add, communion with them but

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<sup>957</sup> Murdoch, *UN*, p.268.

<sup>958</sup> Emphasis added. Murdoch, *AM*, p.358.

<sup>959</sup> This is true for instance of William Eastcote in *PP*, Hugo Belfounder in *UN*, Uncle Theo in *NG*, Bledyard in *TS* and Tallis in *FHD*.

<sup>960</sup> Murdoch, *NS*, pp.110, 479.

<sup>961</sup> Murdoch, *NS*, p.510.

<sup>962</sup> Murdoch, *BB*, p.490.

<sup>963</sup> Ben Obumselu ‘Iris Murdoch and Sartre’, *English Literary History* Vol.XLII (1975), p.299.

‘simply a kind of co-existence [which] too is one of the guises of love’.<sup>964</sup> Jake adds that such a co-existence can be attained only ‘after one has realised the impossibility of knowledge and renounced the desire for it and finally ceased to feel even the need of it’.<sup>965</sup> With this, Jake evokes Weil’s notion that ‘when a human being is attached to another by a bond of affection which contains any degree of necessity, it is impossible that he should wish autonomy to be preserved both in himself and in the other’—that is, he confirms Murdoch’s Weilian notion that the preservation of independent distinctness is at odds with an emotive quest for knowledge of, and intimacy with, the other.<sup>966</sup> Respect for the individual corresponds with a co-existence, which lacks any element of compulsion, but, it seems, also of emotional intimacy. Murdoch indeed appears to associate any element of desiring the other’s love with such necessity.

As Goodyer argues there is, therefore, a dualistic element in Murdoch, which I would suggest is rooted in her fear of the personal and of the unified.<sup>967</sup> Goodyer is right to argue that Murdoch thus rejects ‘consummately reciprocal’ love.<sup>968</sup> The above indeed suggests that it is precisely with respect to promoting reciprocity and receptivity that Murdoch’s thought is wanting. Murdoch’s is what Steiner has described as a morality of ‘individualised reciprocity’.<sup>969</sup> In this light, Laverty’s suggestion that Murdoch thinks of learning as ‘something that we become ready to receive’ and that is ‘in that sense like grace’ is only conditionally right: it brushes over the fact that Murdoch’s good man is reluctant to receive anything from other *persons*, particularly where this requires

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<sup>964</sup> Murdoch, *UN*, p.268.

<sup>965</sup> Murdoch, *UN*, p.268.

<sup>966</sup> Weil, *An Anthology*, p.286.

<sup>967</sup> Jennifer Spencer Goodyer ‘The Blank Face of Love: The Possibility of Goodness in the Literary and Philosophical Work of Iris Murdoch’, *Modern Theology* Vol.25, No.2 (2009), p. 232. In contrast to my present argument that this dualistic element qualifies the extent to which Murdoch’s selfless love enables human *flourishing*, Goodyer ultimately judges this dualism to be incompatible with attaining ‘selflessness’ in the sense of overcoming individualistic self-sufficiency (Goodyer, ‘Blank Face of Love’, pp.232f). To Goodyer’s argument I would add the qualification that Murdoch’s dualism between self and other is, to some extent, offset by her view that the absence of self from the mind enables a ‘pure cognitive state’ ‘where the object is not disturbed by the subjective ego, but where subject and object simply exist as one’ (Murdoch, *MGM*, p.245).

<sup>968</sup> Goodyer, ‘Blank Face of Love’, p.232.

<sup>969</sup> Steiner in Murdoch, *EM*, p.xvi; Steiner in Murdoch, *MGM*, p.xvi.

intimacy.<sup>970</sup> Murdoch's unwillingness to associate goodness with any real personal union further prevents her from fully endorsing the creative dimension of Eros: without union, love and desire remain 'fruitless' and 'pointless', leading only to what Murdoch portrays as a somewhat exhilarating and liberating emptiness.<sup>971</sup> While my analysis suggests that Murdoch cannot be seen as propagating the 'feminine ethic of self-effacement' Griffin accuses her of, the above can, finally, also be taken to make more possible the kind of asymmetrical relationships which can lead to such self-effacement.<sup>972</sup>

#### 7.4 Conclusion

It has become apparent that Murdoch distances herself from what Obumselu describes as 'the contemporary pagan ideal of passionate affirmation' proposed by D.H. Lawrence and reflected in contemporary 'notions of self-fulfilment and freedom'.<sup>973</sup> As I have argued, Murdoch does so, however, without uprooting desire from the human person and her love, and without devaluing the self and its individuality. Understanding the human being as intrinsically moral and related to transcendent Good, Murdoch proposes that human flourishing, or the fullness of being, is attained only where the human being is oriented and attached to Good, which she deems to be encountered in the individual particulars of the world. I have argued that Murdoch considers such other-orientedness to be attained and manifested in a combination of erotic desire for Good and a visual practice of attention to the particular other. I have suggested that this combination of Eros and attention is, in two respects, well described as a form of selfless love: it is a love

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<sup>970</sup> Megan Laverty (2007) *Iris Murdoch's ethics: a consideration of her romantic vision*. Continuum, London, p.6.

<sup>971</sup> Conradi, *Saint and Artist*, p.196, Murdoch, *SoG*, p.96. It is interesting, in this respect, to note that the relatively rare occasions of pregnancy in Murdoch's novels tend to result in abortion. This regards for instance Georgie in *SH*; Tamar in *BB*; Morgan in *FHD*; Flora in *IG*. Similarly, children are a rare (and usually somewhat mythical) appearance in her novels (Henrietta and Edward in *NG* being something of an exception in this respect).

<sup>972</sup> Griffin, 'Influence of Simone Weil', p.275. Meanwhile, Robjant is right to argue that Lovibond's objection to Murdoch's morality of 'selflessness', viz. that such a value is held more by women than men and has played a role in the oppression of women, is not only difficult to prove but irrelevant to the question of whether it is indeed a true moral value (Robjant, 'Is Iris Murdoch an Unconscious Misogynist', p.1026; see also Lovibond, *Iris Murdoch and Gender*, p.85).

<sup>973</sup> Obumselu, 'Murdoch and Sartre', p.315.

which rests on the insight that the human being is self-less in that her self is no object-like, self-contained reality, and it is an other-centred love, lacking self-concern, but nonetheless engaging the lover deeply and in her entirety, or erotically.<sup>974</sup>

Murdoch's notion of selfless love should be credited for its skilful integration of modern insights into the instability, even fluidity, and desirous nature of the self, on the one hand, and of Christian insights into human sinfulness, dependency and originary relatedness to what transcends the human being, on the other. Murdoch does not simply deny human sinfulness but rather understands it *in light of* contemporary insights into the delusory nature of 'form, of internally related completeness': sinfulness is connected with a denial of our lack of intrinsic completeness.<sup>975</sup> This strategy allows Murdoch to move beyond the polar divide between the thinkers examined in Chapter 3, and to show how and why selfless love is not only compatible with, but necessary for, the flourishing of the moral subject. Despite her insistence that goodness must be for nothing, and despite her emphasis on attention to the other, Murdoch successfully makes room in her selfless love for erotic desire, which she considers a crucial precondition for this latter turn outwards. She has been shown to consider selfless love to yield certain fruits also for the lover, including his becoming more real, his freedom and his happiness—while nonetheless acknowledging also the ambiguity of desire, and the human being's destructive tendencies, which affect the well-being of the self as much as that of the other.

Notwithstanding these important accomplishments, Murdoch's argument has been somewhat weakened by the fact that she has undertaken the above-described integration at the cost of accounting for, or indeed fully endorsing, the human desire for a return of one's love, and thus for friendship and communion. Though in most respects

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<sup>974</sup> That Murdoch's love implies 'self-forgetfulness' is also recognised by Völker although he underplays the role of Eros in this, and instead and throughout his argument understands the true human self as a personal self in a way I have argued against (Völker, *Rhetoric of Love*, p.44).

<sup>975</sup> Obumselu 'Murdoch and Sartre', p.299.

supportive of the human being's needs, capacities and potential, Murdoch's selfless love is uneasy with the distinctly personal nature of the human being. This manifests itself in Murdoch's failure to fully endorse love relations with other persons, particularly where the relationship entails the gratification of the other's reciprocation of one's love. This unease, which is motivated by Murdoch's sensitivity to human selfishness and by her understanding Good as an impersonal, unresponsive reality, evinces a certain pessimism about the human being and her potential for love. It also means Murdoch retains the very tendency towards solipsism and the fear of intimacy that she attacked Sartre for.<sup>976</sup> While Murdoch's selfless love does not 'mean living divorced from any attachment', Griffin is indeed right to observe that Murdoch adopts Weil's notion that the, albeit never fully attainable, perfect standard for all love is love which 'consents to distance, [and thus to] the autonomy of the other'.<sup>977</sup> Murdoch's good life does indeed imply 'inhabiting "a vast place of loneliness"' whose 'ultimate meaning is death'.<sup>978</sup> This compromises the extent to which Murdoch's selfless love enables human flourishing. Somewhat ironically, it is not self- but other-centredness which, in Murdoch's case, leaves the moral subject lonely and—in this respect—unfulfilled.

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<sup>976</sup> See Obumselu's article on Sartre's lasting influence on Murdoch. Obumselu argues that Murdoch's world remains 'lonely and absurd' and points out that while she attempts to 'demonstrat[e] connectedness' she in fact celebrates primarily particularity (Obumselu, 'Murdoch and Sartre', pp.296, 300).

<sup>977</sup> Griffin, 'Influence of Simone Weil', pp.126, 101.

<sup>978</sup> Griffin, 'Influence of Simone Weil', p.126.

## Chapter 8 – Selfless love and human flourishing:

### final comparisons and a constructive proposal

This thesis set out with the observation that in the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries, notions of the self as a unified, simple and objectifiable substance came under heavy attack. It may seem odd that these challenges to the traditional self, of which I have taken Sartre to be illustrative, reinforced attacks on the Christian emphasis on the other-centred or selfless nature of love, judging this Christian position to be destructive of the subject's freedom and fullness of being. But, as we saw, Sartre's critique of the Cartesian self was in aid of reducing the human subject to an absolutely free and empty self-consciousness. In light of this reduction, anything outside the self came to be perceived as a potential threat to human freedom and autonomy—that is, as a threat to precisely that which was now taken to be constitutive of the human subject. A love centred on the Good of the other consequently appeared to be destructive of the flourishing of the subject.<sup>979</sup> As became evident in Chapter 3 of this thesis, Sartre's views in this respect merely heighten and corroborate *existentially* such polarised accounts of self-surrendering love and self-assertive love, as had already been promoted by Nietzsche, Freud and, indeed, writers like Kierkegaard, Nygren and Weil. Notwithstanding their different persuasions, these latter thinkers, too, had, at least implicitly, declared selfless love and the individual's flourishing in the here and now to be incompatible.

It has been the goal of the present thesis to re-examine such a conclusion without simply dismissing Sartre's perspective on the self as an unstable and fluid reality which, far from being intrinsically complete, is a project that is shaped in the context of, and in dependence on, the subject's interactions with its surroundings. I have pursued

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<sup>979</sup> Although Sartre himself does not speak of 'human flourishing', it will have become evident that he was profoundly concerned with the freedom and individual development, of the human being, and that I have subsumed these concerns under this term.

the validity of this modern perspective on the self, and the question of whether this necessarily implies the incompatibility of selfless love and human flourishing, through recourse to the thought of Paul Tillich and Iris Murdoch. Tillich and Murdoch have been apt interlocutors in this task because, as I have argued, both take seriously and accept much of Sartre's deconstruction of the traditional self. At the same time they consider all forms of polarisation between self-surrendering love and self-assertive love to be problematic developments in need of a response. Although neither Tillich nor Murdoch use the exact term 'self-less love,' I have chosen to employ this phrase since it brings two concepts together: the Sartrean notion that we lack a 'self' in the Cartesian sense, and the Christian notion of other-centred, self-giving love. In speaking of 'selfless love' I have thus been envisaging a 'self-giving' love while recognising that the self under consideration is not the self as Descartes described it.

I have argued that both Tillich and Murdoch defend a notion of selfless love as necessary and conducive to the flourishing of lover and beloved. As I have sought to show, both base this on four distinct but related points: 1) on an *affirmation* of Sartre's notion that we lack a self in the sense of what I have referred to as the ego; 2) on an account of self and other as ontologically inter-related realities; 3) on an endorsement of the human being's desire for self-transcendence in conjunction with a more unambiguously other-centred love or practice; and 4) on the notion that all these features depend on setting the human being in relation to a transcendent reality which constitutes the source of its true being. In the following, I give a brief comparative overview of the picture of selfless love that arises from these claims. This procedure will also enable me to retrace how Tillich's and Murdoch's proposals allow them to accept many of Sartre's insights into the self as a developing, unstable reality, while also resolving some of his inner tensions by incorporating these ideas into a different metaphysical framework. Through this comparison, furthermore, I will be able to summarily retrace how their

accounts of selfless love allow them to unite and transcend the distinction between eros and agape, and thus to overcome the apparent impasse between Nietzsche's and Nygren's perspectives on love. After highlighting some of the remaining weaknesses of Tillich's and Murdoch's accounts, I will make some concluding suggestions as to how we might increase the persuasive power of their own arguments, so that we can defend the congruence of selfless love with human flourishing on the basis of an ontology which is internally consistent, and which offers a true alternative to Sartre's world-view.

## **8.1 Tillich's and Murdoch's analyses: a summary**

### **8.1.1 Tillich's selfless love**

Tillich, we found in Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis, seeks to make room in Christian love for eros, or for the human desire for and drive towards attaining self-fulfilment. He approaches the question of love and, connected with this, of the self by way of an ontological framework of essence and existence. The two- (if not three-) dimensionality this implies allows him to adopt Sartre's view that the object-like self we like to identify ourselves with is an instance of bad faith and that we must transcend our status quo in order to attain our true self, while avoiding the conclusion that this true human self is identifiable with sheer nothingness. Tillich considers both the true and the false, or rather, the full and the incomplete self to be determined by ontological polarities. Yet, in the case of the former, the polar ontological elements are in a state of balance that is lacking in the latter. We saw that this means that the true self is, for instance, both fully individualised *and* participatory. It is a reality both distinct from its surroundings and in relationship with its surroundings, to which it belongs. True selfhood, as we found Tillich argue, means being 'personality' in 'communion'. Tillich justifies the above picture by rooting both self and other in a transcendent ground of being that unites

them. It is through participating in her environment that the human being actualises her relationship with this transcendent ground, and through participation in the ground of her being that she can enter into full relationship with the other. Through such participation, the human being attains individual selfhood, and her environment becomes her world.

As we saw, according to Tillich, the lack of a self in the sense of a self-contained reality, and the human being's essential ontological connectedness with the other, makes such full selfhood a matter of selfless love. The human being only attains the fullness of her being where she lovingly turns away from what she perceives to be her self and where she, instead, participates in the other. For Tillich, this requires particularly a turn and an opening towards the transcendent Other, whose transformative selfless love enables right participation in the human other. On the one hand, we found that this means that the human being in existence cannot directly love herself: she does not know herself—indeed, she is not fully herself—until she stands in a participatory relation with the other. On the other hand, Tillich was shown to understand selfless love as a form of self-love: the subject's participation in the transcendent Other enables her to overcome the threat of non-being, and thus to truly affirm her being. We also found Tillich's understanding of selfless love not to invalidate or go against the human being's needs, and her desire for a fulfilment of self (what Tillich defines as *eros*), but to emerge out of, incorporate and fulfil this desire by unifying it with, and placing it under, the criterion of the desire for the fulfilment of the other (what Tillich defines as *agape*). Thus, Tillich's account of love challenges the adequacy of conceptualising selfless love as a love that denies or goes against the needs and interests of the self, and instead lets it appear as a love conducive to human flourishing.

### 8.1.2 Murdoch's selfless love

As we saw in Chapters 2 and 6, Murdoch, too, agrees with Sartre that the self in the sense of a clearly delineated, object-like reality is an illusion. Like Tillich, however, she resists a wholesale dismissal of the human being's experience of continuity, distinctness and even stability, and suggests instead that the human self must be understood as a substantial mechanism of attachments, driven by desire. Murdoch also, then, proposes that the human self is a reality both distinct from others, and intrinsically and inevitably related to them. Not unlike Tillich, and with particular recourse to Freud, Murdoch implies that the human being's eros is indicative of his proper relatedness to the other as well as being responsible for the typical corruptions of this relatedness. She, too, finds these corruptions to stand in the way of truth, goodness and thus, I have argued, of the flourishing of the self. Left to itself, the erotic desire for Good comes under the impact of natural human selfishness, which lies at the root of the human being's pretensions to independent selfhood. Eros is, then, led to mistake false for true Good, and thereby causes the self to be attached not to reality, which Murdoch identifies with transcendent Good, but precisely to the ego-self, which Murdoch sets in opposition to the Good and the Real. With this simultaneous appropriation and subversion of Sartre and Freud, Murdoch, too, implies that true human selfhood is realised only where the self is attached, and thus actively related, to the transcendent.

In effect, Murdoch also considers human flourishing to be dependent on selfless love understood as a loving turn away from self, towards the other. The human being's tendency towards self-deception means that attempts at mere self-assertion are bound to lead him further into self-delusion and, thus, away from the fullness of being which I have identified with human flourishing. Instead, he must be attached to transcendent Good and, with this, to reality. Such attachment is made possible through a selfless love which rests on and includes the erotic desire for Good, but which also entails a more

unambiguously other-centred practice of attention which channels and purifies eros. It is this combination of erotic passion and attention which enables the human being to perceive and respect the worldly other, wherein transcendent Good is manifest and encountered. Murdoch is more insistent than Tillich that this does not include any direct kind of self-love, and, indeed, that Good must not be sought for any kind of reward. Yet, as I have argued, her endorsement of eros implies that she too recognises the moral importance and exigencies of the human being's most deep-seated desires. Selfless love is not only rooted in, and transformative of, human desire but, in leading the human subject towards Good which, I have argued, bears the fruits enabling the person's flourishing, also fulfils this desire. Thus, while Murdoch considers the relevance of, and need for, selfless love to be *reinforced* by the need to avert human selfishness, she primarily roots the need for selfless love in the ontological relation between self, Good, and world, where Good is encountered.

### **8.1.3 Tillich's and Murdoch's appropriation of Sartre**

We have seen that, with their respective proposals as outlined above, both Tillich and Murdoch have adopted some of Sartre's most significant insights while also integrating them into an alternative framework by which they propose to resolve some of the inner tensions and more problematic aspects of Sartre's thought. Most significantly perhaps, we found Tillich and Murdoch to accept Sartre's opposition between a true and a false self. Both follow Sartre in understanding the true self as a project, an unstable, malleable reality continually created and defined by the subject and her surroundings. They, too, associate this self with an enlightened consciousness, the inner workings of which they consider to be the essential battleground between truth and falsehood, between freedom

and enslavement.<sup>980</sup> As already indicated, both equally agree that the self's instability bears the temptation of seeking false stability, a circumstance of which the notion of the false, object-like self is the result. They concur that such false self-identification is the product of wishful thinking. Though perhaps perceiving herself to be free, the human being in this self-deluded state is, they agree with Sartre, a slave to incapacitating and self-alienating convention.

Tillich and Murdoch furthermore agree with Sartre that the individual can and must transcend the state of enslavement towards greater freedom. However, both also associate Sartre's proposed solution to this precisely with the misguided efforts leading to *false* selfhood, or with what Sartre calls 'bad faith'. Sartre recognises that the other inevitably affects the dynamic human self in its being. Yet, instead of exploring how the other's influence can be legitimately welcomed, Sartre seeks to fight, contain and control it. Proclaiming true selfhood to consist in absolute freedom, he denounces any outside effect on the self as an improper infringement yet proposes to counter this simply by exhorting the human being to exercise his supposedly absolute freedom—an effort Sartre himself recognises to be futile. Tillich in particular credits Sartre with calling the individual to affirm and assert his threatened being but both he and Murdoch nonetheless dismiss as misguided Sartre's attempt to overcome the human being's enslavement merely by a heightened self-assertion.

This attempt, both imply, reflects a failure to recognise the extent to which the individual's drive towards self-fulfilment and her willingness to self-assertion are typically implicated in human self-delusion and, thus, in self-enslavement. The attempt, for instance, to assert oneself and one's freedom over *against* the other entails a false pretension to autonomy. As Murdoch in particular suggests, the misguided nature of this is confirmed by Sartre's own frustrated experience of the impossibility of such freedom

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<sup>980</sup> For all her criticism of existentialism, this parallel alone renders Murdoch's statement that 'I don't think [Sartre] has had any influence on me as a writer or, indeed, as a philosopher [...]' highly dubious (Michael Bellamy 'An Interview with Iris Murdoch', *Contemporary Literature* Vol.18, No.2 (1977), p.131).

and by his consequent, contradictory assertion of both absolute freedom and enslaving determinism.

Tillich and Murdoch persuasively counter this by suggesting that the human being's capacity for freedom and her simultaneous proclivity towards bad faith is indicative of the temptations arising out of the tension between the person's relation to the transcendent on the one hand and her own finitude on the other. In setting the human being in a constitutive relation to a transcendent reality, Tillich and Murdoch identify human relationality as unambiguously life-giving, and portray it as the cause of both stability and instability: a person's relationships connect her with the foundational source of her individually distinct being, yet at the same time this very fact means that she cannot rest in herself but is dependent on, and must thus relate herself to, what lies beyond herself. Setting the human being in relation to the transcendent allows Tillich and Murdoch to argue that it is on account of her relationality that the human being has individuality and that it is on account of her individuality that the human being can and must relate to others. This provides the foundation for the suggestion that the danger to human selfhood lies not in the individual's inevitable relatedness to the world, but in her tendency to see the world as a threat to her individual being, and to consequently attempt to elevate herself over, and to dominate, the world.

I would suggest that, in effect, Tillich and Murdoch define the human self as a *relational substance*, thereby dismissing Sartre's insistence on the incompatibility of unstable being-for-itself and stable being-in-itself and his consequent claim that where the human being experiences *herself* as stable this is necessarily illusory. Both Tillich and Murdoch consider the human self to properly combine these opposed forms of being, or an element of stability and an element of instability. This allows them to present a solution to the Sartrean impasse between freedom and determinism. Encompassing both instability and stability, the human being is free to creatively shape her relation with

reality but cannot go against reality, from which her freedom derives, without forfeiting this freedom. Freedom thus depends on the human being's acceptance of destiny (Tillich) or on obedience to reality (Murdoch).<sup>981</sup> In the case of the human being, instability enables autonomous human self-definition as little as stability amounts to inertia.

The combined instability and stability of the human being has expressed itself particularly in Tillich's claim that the relatedness Sartre admits to is possible only on the basis of a degree of unified individuality, and in Murdoch's claim that without a degree of self-being the human being could not come to recognise her moral depravity and progressively work towards a more truthful state of being. Without her relation to the world, the human being is an empty shell or removed from reality, including her own, Tillich and Murdoch suggest. Relations with others are neither unnecessary extras, then, nor evils which inevitably threaten the individual and need to be controlled. They constitute the very foundation of the person's individual being and are capable and in need of being creatively shaped. With this, both Tillich and Murdoch seek to avoid the extremes of autonomy and heteronomy. In light of this similar intention, and of the fact that Murdoch quotes from Tillich's *Systematic Theology* in this very context, it is striking that she leaves Tillich's solution of 'theonomy' entirely unmentioned. The concept's invocation of God does not sufficiently explain this since Murdoch is open to referring to God metaphorically. It appears to me that Murdoch may have perceived Tillich's concept of theonomy to involve too strong a stress on immanence over transcendence, the latter being the notion Murdoch sought to restore to secular moral philosophy.<sup>982</sup>

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<sup>981</sup> Tillich's and Murdoch's insistence on obedience to that which transcends the self is closely tied up with a feature of their thought which space has here prevented me from exploring in much detail. Both consider anxiety about, and the attempt to deny, human 'finitude' (Tillich) or 'mortality' (Murdoch) a major qualification of human freedom as well as an indicator that freedom must be rooted in a reality which transcends the finite realm and which the human being is connected with.

<sup>982</sup> Another reason may be that Tillich can only establish the notion of theonomy by providing an ontology, which Murdoch, as discussed below, is reluctant to provide. Moreover, Murdoch's Socrates claims that even the 'phrase "the ground of being" [...] is a metaphor which is understood in a tradition',

Finally, it is on account of the above features that Tillich and Murdoch can provide an alternative to Sartre's confinement of love to the oppressive restrictions of the Master-Slave relation and to his consequent definition of love as 'the project of making oneself be loved'.<sup>983</sup> Tillich and Murdoch make the case that love, and individual well-being, requires precisely an acceptance of and surrender to one's intrinsic relatedness such that one can creatively shape this relatedness in freedom from fear and the urge to control.

#### **8.1.4 Tillich's and Murdoch's response to the impasse between eros and agape**

The rootedness of Tillich's and Murdoch's love in an ontology of self and other as mutually dependent has also been shown to allow them to unite elements of eros and agape, and of self-interest and self-surrender. In doing so, Tillich and Murdoch help to overcome the deadlock between Nietzsche's, Freud's and Sartre's perspectives on love on the one hand, and Nygren's amplification and radicalisation of Kierkegaard's views, as well as Weil's views, on the other. Both Tillich and Murdoch have been shown to endorse Freud's emphasis on the desirous nature of the human being, and Nietzsche's demand that the individual actualise his vigorous drive towards greater freedom and individuality, as the crucial motor for the attainment of the fullness of being. Though Tillich makes this more explicit than Murdoch, both associate the human being's desire for the fullness of being and, thus, for human flourishing, with the desire for Good. Most importantly, both recognise that where the turn towards the other is not rooted in, and does not emerge out of, this *desire*, it is lacking, ineffective, and thus, so I have suggested, potentially harmful. Contrary to Insole's criticism, Murdoch, like Tillich, considers selfless love to aspire to 'something it lacks'—a quality Insole is right to

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thus apparently insinuating that Tillich's language, for all its innovativeness, in fact continues to be too specifically Christian (Murdoch, *EM*, p.519).

<sup>983</sup> Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, pp.370, 375.

associate with eros.<sup>984</sup> Both Murdoch and Tillich, moreover, argue that true love not only *issues* from within the individual and his erotic drive, but also *fulfils* human desire and brings individuality to greater fruition.

At the same time, I have argued that both Tillich and Murdoch define true love as selfless in the sense of being other-centred and gratuitous, in the sense of seeking Good as an end in itself. True love, they have suggested with different emphases, consists in turning away from self and confronting, accepting, and respecting what is entirely other than self, the ‘unconditioned’. As such, love as they conceive it is certainly to the other’s Good. In Tillich’s case in particular, true love ‘comes from a position of plenitude’ in the manner typically associated with agape.<sup>985</sup> From Tillich’s viewpoint, this does not contradict the above-mentioned notion that love seeks a greater fullness of being, which it still lacks: true love depends on a prior reception of a love, and thus has its ultimate origin in a source, which is indeed characterised by plenitude—that is, by a fullness of being and, correspondingly, of love. In attributing these characteristics to love, Tillich’s and Murdoch’s understandings of love are at least in some continuity with traditional Christian understandings of self-giving love. They take seriously Kierkegaard’s worry that supposed other-love often becomes mere self-love; they second Nygren’s assertion that true love is not motivated by self-seeking and that we need to allow ourselves to be pervaded by a reality other than ourselves; finally, they incorporate Weil’s notion of a need for purgation from ego.

In uniting central concerns of both the camps examined in Chapter 3, Tillich’s and Murdoch’s love draws on, but also transcends the boundaries of, the traditional conceptuality of eros and agape.<sup>986</sup> Their love, which I have argued to be a form of

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<sup>984</sup> Insole, ‘Beyond Glass Doors’, p.136.

<sup>985</sup> Insole, ‘Beyond Glass Doors’, p.136.

<sup>986</sup> Somewhat reluctantly, I have not discussed selfless love in relation to the body. This results, on the one hand, from the priorities space has forced me to make in this thesis. It also reflects a relative neglect of the bodily dimension on Tillich’s and Murdoch’s part. Though highly problematic and arguably unwarranted even from a Platonic point of view, other writers on the topic of eros also appear to be guilty of such an omission. Osborne’s book on eros, referenced in Chapter 3 above, is a case in point. By contrast, David

selfless love, equally overcomes the divide between Nietzsche's and Nygren's notions of right love. It is like Nietzsche's *amor fati* in that it entails an affirmation of life as it really is, regardless of whether it pleases (i.e. including suffering), and yet implies a critique of *amor fati* in that it also recognises the even greater reality of the transcendent source of this life, and in that it seeks to creatively shape life in and through relationship with this transcendent reality. Similarly, Murdoch's and Tillich's love both accommodates and moves beyond Nygren's love in that it involves a recognition of the individual person's limitedness and proper pervasion by another, while nonetheless affirming the individual's capacity for agency and engaging the individual and his desires in the deepest core of his being. Love, Tillich and Murdoch have been shown to argue, must seek the Good as such and, through being centred on the other, achieves the Good of both self and other. The flourishing it leads to is, correspondingly, not reduced to that of an individual reality whose flourishing comes at the cost of another; rather, such flourishing is a joint matter. If Nietzsche says there is no opposition of egoism and selflessness because there is only 'my good', Tillich and Murdoch dismiss this opposition by implying that there is only 'our good'.

Tillich and Murdoch can thus be judged to satisfy and unite the most central requirements of the polarised positions sketched in Chapter 3 of this thesis while also critiquing each for creating false oppositions. Their awareness of human finitude and of the tendency towards self-delusion undermines Nietzsche's notion that the self can come into its own through the supposedly direct self-affirmation of a sheer assertion of power, while their argument for the inter-relation of self and other subverts Nygren's insinuation that the other's Good can be attained without that of the self.

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Jasper's recent book, *The Sacred Body*, counters any tendencies to sever the bodily and the erotic, and indeed (re-)connects both these dimensions with the Christian mystical-ascetic tradition, without brushing over the way in which this tradition also problematises the body. Jasper's work implicitly underlines the extent to which selfless love must include, even emerge from and be grounded in, the lover's bodily nature (Jasper, *The Sacred Body*, especially Chapters 3 and 5).

### 8.1.5 Respective strengths, differences and unresolved issues

We found the strengths in Tillich's and Murdoch's accounts of love and the self to lie in a thoroughly ontological integration of self and other in some transcendent reality, and in a particular sensitivity to the moral importance of the individual and to the human propensity for self-delusion. Their insights have suggested that it is possible to develop an account of a selfless love which does not deny, but fulfils, the self. A combined reading of Tillich and Murdoch has suggested that the validity, fruitfulness, and, indeed, need for selfless love rests 1) on a recognition that we do not have or 'own' a self in the sense of a discreet entity independent of the world, and 2) on the insight that the true human self cannot be known, and indeed does not emerge, other than through entering into external relations with others. The notion of selflessness, which Tillich and Murdoch embrace and connect with love, is selflessness in the sense of a lack of an ego-self and in the sense of a need to turn towards and affirm the other for his or her own sake. They do so not to devalue but to build up the true human self, which they understand as a reality ontologically connected to the world in and through the transcendent Other. Thus understood, selfless love entails, so I have argued, the gratuitous love of the other referred to as *agape* while satisfying also the erotic desire for self-transcendence and individual self-fulfilment. As Tillich and Murdoch rightly suggest, selfless love in this sense is ontologically rooted. It transcends the realm of passing phenomena, yet nonetheless seeks to include and engage the emotions.

We found that, as regards the nature of the transcendent in particular, and the question of how the human being becomes capable of loving Good, Tillich's and Murdoch's accounts also contain several significant differences. Tillich's notion that God is love and breaks into and transforms existence provides him with a response to the fact that 'the sick cannot overcome the sick'.<sup>987</sup> Persuasively, Tillich's argument implies the claim that the human self cannot emerge in its fullness without being participated *in* as

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<sup>987</sup> Tillich, 'The Impact of Psychotherapy', p.399

well as participating in the other, and, indeed, without the *initiative* of divine love. At the same time, he has suggested that this participation of the divine in the self becomes fruitful only where it is accepted. Tillich's use of Sartre's account of the self as malleable has thus led him to portray the emergence of the human self in its fullness as the result of a *cooperative effort between lovers*. His thought indeed reveals that the challenge of the human condition lies not in creating oneself *as opposed to* letting the other create the self, but in promoting the development of both self and other *in loving cooperation* with the o/Other.

Murdoch, too, arguably has a sense of the individual being worked on *by* reality: the Good, she argues, *attracts* the self and, where the individual allows this, reality *compels* the will. However, her insistence that the Good cannot be communicated with and does not love the human being ultimately results in her suggestion that the moral subject 'must do it all [her]self'.<sup>988</sup> This implies particular emphases on non-reciprocal relations, on the obstacles human selfishness poses to moving towards Good, and on the consequent struggle and need for human effort in moving towards Good. Murdoch is right to stress the need for love of Good to be gratuitous,<sup>989</sup> and her consistent talk not of the Good of the self or the Good of the other but solely of Good constitutes, as I argue below, a helpful tool for overcoming dichotomous juxtapositions of self and other, while drawing both into relation with this Good.

Notwithstanding these different emphases, the weaknesses we detected in Tillich's and Murdoch's thought in fact resemble one another. In particular, I judged both to provide an insufficient endorsement of human reciprocity and thus to fail to fully appreciate the personal nature and potential of the human being, and her according desire for communion with the other. Tillich was found to de-emphasise the personal

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<sup>988</sup> Murdoch, *NS*, p.297.

<sup>989</sup> Her thought in this respect resembles Pickstock's claim that Christian agape 'moves beyond the finality of the circuit of reciprocity' by 'offering [...] a new gift to "anyone" that does not return to the givers in any ordinary fashion' (Catherine Pickstock '*Eros and Emergence*', p.108).

nature of the transcendent, and to thereby compromise his sense of the reciprocal nature of selfless love. This was also found to leave unclear the role the human other plays in the love between God and the human being and, thus, in the fulfilment of the self. Reluctant to admit that the path towards truth and goodness involves the *reception* of anything from outside the self, Murdoch cannot provide an explanation of the origins of the human being's capacity for love (imperfect though this may be), and retains the solipsism she so criticised in Sartre, such that relationship with Good, as she portrays it, lacks a communal dimension and ultimately remains a private matter internal to the subject's consciousness. By portraying love as one-directional, she, too, brushes over the role of the beloved. Indeed, neither Tillich nor Murdoch shows any particular regard for the other's role in the emergence of the self—that is, for the significance of the other's desire for the lover's love, her role in receiving this love, and her potential wish and attempt to return it.

Moving beyond Tillich's and Murdoch's own inquiry, I now wish to propose that some of the above difficulties can be resolved by attending to three elements. These features, either left underdeveloped or simply rejected by Tillich and Murdoch, would help secure the kind of account of selfless love these two thinkers intend—that is, an account of selfless love that overcomes any supposed dichotomy of eros and agape and enables the flourishing of lover and beloved. The three elements I have in mind include 1) a determined endorsement of receptivity, and of a reciprocity between self and finite other that is stimulated by and mirrors a reciprocity between self and transcendent Other; 2) an emphatic embrace of the fact that transcendent, objective Good is necessarily the Good of self *and* other and, thus, the unifying meeting point of the two; and 3) an account of the transcendent as a personal reality who instigates and makes possible selfless love in the first place. In order to demonstrate the relevance of these points it will be beneficial to take some recourse to the personalism of Martin Buber,

with whom Tillich and Murdoch share much in common and whom both comment on. I will also make some suggestions as to how Tillich's and Murdoch's accounts of love provide the foundations for, and can accommodate at least some of, these features more easily than is suggested by their *prima facie* scepticism, or even antipathy, towards one or more of these features.

## 8.2 Suggestions for amendments

### 8.2.1 Selfless love and mutuality

Selfless love, I firstly propose, is fully conducive to the flourishing of lover and beloved only if it entails also a reception of love. As I shall argue, this does not mean that love must necessarily and in each instance be returned to the person from whom it was received. However, selfless love does, I suggest, necessarily entail a giving and receiving between various partners and ultimately tends towards reciprocity, such that a reciprocation of selfless love constitutes not a compromise to, but the highest manifestation of, selfless love.

#### *Receiving love from the other*

An affirmation of selfless love must include an acknowledgment that love is ultimately a gift, and that the prerequisite or condition for loving—or for passing on this gift—in the first place is that it has been *received*. Without having received love, the potential lover lacks the being, the well-being, and the appreciative knowledge of love necessary for him to become a lover. Most fundamentally, the ability to love evidently requires the fact of existence, and it is here that the relationality of giving and receiving already begins. In addition to the procreative act, the very acts of clothing, feeding and nurturing the newborn necessarily involve something of what Tillich and Murdoch define as selfless

love: they issue from at least a basic attention to, respect for, and endeavour for, the flourishing of the other. Without being ‘loved into being’, so to speak, in this most basic manner, the human being dies. The fact that a person’s very being depends on elemental acts of love suggests that her flourishing, the *fullness* of her existence, and those features which improve her ability to love selflessly also depend on the reception of love.

The preconditions for selfless love of another include self-awareness and insight into human nature, confidence in and the ability to evaluate one’s desires as well as an awareness of the value of love. All of these grow with being loved by another, that is, on account of, firstly, being respected and affirmed as an individual with distinct capacities for judgment and agency, and of, secondly, being confronted with the practical manifestation or lived conclusion of the fact that a true and good life is to be had only when one lives in relation with the other. It appears legitimate, therefore, to say that the greater and more truthful the love a human being has received, the greater is her own ability to properly love another—a notion confirmed both by everyday experience and by insights into the psychological development of the human person.<sup>990</sup>

An affirmation of selfless love must entail an affirmation also of a reception of love not only because love cannot, otherwise, be passed on, but also because love implies allowing oneself to be *affected by* another as much as affecting him. Although he rejected love on account of it, Sartre could be argued to have recognised this requirement of love more than either Tillich or Murdoch. Sartre, we found, was entirely aware of the inevitable influence self and other have on one another. Perceiving this as a threat however, he sought to contain and control (rather than allow) this influence by objectifying the other, thus removing the intrinsic relationality between self and other from the demands of love and, instead, subjecting this relationship to the Master-Slave

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<sup>990</sup> See e.g. P. David Kurtz, James Gaudin, John Wodarski, Phyllis Howing ‘Maltreatment and the school-aged child: School performance consequences’, *Child abuse & neglect* Vol.17, No.5 (1993); Kathryn Hildyard, David Wolfe ‘Child neglect: developmental issues and outcomes’, *Child abuse & neglect* Vol.26, No.6-7 (2002); or the case of the neglected children discovered in Romanian orphanages after the Fall of the Communist regime in 1989.

dialectic. While Murdoch vehemently argued against conscious and unconscious attempts at controlling the other, we found her subject to remain closed to the other's influence on the self particularly where this is marked by the other's love. Tillich, who addresses love primarily in terms of the *subject's* desire for the fulfilment of self (eros) and for the fulfilment of other (agape), failed to show significant interest in the other's potential *desire* to love, and to participate in and affect the self. With this, Murdoch and Tillich do injustice to the mutual influence of self and other as recognised by Sartre. In effect, they both tend, so I would suggest, towards confining the human other to precisely that inert, object-like state of being-in-itself, to which Sartre reduces them when attempting to control them, and which de Beauvoir decries as the plight of women.<sup>991</sup> An affirmation of the other that is not explicitly open to receiving her love is compromised and disingenuous, embracing the other only at a safe distance and not in her human immediacy, subjectivity, and personal potential. The other is indeed only truly valued as personal subject where the human being opens himself to, and makes himself vulnerable to, her, and where the human being thus also allows her to influence his self.

### *Desiring the other's love*

Going yet a step further, I propose, thirdly, that it is necessary for selfless love to want and desire that the beloved become a lover himself. It is in this sense that selfless love tends towards reciprocity. It has been the gist of this thesis that the flourishing of the human person depends on loving another. If there is, as Gabriel Marcel puts it, 'a sense in which it is literally true to say that the more exclusively it is *I* who exist [sic], the less do I exist', then this must be as true for the (human) beloved as for the lover.<sup>992</sup> The beloved other, too, must love if he is to flourish. His return of the lover's love is thus as crucial to his well-being as his reception of love. In seeking to promote the other's

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<sup>991</sup> Simone de Beauvoir (1972) *The Second Sex*. Penguin, Harmondsworth, pp.172f.

<sup>992</sup> Marcel, *Mystery of Being*, p.33.

flourishing, the lover must not merely respect him in his otherness, but must also *desire* and *encourage* him to love what is outside of him (which clearly includes, but is not limited to, the lover). The lover must promote that which makes the other's individual distinctness possible: his loving relatedness. Where this is not the case the flourishing of the beloved is hindered and not truly desired. Furthermore, and as David Bentley Hart points out, where the other's response to my love is, as in Levinas, neither 'expect[ed]' nor 'want[ed]', 'the other is not really "other" at all [...] but the infinite orientation of "my ethical adventure"; 'by expecting nothing of the other, wanting nothing, I leave the other behind; and stripped of the dignity of the desirable [...], the other becomes merely my "occasion"'.<sup>993</sup> The legitimacy of the desire for a reciprocation of one's love is, finally, underlined also by Marcel's observation that the lover's self-worth, which I have argued to be a central prerequisite for his ability to love, does not derive simply from being loved but from 'being loved by other beings who are loved by me'.<sup>994</sup>

The above arguments indicate that the subject's desire to *be* loved, which includes the desire to be loved by one's beloved and, thus, the desire for communion, plays not only a legitimate but an important and indeed revelatory role in selfless love. This desire of the subject is properly geared first and foremost towards the Good of the other. The lover must desire the reciprocation of his love for nothing less than the sake of the beloved. Where this is the case the desire to be loved is channelled towards Good as such, including that of the self. It is by virtue of its very quest for the other's Good, therefore, that selfless love tends towards a reciprocity, which benefits both self and other, such that selfless love can be said to manifest itself most fully in the context of friendship. As will become more apparent in sections 8.2.2 and 8.2.3, the structure of

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<sup>993</sup> David Bentley Hart (2003) *The Beauty of the Infinite: the Aesthetics of Christian truth*. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, pp.81f. Although I would agree that selfless love must entail an openness to the possibility of self-sacrifice, I would thus reject Niebuhr's notion that mutuality cannot be pursued directly but can legitimately emerge only where it is based on self-sacrifice, which he believes prevents the individual from natural morality's expectation of or demand for *mutuality* (Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, p.69).

<sup>994</sup> Marcel, *Mystery of Being*, p.8.

reciprocity is triangular, then, involving not merely two but at least three realities: self, other(s), and the transcendent Good in which both meet.

Underlining that selfless love cannot be founded on, and cannot ultimately consist in, a one-directional self-emptying should make the notion of selfless love more palatable to feminists such as Margaret Farley, who insists that agape must be pictured ‘as a full mutuality marked by equality between the sexes’ and that agape implies ‘that all parties in a loving relationship display both active and receptive qualities’.<sup>995</sup> ‘Receiving and giving’, Farley further argues, ‘are but two sides of one reality which is other-centred love’.<sup>996</sup> My above discussion confirms that feminist writers, such as Andolsen or Coakley, are right to point out that features like ‘openness and vulnerability’, or a ‘dependence upon love from others’ are no selfish indulgences, but challenge precisely the individual’s selfish self-enclosedness.<sup>997</sup> It does however imply the acknowledgement that one’s own self is as essential to a relation as the other’s self. Meanwhile, my claim that selfless love must include an affirmation of receptivity and reciprocity does not necessarily entail the risks Tillich and Murdoch—the latter in particular—might want to ascribe to it. This becomes clear especially through a more precise clarification of what I mean by reciprocity and what I consider to be misconceptions of the concept.

### *Clarifying reciprocity*

Affirmations of reciprocity, such as found, for instance, in the personalist movement, have been perceived as potentially endangering love’s gratuitousness (reciprocation becoming a condition for love), and as leading to a denigration of non-reciprocal relations. Such concerns constitute the tenor also of Murdoch’s criticisms of Martin

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<sup>995</sup> Andolsen, ‘Agape’, p.77.

<sup>996</sup> Farley in Andolsen, ‘Agape’, p.77.

<sup>997</sup> Andolsen, ‘Agape’, p.78. e.g. Coakley, ‘Kenosis: Theological Meanings’, pp.206, 208. See also Aristotle Papanikolaou ‘Person, kenosis and Abuse: Hans Urs von Balthasar and Feminist theologies in conversation’, *Modern Theology* Vol.19, No.1 (2003).

Buber's notion of dialogical relation as the foundation of human personhood.<sup>998</sup> Nonetheless, it is precisely Buber's thought which is helpful to allaying some of these fears, the upshot being that Murdoch's reading of Buber must be judged to be, as at least partly, misguided.

Firstly, asserting the special relevance of reciprocity does not amount to making it the condition of one's love. It is true that where love is defined in Sartre's terms, that is, as 'the demand to be loved', and where another's love thus becomes the precondition for one's loving him, love is ultimately rendered impossible. The ontological foundation this thesis has sought to give to selfless love means precisely that no such external contingencies exonerate the human being from being called to approach the other with selfless love. An affirmation of reciprocal relations no more implies that love can legitimately be withheld where it is not returned, than it legitimises a retreat into self-serving privacy. The ontological connectedness of self and other applies to *all* others and means that truthful being consists in facing the entire world in the spirit of selfless love. Reciprocity as I propose it here is not, therefore, the "tit-for-tat" reciprocity based on enlightened self-interest', that Stephen Pope critically describes, and commending it as the consummation of love does not imply the imposition of 'limits to what the agent ought to do on behalf of the other'.<sup>999</sup> In the same vein, the assertion that, in its fullness, selfless love is reciprocal does not mean love is 'based upon the reasonable expectation that one will receive a return in proportion to what one gives to the other' in the manner Andolsen suggests.<sup>1000</sup> Rather, it includes the subject's purgation from selfishness.

The notion that affirmations of reciprocity imply an undue elevation of symmetrical relations, which devalues not only relations with the weak and vulnerable

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<sup>998</sup> Martin Buber (1961) *Between Man and Man*. Collins, London, p.39; (1937) *I and Thou*. T&T Clark, Edinburgh, p.62; Murdoch, *MGM*, pp.461-480; Levinas has, among other things, also criticised Buber for giving too spiritualised an account of true human relationship. See Emmanuel Levinas 'Martin Buber and the Theory of Knowledge' in Maurice Friedman, Paul Arthur Schilpp (eds.) (1967) *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*. Open Court, La Salle, esp. pp.147-150.

<sup>999</sup> Pope, *Human Evolution and Christian Ethics*, pp.239f.

<sup>1000</sup> Andolsen, 'Agape', pp.69, 71.

but also with non-humans, is equally unnecessary.<sup>1001</sup> It is particularly in this respect that Buber's thought is helpful. Buber fiercely rejects the notion of 'love without dialogue' and, not unlike Tillich, whose familiarity with Buber's thought suggests he has drawn on Buber in this respect, suggests that true dialogue is interdependent with the *personhood* of the individual.<sup>1002</sup> The fully personal self emerges in the context of 'mutual' or dialogical relations: where the human being says 'Thou' to the other, or where he opens and gives himself to her, the other will respond in a similar way, such that a mutual relation emerges in which self and other reveal their very being to one another.<sup>1003</sup>

This dialogue, which is so critical for the human being's true personhood, does not necessarily consist in a visible and conscious exchange between two human parties of similar standing.<sup>1004</sup> It consists in a 'mutuality of inner action', which need not be given orally or even consciously, and which can indeed include love relations even with non-human beings such as animals or trees.<sup>1005</sup> Buber grounds this in an appeal to a reality, which transcends the finite other and which he identifies as God: where I meet a finite reality as a 'Thou', it is not only this finite other who reveals himself to me, but also God, the 'eternal Thou', who reveals Himself in the other.<sup>1006</sup> Where the other does not visibly or consciously respond to my saying 'Thou', God's presence in what Buber calls the 'between' of self and other, nonetheless, allows a revelation also of the finite other's being. It is in and through this divine presence, then, that dialogue can take place even where one or both parties are not explicitly aware of it, and it is in and through the

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<sup>1001</sup> It can be argued that Barth, who emphasises the need for verbal speech in I-Thou relations, thinks of these as symmetrical (see Barth, *CD III/2*, pp.222-284). As I will argue in the following, doing so is unnecessary, however.

<sup>1002</sup> Buber, *Between Man and Man*, p.39. In direct reference to Buber, Tillich indeed states that 'there is no other way of becoming an "I" than by meeting a "Thou" and by accepting it as such, and there is no other way of meeting and accepting a "Thou" than by meeting and accepting the "eternal Thou" in the finite "Thou"' (Paul Tillich 'An Evaluation of Martin Buber: Protestant and Jewish Thought' in Paul Tillich (1959) *Theology of Culture* (ed. Robert Kimball). OUP, New York, p.189). He, similarly, writes that 'he who cannot relate himself as an 'I' to a 'thou' cannot relate himself to the true and the good and to the ground of being in which they are rooted' (Tillich, *LPJ*, p.31). Yet, as already noted in Chapter 5, he not only fails to flesh out this insight, but also obstructs it by his de-emphasis on the personal.

<sup>1003</sup> Buber, *I and Thou*, pp.6-8, 33.

<sup>1004</sup> Buber, *Between Man and Man*, p.19f, 25

<sup>1005</sup> Buber, *Between Man and Man*, p.27.

<sup>1006</sup> Buber, *I and Thou*, pp.6, 75f.

various ‘moments’ of dialogue with others that ‘there arises for us with a single identity the Lord of the voice, the One’.<sup>1007</sup> The reciprocity enabled by the I-Thou relation does not, then, equal ‘speech’ in the sense of conversation.<sup>1008</sup> Though a tree’s response is both invisible and unconscious, the tree addressed as Thou will, like God Himself, nonetheless be a genuinely active partner in dialogue.<sup>1009</sup> Though in a different, and arguably less complete, way, a tree can, according to Buber, also be loved and respond to a selfless kind of love therefore.<sup>1010</sup>

Finally, valuing reciprocal relations as possessing special significance does not necessarily correspond with a rejection or depreciation of non-reciprocal relations. In this respect it is necessary to move beyond Buber: while Buber does not, contrary to Murdoch, *reject* I-It relations, it is true that his elevation of I-Thou relations over I-It relations comes at the cost of making positive sense of the non-mutual but, as he himself admits, inevitable I-It relations. Instead of exploring the positive value of non-reciprocal relations, Buber looks for a way of fitting even relations with inanimate objects into I-Thou relations (for which he is criticised by Franz Rosenzweig).<sup>1011</sup> Rather problematically, this attempt of Buber’s appears to imply also that, where the other does not respond to my love, I have failed in meeting them as a Thou. Although Murdoch appears to give greater value to such non-reciprocal relations, even she does not fully unravel why these might be morally relevant. I have suggested that she considers them to mirror our supposedly non-mutual relation with transcendent Good, yet she thereby neglects the fact that she herself also considers Good to attract the subject and to evoke joy, thus entailing at least some degree of mutuality. Such an explanation would moreover imply a problematic *elevation* of non-mutual over mutual relations.

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<sup>1007</sup> Buber, *Between Man and Man*, p.33; *I and Thou*, p.119; p.32f.

<sup>1008</sup> Buber, *Between Man and Man*, p.19; cf. Murdoch, *MGM*, p.463.

<sup>1009</sup> e.g. Buber, *Between Man and Man*, pp.25, 27.

<sup>1010</sup> Buber, *I and Thou*, pp.6f. Cf. Also *I and Thou*, p.103, where Buber states that ‘the relation with man is the real simile of the relation with God’.

<sup>1011</sup> Franz Rosenzweig to Martin Buber in September 1922 in Martin Buber (1973) *Briefwechsel aus sieben Jahrzehnten* (ed. Grete Schaeder). Band II: 1918-1938. Lambert Schneider, Heidelberg, pp.124-128.

A more satisfactory (and Murdoch-inspired) explanation of the moral significance of non-reciprocal relations might be that non-mutual relationships can be a valuable precursor to entering into a mutuality with Good in that they aid the purgation from selfishness—a purgation necessary for the encounter with Good to become possible in the first place. This interpretation would underline Murdoch's view that, in order for Good to become present to us in and through the other, long efforts of unselfing are required. As Murdoch portrays it, the individual must look at the other with the distance entailed in a subject-object relation before she has sufficiently died to self. Unreciprocated love could, on Murdoch's terms, be seen to unselfe the lover and lead her towards Good by enforcing a certain distance between lover and beloved. In this sense, relations in which the other does not give the desired response may also bear opportunities for growth by underlining our separateness from Good and by, thus, serving as a reminder of Good's transcendence. Analogically speaking, they arguably also confront the lover with the reality of death (though from a Christian point of view this does not lend non-reciprocal relationships any ultimacy because death is not an endpoint). In this sense, they could be associated with the negative Sublime discussed by Fiddes.<sup>1012</sup>

Thus, we might, on Murdoch's own terms, give a place to non-reciprocal relations while stressing their penultimate and provisional place in the full making of relationships. While concerns about reciprocity such as mentioned above do indeed constitute potential ramifications for affirming reciprocal relations, they cannot, I suggest, be taken as the necessary and inevitable consequences of reciprocity. Rather, the dangers Murdoch discerns in this respect depend on the same corrupting forces that can take hold of any human relation, whether reciprocal or not, and do not, therefore,

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<sup>1012</sup> Fiddes, 'The Sublime and the Beautiful', p.133f.

warrant a rejection of reciprocity and its special value.<sup>1013</sup> Indeed, reciprocal relations are likely to be prevented from taking on, say, a selfish dimension where the individual is open to receiving love and, in the case of loving another, desires and encourages a return of love, but where he or she does not *demand* such a return.

### 8.2.2 The oneness of Good

My argument that selfless love can be considered conducive to human flourishing only where receptivity and reciprocity are affirmed as important elements in love corresponds with an impression already gained throughout our discussion of love and the self: the Good of self and other are intertwined. I now propose, secondly, that selfless love can only be fully compatible with human flourishing if the above emphasis on reciprocity is conjoined with a more explicit affirmation of the oneness of Good and, thus, of the notion that the Good of the other involves the self and vice versa. Although this follows particularly from Murdoch's theory of Good, it is under-emphasised by Murdoch herself.

As Murdoch implies contra the successors of Moore (though not against Moore himself), the objectivity of Good is intertwined with its oneness.<sup>1014</sup> Murdoch's entire theory of the human being has been shown to rely on the notion that all desires find their harmonisation in the one Good. Only then can one maintain a moral philosophy as opposed to an ideology concerned merely with gratifying the various personal and subjective desires, Murdoch argues. Her preference for speaking, as she does almost exclusively, of 'Good' as such, rather than drawing a *contrast* between the Good of the self and the Good of the other, is entirely consistent with this.<sup>1015</sup> Nonetheless, Murdoch

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<sup>1013</sup> Murdoch's tendency to denigrate the value of the other's reciprocation of one's love on account of its being a *potential* occasion for selfishness is as philosophically defective, therefore, as Lovibond's criticism of Murdoch, i.e. that selfless love must be rejected because it *potentially* reinforces excessive self-effacement.

<sup>1014</sup> Murdoch, *SoG*, p.41.

<sup>1015</sup> We saw in Chapter 6 that Murdoch establishes the oneness of Good (but not God) through recourse to the ontological argument. As becomes evident in Altorf's discussion of Murdoch's interpretation of the

must be criticised for failing to clarify that the one Good precisely and necessarily includes the Good of *both* self *and* other: as I argued, she leaves the importance of the Good of the subject relatively unaddressed.

Against this, it should be called to mind that it is precisely on account of the oneness of Good that selfless love challenges any polarisations of the Good of lover and beloved. The human being cannot attain her Good without seeking the Good of the other because the Good of self and of other coincide rather than stand in oppositional rivalry; equally the other's Good cannot be had at the expense of, but necessarily entails, the Good of the self. Only where it is recognised that Good is never only mine but always also another's (and vice versa), can true Good, in its fullness, be attained. Good is a shared reality, and a veritable view of this shared reality abjures the idea that the other's Good depends on a sacrifice of the Good of the self.<sup>1016</sup> Equally, the shared nature of Good is incompatible with the notion of the Good as a private matter, potentially even threatened by the other.

The oneness of Good, thus, corresponds with, and underlines the, implications of the ontological interrelatedness of self and other: selfless love cannot lead to the lover's flourishing if it consists in a pursuit of the Good of one party as opposed to another. The point of the selflessly loving orientation towards the other is precisely to pursue Good as such, i.e. the one Good which lies outside and beyond the self, and which is found in the context of relationship with the other (or, as I shall shortly suggest, with Buber, in the space between self and other). Good, the selfless lover knows, must be sought in orientation to, and indeed *with*, the other, but does not exclude the lover's own Good. Indeed, the lover can legitimately undergo the re-orientation towards the

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argument, Murdoch considers this to point to a unified and unconditioned reality, which transcends the diversity of the various religious and philosophical traditions, as well as consciousness itself (Altorf, *Iris Murdoch and the Art of Imagining*, esp. pp.98-106).

<sup>1016</sup> This does not rule out the possibility of self-sacrifice. It does imply, however, that self-sacrifice is legitimate only where it is undertaken with a view to acting in accordance with the one Good. As such, a legitimate self-sacrifice will, in some way or other, be to the Good of the self as well as of the other. Ultimate sacrifice (in particular the giving of one's life), though possible, seem to call for a faith in a kind of flourishing which 'no eye has seen, nor ear heard [...]' (1 Cor 2:9).

other with the knowledge that this is also to his own benefit. This is different from suggesting that the Good of self and other are sought alongside one another, or that the pursuit of the other's Good can be integrated into a pursuit of one's own Good (or vice versa). Rather, it means that the pursuit of Good is always a matter of both concomitantly. This also means that where the moral subject perceives a supposed act of love to be bad for himself, this act cannot fully benefit the other (and, again, vice versa). At the same time, the oneness of Good means that, while serving the Good of both self and other, the reach of selfless love always also transcends the Good of these two parties.

Recognising the unity and oneness of Good thus rules out any notion that the lover must not benefit from her love. Instead, it indicates the actual unity of self-giving and self-affirming love, and corresponds with a love that seeks the Good of the self as person, who 'exists in the fullness only in the plural'.<sup>1017</sup> Meanwhile, the notion that the one Good is attained in and through relationship with the other explains why true self-love must, as proposed in the above discussion of Tillich and Murdoch, 'start[] from the other, or from others'.<sup>1018</sup> True self-love depends on 'humility', which, as Marcel rightly stresses, is at odds with any perception of self and other as separate and conflicting realities and which contradicts self-effacement as much as proud self-sufficiency.<sup>1019</sup> In sum, an affirmation of the oneness of Good is an important foundation for selfless love because it corresponds with the inter-relatedness of self and other and, thus, with the unity of self-love and other-love. As such, it also corresponds with an affirmation of reciprocity and the possibility of communion, and further clarifies that selfless love properly leads to the flourishing not only of one, but of all partners in a love relation.

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<sup>1017</sup> Norris Clarke, 'Person, Being and St Thomas', *Communio* Vol.19, No.4 (1992), p.610.

<sup>1018</sup> Marcel, *Mystery of Being*, pp.7f.

<sup>1019</sup> See Marcel, *Mystery of Being*, p.87.

### 8.2.3 A personal transcendent

I finally propose that selfless love does most justice to the personal potential of lover and beloved, and thus promotes human flourishing most fully, where the ‘ontological third reality’ to which both Murdoch and Tillich appeal is conceptualised as, analogically speaking, *personal*. I should state at the outset that in the following I am not actually *arguing* for the actual *existence* of a personal (transcendent) God, but simply showing how the traditional conception of a personal God helps avoid certain pitfalls and aids in the project of affirming selfless love. I am aware that the fact, that a certain notion (such as a personal God) can be helpful in making sense of selfless love, does not at all guarantee the idea’s truth, but indicates merely that this, in this case, Christian notion has something to contribute to this project’s coherence and tenableness. I am, furthermore, staying within Tillich’s and Murdoch’s parameters in that I am not proposing the ‘personal’ as a literal conception of the transcendent. Tillich himself increasingly realised that *all* language of the transcendent is symbolic. I suggest that this means that with regard to the transcendent, his privileging of the language of being over personal language is not only unhelpful, as argued above, but also somewhat arbitrary. Despite her insistence on the unreality of a personal God, Murdoch, too, does not fully depart from the language of ‘God’ and the ‘soul’ but continues to recognise the metaphorical relevance of this conceptuality. Configuring the transcendent in personal terms better reflects, I then propose, the personal nature and potential of self and human other, and thus roots these and the highest form of selfless love, which promotes these qualities, ontologically. Similarly, an account of the transcendent as personal gives a firmer foundation and greater cogency also to the above elements of reciprocity and of the oneness of Good.

The relevance of a correspondence between the personal nature of the human being and the configuration of the transcendent is underlined by the fact that both

Tillich and Murdoch have been found not only to depersonalise the human being, but also to speak of the transcendent in impersonal ways. The connection between a metaphysic of impersonal Good and a de-personalisation of the human being becomes particularly evident in Murdoch's thinking. Murdoch rightly stresses that 'a love which [...] treats [the beloved other] as an *end* not as a *means*, may be the most enlightening love of all', and is aware that if she were to posit that Good is encountered *through* the other she would violate the need to treat the other as an end in itself.<sup>1020</sup> She instead portrays Good as being encountered *in* the other, but in doing so, falls into the untoward situation in which the moral subject is provoked to look for what is impersonal in what is personal, and indeed to love the personal, human other as one would love Good—i.e. with an impersonal love, which loves the other 'for nothing' and without expectation of a response. This impersonal love of what is personal does injustice to common experience, which reveals that different realities affect us differently, and demand different responses, according to what they are, such as being personal.

Murdoch's metaphysic in this respect raises the question of the effect an impersonal Good has on our relations with the other in whom we are to encounter that Good. The fact that, where Good does, metaphorically speaking, address us, it does so 'without any neediness [as in the case of art], and so with a purity and authority we [who *are* needy] are unable to reciprocate', would, for instance, appear to work against mutuality in human relations.<sup>1021</sup> Indeed, Murdoch's conviction that Good is ultimately out of our reach and cannot be communed with leads her to hold that 'things have to be incomplete' such that the perfection, and union with, or resting in, the other, associated with reciprocal love does not in fact reflect or correspond with the nature of goodness.<sup>1022</sup> By contrast, I suggest that a transcendent conceived of in personal terms alerts us to the personal nature of others (and vice versa), and enables us to encounter

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<sup>1020</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, p.417.

<sup>1021</sup> Insole, 'Beyond Glass Doors', p.136.

<sup>1022</sup> Obumselu, 'Murdoch and Sartre', p.298f.

and treat them as personal and thereby to promote and draw out their own personal potential rather than imposing the impersonal nature of Good onto them.

*A foundation for reciprocity and the oneness of Good*

The notion that the transcendent is best thought of as personal is in line also with my above argument for the special value of reciprocity. Although possible also with non-personal realities, reciprocity can be most fully realised with beings or realities whose potential for simultaneous distinctness and relatedness matches or exceeds that of the human being.<sup>1023</sup> It is in the context of personal reciprocity that selfless love comes to its fullest expression and most enables the flourishing of the human self. In light of this, and of Tillich's and Murdoch's convincing claims that love is ontologically grounded, I would suggest that the transcendent, too, must be thought of as personal: if one uses the analogy of love with regard to relations with the Good (as Tillich and Murdoch do), then it is consistent to use the analogy of personalness in this context, too.<sup>1024</sup> Although the transcendent may, as Tillich implies, be more than personal<sup>1025</sup> (such that it can for instance be the source of being and fulfilment also of realities transcending the human *person*), it must be thought of as personal also—especially from the human point of view. It is no less scandalous to apply the analogy of love to relations with the Good than it is to apply the analogy of the personal to the Good. Only where the possibility of personal reciprocity is applied to the love relation with transcendent Good itself is Tillich's and Murdoch's claim done justice, that the transcendent is the telos of all true love and the foundation of the fullness of being of self and other.

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<sup>1023</sup> This corresponds particularly with Tillich's (and Buber's) notion that the fullness of individual selfhood consists in personhood and that this is interdependent with communion, or the 'encounter of person with person' (Tillich, *ST* III, p.43).

<sup>1024</sup> Pressing for consistency, Schwartz, too, asks why, 'if God as person is included in the more than a person, [...] can Tillich not concede that God is a person but also more than a person instead of saying that God is not a person but not less than one?' (Schwartz, 'Open Questions', p.188; as Schwartz points out, this was also asked by Carl Armbruster (1967) *The Vision of Paul Tillich*. Sheed and Ward, New York, p.153).

<sup>1025</sup> Tillich, *ST* I, p.271.

Configuring the transcendent as personal also adds cogency to the fact that the one Good is, as clarified above, always also the Good of the human subject. Since the human person's Good consists in an actualisation of her personal potential, the manner in which we speak of Good should reflect this. While the transcendent may, again, be 'more than' personal, the fact that the Good of the human being is personal suggests that the transcendent must also be thought of as personal and that it is, indeed, this quality of transcendent Good which is particularly relevant to the human being. If the language of love is central to conceptualising the origins of the human being, and if this applies particularly to the human being's relation with the transcendent, then personal language is, I would suggest, the most satisfactory and capacious language available to us for conceptualising both the human being and the transcendent. Only a transcendent conceived of as personal, i.e. an ultimate reality, which, though distinct from the human being, is—analogically—also pictured as relational, adequately reflects the human being's Good and the utmost or fullest object of her love.

### *The personal transcendent and the finite other*

The notion of a personal transcendent also enables the most satisfactory conceptualisation of the relation between the loving subject and her finite beloved. Underlining the personal nature of the human being's 'ground' and speaking, correspondingly, of the human being's relation with being-itself as one of communion would appear to foster a valuation also of those inter-personal relationships, which human beings commonly desire and which we know are crucial for human development. A personal account of the transcendent would furthermore help safeguard the other's individuality, an effort which demands a protection of the other's freedom not to respond to, or to reject, one's love. One of the most challenging aspects in basing the plea for selfless love on a relational anthropology indeed lies in respecting the other's

individual distinctness in this manner without thereby implying a) that the lover's flourishing *depends* on a contingent reality—a circumstance which could only result in that kind of frustration with, and attempt to liberate oneself from, one's relation with the other to which Sartre witnesses so passionately; and without implying b) that the lover's flourishing is *unaffected* by the other's response such that the lover can be indifferent to it—an assessment which would call into question the supposed ontological connectedness of self and other, and which is disproven by experience even as analysed by Sartre. Neither of these attitudes legitimately prompts selfless love.

The notion of a personal transcendent helps overcome such an apparent impasse by freeing the moral subject's relations with the worldly other to be as they are. While the person who stands in relation only to a finite other is forced to expect either too much or too little from this other, the person who stands in relation both to a finite other and to a personal transcendent can allow and desire the former's particular loving response to her love while being able to accept the lack of a conscious or visible response. The other plays a definite, but not an exhaustive or the exclusive, role in the emergence of her personhood. It is helpful in this respect to call to mind Buber's already mentioned notion that the personal self of the lover is bestowed by the divine third, which 'has its being *between* [the finite lover and beloved], and transcends both'.<sup>1026</sup> Although Buber considers the *mutual* love between self and (finite) other the necessary context for the development of the full, personal self, his understanding of transcendent reality as personal and responsive frees him from tying the constitution of the self to the other's concretely visible response. It is not merely the finite but also the divine Other who speaks to the lover and indeed reveals both Himself and the finite other to the lover.

With respect to selfless love as the foundation for human flourishing, an account of being as personal thus permits the following interpretation: the true self emerges in

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<sup>1026</sup> Emphasis added. Buber, *Between Man and Man*, p.246.

the *context* of selfless love of the finite other—a context which enables the reception of the love of the personal transcendent. It emerges not solely *on account* of the finite beloved, but on account, primarily, of the love of the personal transcendent, which enables the self-revelation of the beloved to the lover, and which thus responds to the lover irrespective of whether the beloved himself consciously engages in such a response. This makes clearer in particular why seemingly non-reciprocal relations can and do directly contribute to the flourishing of the human person: where the finite other is lovingly addressed as a Thou, the transcendent, which bestows the fullness of human being, responds in and through the finite other even where the finite other does not respond in an openly visible way. The finite beloved is freed from undue pressures to respond to the love of another in a particular way, since the lover is not wholly dependent on her conscious and visible return of his love.

This picture should not render the lover indifferent to the outwardly experienced response of the beloved since their stance does affect the lover and his flourishing. This is because where such a response takes place it manifests and makes visible the divine response in a manner appropriate to the human being's embodied and emotional nature. The conscious and personal nature of the finite other's loving response allows the lover to taste Good in its fullness, which includes its shared and incarnate nature. The embodied and personal nature of the human being means that where the finite beloved does not visibly participate in the relationship, both lover and beloved will be more likely to struggle to perceive and receive the love of the transcendent and, thus, to allow themselves to be transformed. The more fully self and finite other recognise and act on the fact that the fullness of their being depends on their turning towards and opening themselves to each other in selfless love, the greater their receptivity for the life-giving love of the transcendent Other. Where the transcendent itself is conceived of as a personal respondent encountered in and through the finite other, their lack of active

participation in the relationship can be genuinely respected while such participation nonetheless matters and is desired as a part of the fullness of a loving relationship.

### *The transcendent as Trinity*

The notion of a personal transcendent reaches its acme in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, which expresses the personal nature of the transcendent, not only in terms of a relationship between God and world, but also in terms of an internal relationality. Since this posits, as Fiddes and others have pointed out, ‘the persons in God [to be] nothing less than relationships’, the doctrine of the Trinity is congruent with and underlines a sense shared also by Murdoch ‘that th[e] wholeness [of God—or Good] cannot be objectified or envisaged in the mind’s eye’.<sup>1027</sup> In characterising the divine life itself as relational and marked by a reciprocity of giving and receiving, the doctrine of the Trinity, at the same time, makes yet more apparent why it is that the gift of selfless love must entail also a reception of love, such that selfless love ultimately tends towards reciprocity. The Father and the Son, who signify a giving and a receiving of love respectively, are expressive of the fact that these two movements are mutually implied, one in the other: there is no father without a son and vice versa. Accordingly, the human being’s gift of love, which seeks the Good of the other, imitates in particular the love of the Father, in whom the lover, through loving, participates.<sup>1028</sup> In turn, the beloved’s active reception of this love (or indeed the lover’s prior reception of selfless love) constitutes a participation in God the Son, who is called the ‘beloved’. Imitating that of Father and Son, the relation between lover and beloved can, in the spirit of Tillich’s notion of the

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<sup>1027</sup> Fiddes, ‘The Sublime and the Beautiful’, p.141. On the idea of person as relation being apophatic as well as kataphatic see also Paul Fiddes (2000) *Participating in God. A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity*. Darton, Longman and Todd, London, esp. p.45.

<sup>1028</sup> see e.g. Yves Congar (1983) *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*. Vol III. Herder and Herder, New York. Congar mentions Nygren as having validly shown that agape is ‘love as the source without antecedent’ (Ibid., p.140).

‘Spiritual Presence’, be said to make present God the Spirit who brings forth the flourishing of both lover and beloved.

That the divine love is thus intertwined with, and received in, the context of *concrete* mutual relations with finite others in the *world* reflects the fact that we are not merely spiritual but embodied beings, who do not (primarily) encounter God in the abstract. The Christian notion of the Trinity furthermore confirms not only that love presses for an ongoing and ceaseless reciprocity between lovers, but also that the fullness of being involves at least three rather than merely two partners in relation. The three-fold relational structure, which we found beneficial to the relation between self and other is indeed mysteriously mirrored within the divine life, when conceived of as Trinity. By conceptualising the unity of the transcendent in terms of a unity that is not abstract and absolute but complex and relational, Christian thought ties together my above two points about love’s culmination in reciprocity and its rootedness in the unity of Good. With the doctrine of the Trinity, Christian thought also highlights the notion that the fullness of being is a state wherein all (rather than merely select) relations are marked by a mutuality of selfless love.

It is noteworthy that the above and other features have also led Christian feminists to perceive the doctrine of the Trinity and the mutuality it implies as a particularly important image of right relationships. As already indicated, Margaret Farley, for instance, asserts that the three persons of the Trinity engage in a reciprocal giving and receiving of love.<sup>1029</sup> Elizabeth Johnson sees in the doctrine of the Trinity ‘a symbolic picture of totally shared life at the heart of the universe’.<sup>1030</sup> The Trinity overcomes any notions of rigid duality between God and humankind, man and woman, and instead, emphasises ‘the connectedness of all that exists in the universe’ as one of

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<sup>1029</sup> Farley, ‘New patterns of relationship’, pp.66f.

<sup>1030</sup> Johnson, *She Who Is*, p.222.

‘pure relationality’ and mutuality between ‘different equals’, Johnson argues.<sup>1031</sup> The Trinity is here considered to convey that relation is the very fabric of reality and, in its right formation, holds the key to ‘the flourishing of all creatures’.<sup>1032</sup> In reference to Gregory of Nyssa’s account of the Trinity, Sarah Coakley has related the doctrine of the Trinity to contemporary discourse on gender, arguing that the Trinity breaks open ‘the world’s gender binary’ and introduces ‘gender fluidities and reversals’.<sup>1033</sup> Janet Soskice, too, has recently invoked the Trinity as undermining hierarchy, as ‘exceed[ing]’ gender, as elevating ‘complete mutuality’ without denying difference.<sup>1034</sup> The doctrine of the Trinity thus remains relevant also to the most recent concerns of contemporary feminist theology.

### *Compatibility with Tillich and Murdoch*

As I argued, Tillich’s claim that the abstract language of being allows for a better grasp of the transcendent than personal language, stands in tension with his own characterisation of the human telos as one of personhood. The proposition that the transcendent, which both Tillich and Murdoch consider to be the source and telos of the human being’s reality, be conceived of in personal terms does not, therefore, contradict, but is indeed in greater line with, and undergirds, a central insight of Tillich’s own. As Schwartz points out, as Tillich moves from volume one to volume two of the *Systematic Theology*, he himself comes to realise ‘that a two-fold access to God, non-symbolic and symbolic, is impossible’ and concludes that all language of God is symbolic.<sup>1035</sup> Tillich thereby opens the door to a more resolutely personal language of God.

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<sup>1031</sup> Johnson, *She Who Is*, p.222.

<sup>1032</sup> Johnson, *She Who Is*, p.223.

<sup>1033</sup> Sarah Coakley ‘Why gift? Gift, gender and trinitarian relations in Milbank and Tanner’, *Scottish Journal of Theology* Vol.61, No.2 (2008), pp.234; ‘Re-thinking Gregory of Nyssa: Introduction—Gender, Trinitarian Analogies and the Pedagogy of the Song’, *Modern Theology* Vol.18, No.4 (2002), p.439.

<sup>1034</sup> Janet Soskice (2007) *The Kindness of God. Metaphor, Gender and Religious Language*. OUP, Oxford, pp.113, 117.

<sup>1035</sup> Schwartz, ‘Open Questions’, p.188.

The proposal that the transcendent be conceived of as personal constitutes a more definite break with Murdoch. Her explicit rejection of such an idea, however, lacks a firm philosophical foundation and is, instead, based primarily on a concern about selfish elevations of the ego. This is made evident by the fact that Murdoch passes over the question of the origin of being; that she gives no account of what it is that makes the depraved human being capable of undergoing the hard work of attention, and with this, what accounts for the origins of the will and intellect; and that she leaves the tension between our supposedly intrinsic desire for Good and natural selfishness unexamined. As Insole rightly argues when analysing Murdoch's rendition of the ontological argument, her philosophically wanting foundation for Good leaves her unable to substantiate Good: doing so would, again, mean giving in 'to the forces of self-gratification, vanity and destructive self-love' and, thus, to seeing the world according to the fantasies of the 'fat relentless ego' rather than 'as it really is'.<sup>1036</sup> According to Insole, Murdoch thus makes faith in Good impossible.<sup>1037</sup>

In light of the fact that Murdoch's assertion of Good is more a precaution against selfishness than a consistently argued philosophical conclusion, it is unsurprising, perhaps, that Murdoch has been found 'to retain in the notion of the Good a central concept with the characteristics of the old God'.<sup>1038</sup> Her attempt to do away with the personal nature of the transcendent while holding on to ideas traditionally rooted in this (such as selfless love or Good's incarnate nature), has been found to put her into various difficulties, however. As Mulhall, for instances, notes, Murdoch's adoption of Weil's sense that 'the void can give spiritual succour' lacks the coherence it receives from

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<sup>1036</sup> Insole, 'Beyond Glass Doors', p.132.

<sup>1037</sup> While my discussion will have indicated that I do not share Insole's verdict that Murdoch thereby heightens the 'neo-Protestant' and Nygrenian notion of the utter worthlessness of the human being, I am more inclined to follow him in his claim that Murdoch's interpretation of the ontological argument amounts to denouncing faith as sin (Insole, 'Beyond Glass Doors', p.132). For Murdoch, to 'believe in the possibility of the perfection and transcendence towards which we must strive [...] is precisely to violate (by introducing 'metaphysical form') the very perfection that we are striving for', Insole rightly establishes (Insole, 'Beyond Glass Doors', p.132).

<sup>1038</sup> Altorf, *Iris Murdoch and the Art of Imagining*, p.97 (cf. Murdoch, *EM*, p.344).

Christianity's ability to 'incorporate[...] the ultimate human experience of reality's resistance to meaning and value within the life of God' who died on the cross and rose to life.<sup>1039</sup> A more personally conceived transcendent would not only better confront some of these problems, but would also not necessarily be faced with the numerous philosophical obstacles suggested by the vehemence of Murdoch's rejection of the idea.

### 8.3 Metaphysical underpinnings

Above I have made proposals bolstering the notion that selfless love is conducive to the flourishing of both lover and beloved. These include an affirmation of reciprocity, the acknowledgment of the oneness of Good, and a conceptualisation of the transcendent as personal. All of these factors are geared towards strengthening the kind of ontology, which the argument of this thesis has implied is the necessary foundation for selfless love. This is an ontology which posits the simultaneous individual distinctness and social relatedness of the human self:<sup>1040</sup> human beings can enter into a state of communion without losing their individuality. Indeed, their individuality is interdependent on their mutual participation in one another. This has been shown to mean also that it is only where the existential human being actively participates in the other—that is, where she acts out her ontological relation with the other—that her full, individual selfhood is existentially realised. As already implied in the above discussion, such an ontology corresponds, I now finally suggest, with a participatory metaphysics, which constitutes an alternative to Sartre's more isolationist ontology.

Sartre, we found, recognises that self and other inevitably stand in relation to one another. But by rejecting the notion of a transcendent source of being, he denies that they have a common ontological ground, and thus opposes subject and object as marked

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<sup>1039</sup> Mulhall, 'All the World', p.34.

<sup>1040</sup> The embodied nature of the human being corresponds with such an ontology: the human body simultaneously demarcates the boundaries of the individual as a distinct and inviolable entity and enables the human being to relate to and commune and unite with others. In light of this, it is no surprise that Sartre struggles with the human being's bodily dimension.

by mutually exclusive forms of being, whose relationship is necessarily one of conflict. Since each being-for-itself is supposedly autonomous rather than being rooted in, and thus intrinsically related to, a transcendent ground of being, individual beings are necessarily alien realities to one another which can only impinge on and threaten each other's individual distinctness. Selfless love must be rejected precisely where it is based upon such an ontology which posits that the self is cut off from all other beings and cannot open itself to others without itself disintegrating through the invasive force of the alien other—an ontology Sartre can be argued to share with Nygren.

With Tillich and Murdoch I have sought a counterproposal to this: namely, an ontology which implies that the more a person enters into relations with others, the more developed her individual distinctness is, and vice versa. Only such an ontology constitutes a viable foundation for selfless love. Based on the rootedness of individuality and active relatedness in being itself, such an ontology corresponds with a participatory metaphysics. By this I mean the view that the human being is embedded in a universe ontologically characterised by, and destined for, mutual relationship and communion between distinct realities, the source of whose being is itself of a relational nature and stands in mutual relations with the distinct realities of the world. Tillich and Murdoch realise this and develop such a metaphysics, though I have argued that their proposals gain in internal coherency and are tightened such that they constitute a more viable foundation for selfless love where their thought is amended according to my above suggestions. Only a metaphysics which gives an ontological foundation to the view that the human being's flourishing depends on turning towards, and lies in communion with, the finite other can justify the call to selfless love.

Asserting and developing such a participatory metaphysics implies no mere rejection of Sartre's account. Such a metaphysics is congruent with, indeed even draws on, Sartre's reluctant awareness that self and other necessarily stand in relation to one

another and cannot but affect one another, and that the human being cannot attain her true self autonomously but that this emerges in and through relations with others. It also allows for the recognition that there is such a thing as what Marcel calls a ‘pathology of giving’, which ends in a ‘moral suicide where one person abdicates and annuls himself completely for the benefit of another’.<sup>1041</sup> However, such a metaphysics also accommodates Tillich’s view that Sartre’s perspective on mutual self-giving encompasses merely the fallen state of human life, and that, notwithstanding such pathologies, a different kind of creative giving and receiving is possible and necessary, which transforms the mutual affectation of self and other into something beneficial to both. Such a transformation constitutes, it appears to me, the proper meaning and goal of selfless love.

The participatory metaphysic which I suggest constitutes the most viable foundation for a call to selfless love can be identified with what Gabriel Marcel calls an ‘anti-Cartesian’ ‘metaphysic of “we are” rather than “I think”’.<sup>1042</sup> This implies that the human individual is capable of communion with others, and that human flourishing positively correlates with a realisation of the human potential for communion. Human flourishing then depends, not on a suppression of the other’s influence on the self, but on a welcoming of this influence, and is no matter of private but of shared experience. At the same time, it remains the flourishing of the human being as individual, that is, as a distinct being with personal needs. Such a metaphysic then also supports the notion that the true self is neither an autonomous creation nor simply determined heteronomously, but that it emerges in the context of relations which the person must fully enter into freely and shape creatively.

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<sup>1041</sup> Marcel, *Mystery of Being*, p.100.

<sup>1042</sup> Marcel, *Mystery of Being*, p.9.

#### 8.4 Conclusion: Selfless love and human flourishing

I conclude that the validity of understanding ‘selfless love’ as the foundation of human flourishing depends, firstly, on whether an ontology is possible which, as outlined throughout this thesis and summarised above, entails neither the autonomy of the human individual, nor the heteronomy of the o/Other. With Tillich and Murdoch I have sought to show that such an ontology can, to a significant degree, incorporate the modernist perception that the self is a modifiable reality easily affected and, indeed, defined by its relations with what lies outside it, and from which Sartre concluded that selfless love threatens the flourishing of the self. If the ontology outlined above—that is, an ontology positing the compatibility of individual distinctness and relatedness—truthfully reflects the reality of the human self, then selfless love is a critical prerequisite for human flourishing.

However, while such a relational ontology can and has been argued for, selfless love will, nonetheless, fail where the ontological truth underlying it is not realised existentially. Such a realisation would, however, appear to depend on *experiences* of loving relation with the other, which also include the subject’s relationship with the ground of being itself. It is in such experiences that ‘the self that I could possibly be or become’ is ‘revealed’.<sup>1043</sup> Only where the human being has attained experiential insight into the ontological inter-dependence of distinctness and relatedness can attempts at selfless love be fruitful. They would, by contrast, seem to have destructive effects precisely in those instances where they are undertaken apart from any (conscious or unconscious) existential recognition of the ontological integration of self and other, which in turn depends on a prior reception of love. This, too, is meant by the affirmation that selfless love must emerge out of the person’s innermost depths and that it is erotic as well as

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<sup>1043</sup> Pattison, *God and Being*, p.231.

agapeic. The fruitfulness of selfless love is thus, secondly, dependent on experiences of loving relationship with the other.

This also underlines the need, thirdly, for selflessness and love to be connected. Where it is not rooted in some kind of affective element, selflessness arguably degenerates into precisely the kind of destructive moral norm feminists rightly object to. While the person who has existentially received and experienced selfless love will know that the human being is called to selfless love, one cannot make a moral demand or duty of selfless love as such. Showing that selfless love is an ontologically and existentially grounded reality is crucial to preventing such dangerous moralistic impoverishments of the concept. Selfless love as here proposed must, then, always be rooted both in my having love in me *and* in a concern for the other. In uniting eros and agape, or eros and attention, it transcends these seemingly binary options.

Our analyses of Tillich's and Murdoch's ontological-existential inquiries into selfless love have, fourthly and finally, suggested that it is only where the 'selfless' quality of selfless love is understood in a certain sense that the concept can be vindicated as compatible with, and indeed conducive to, human flourishing. The discussion in this thesis has yielded, or alerted us to, three distinct understandings of selflessness. The first of these consists in the human being's lack of what I have called the ego-self, and, thus, in a somewhat more literal selflessness. As far as understandings of the self as an a priori, self-contained, object-like and autonomous reality are concerned, the human being is indeed selfless, so Sartre, Tillich and Murdoch agree. In this respect all three authors can be contextualised within late modernity's revolt against Cartesian approaches to the self. At the same time, both Tillich and Murdoch have proposed something not unlike Josef Pieper's argument that 'only in reference to an inside can there be an outside' and that 'the higher the form of intrinsic existence, the more developed becomes the relatedness to reality [...] And the deeper such relations penetrate the world of reality, the more

intrinsic becomes the subject's existence'.<sup>1044</sup> Both Tillich and Murdoch have suggested that it is nothing less than the self's substance which both necessitates and enables the human being's relatedness and, thus, her going out to the other in selfless love.

Selflessness in the second sense discussed in this thesis is a loving movement outward, towards the other, that is required by the nature of the true self. The true self, Tillich and Murdoch persuasively argued, emerges in and through loving relations with others, such that it cannot know or satisfy its true needs other than through a turn outwards and a self-opening to the other. Its personal nature means that this self 'cannot be looked on as primarily an isolated, self-sufficient individual, with freely chosen relations added on' but that it is 'intrinsically ordered towards togetherness with other human persons [...] i.e. toward friendship, community, and society'.<sup>1045</sup> It is a reality whose individuality and sociality cannot be thought apart from each other, such that the notion of self-interest apart from or even over against the other is, contrary to Nietzsche, ultimately senseless. Where, as in Tillich and Murdoch, existentialist insights into the developmental character of the self are taken to refer to the self's intrinsically relational or social character, polarisations of selfless and self-love do not hold. Selfless love is a love which entails self-giving, and which recognises the lack of a given and objectifiable self, but which, in doing so, precisely affirms and builds the true self.

The call to selflessness in this second sense of a turn towards the other results from the conviction that the true self cannot be attained, or even envisaged, irrespective of a respectful and loving relationship with the other. Sartre himself already recognised that his despairing efforts at controlling and objectifying the other did not really benefit the self insofar as the self depends on being recognised by the other freely. Yet while Sartre saw no other alternative, we have suggested with Tillich and Murdoch that our participation in, rather than control of, the other amounts to a participation also in the

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<sup>1044</sup> Pieper in Clarke, 'Being, Person and St Thomas', p.608.

<sup>1045</sup> Clarke, 'Being, Person and St Thomas', p.611.

ground of our *own* being—a ground we share with the other, and which constitutes the foundation of our own true selfhood. Selflessness in the sense of a loving orientation towards, and concern with, the other thus implies a self-transcending movement, which draws the self out of any misguided self-preoccupation or sense of self-sufficiency and brings the true, social self to the fore. It alone transforms the inevitable relations with the other in a constructive manner which does justice to the true nature and needs of the human self.

It is a third sense of selflessness, the total denial of the self and its needs, which I have rejected as destructive of both self and other and, hence, as incompatible with human flourishing. Where selflessness is for instance understood in terms of ‘contempt for the [...] self’ selfless love is destructive.<sup>1046</sup> I have sought to counter such an interpretation of selflessness by discussing selfless *love* (or selflessness and love combined), and by arguing that such love must incorporate features traditionally associated with eros, such as the self’s desire for fulfilment, as well as those considered typical of agape, such as the self’s orientation to and concern with the other. This has been shown to imply that selflessness must properly emerge from, include and fulfil, human desire, which, though not sufficient, properly constitutes the foundation for that self-opening and receptivity towards the o/Other without which the self cannot flourish. At the same time, selfless love as I have presented it is by no means easy, but combines ‘Buberian optimism about the possibilities of I-Thou communion and reciprocity’ with ‘a Levinasian sternness about the high cost of making room for the other in myself’ in a manner which has also been ascribed to the thought of Marcel.<sup>1047</sup>

It has been the argument of this thesis that selfless love can be considered to lead to human flourishing only where it is understood in the first two senses of ‘selflessness’ discussed above, and where it is pursued, not in the interest of self or other, but of Good

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<sup>1046</sup> Kern, *Liebe als Erkenntnis*, p.50.

<sup>1047</sup> Merold Westphal, Preface to Gabriel Marcel (2002) *Creative Fidelity*. Fordham University Press, New York, p.xiv.

as such. Selfless love depends on the recognition that human flourishing is a shared reality, and on loving the other at once because one desires to do so and because of love itself, or, as Murdoch would prefer, for the sake of Good as such. Love, or goodness, must be its own motivation and constitutes its own reward—a reward which nonetheless amounts to, or enables, the flourishing of lover or beloved. As Bernard of Clairvaux puts it,

True charity is never left with empty hands, and yet she is no hireling, out for pay, but ‘seeketh not her own.’ [...] True love seeks no reward; and yet it merits one. Nobody ever dreams of offering to pay for love; yet recompense is owed to him who loves, and he will get it if he perseveres.<sup>1048</sup>

This makes clear the redundancy of the question of whether a given form of love is selfish or disinterested.<sup>1049</sup> Love is necessarily motivated but it is motivated by love, which includes one’s desire for the fullness of being, identifiable with Good. Equally, love yields only the fruit of love itself, but it is precisely this which brings lover and beloved to the fullness of being. It is such a relationality of love which, given the nature of the human self, enables the flourishing of the individual person, and which I have argued can legitimately be described as selfless love.

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<sup>1048</sup> Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (1961) *On the Love of God*. Mowbray, London, pp.57f.

<sup>1049</sup> As has been argued by Catherine Osborne, *Eros Unveiled*, p.63.

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