

## **Tillich's account of love: Re-visiting 'selfless love'**

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This paper argues that Tillich's under-explored account of love is not only an instructive illustration of Tillich's project as a whole but also an original—and highly topical—attempt at showing the compatibility of Christian love and personal human fulfillment.

It is shown that, methodologically speaking, Tillich's intricate discussion of the nature of love reflects his unique blend of an ontological and an existentialist perspective, as well as his critical stance towards a self-isolating Christianity on the one hand and his no less critical openness to the most radically anti-Christian voices of his day on the other. In a masterful way, it both draws on, and turns on their head, thinkers as divergent as Anders Nygren and Jean-Paul Sartre, thus demonstrating Tillich's drive to offer what might be described as a revolutionary middle course.

The core of the paper situates Tillich's account of love in the context of a divide between Christian love and the needs of the concrete human individual, which Tillich seeks to overcome by viewing love and the self existentially, while rooting them ontologically, in being-itself. It is argued that a key resource in this endeavour lies in Tillich's creative reception of Sartre's view of the self as emerging both as the result of a tension between being and nothingness and in the context of the relationship with the other. This allows Tillich to intertwine an erotic desire for a greater fullness of self-being with an agapeic desire for the fulfillment of the other, and thus to integrate the Sartrean drive for self-assertion with the traditional Christian call to self-abandonment.

Against this background, the paper concludes with the bold suggestion that Tillich's account of love provides us with a fresh perspective on the notion of 'selfless love'—a perspective that shows anew why personal human fulfillment rests on a loving orientation towards the other. In doing so, Tillich's account of love helps counter the lingering perception that Christian characterizations of love as selfless are necessarily damaging, unlivable or both, as well as the altruism-egoism divide spurred by theologians as much as by strands of evolutionary biology. Tillich's notion of love is, so this paper shows, one indicator of the creative potential and continued relevancy of Tillich's thought.

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