

una certa distinzione tra i due termini, ma, ad un'altra, atterro decisamente che "l'ipostasi è sostanza e non significa altro che sostanza".⁸⁰ Come una soluzione giusta, Florenskij propone: *ousia* e *hypostasis* devono essere comprese come distinguibili ma, allo stesso tempo – per quanto riguarda il loro contenuto –, come inimmaginabili l'una senza l'altra. Di conseguenza, questi termini servono nel comprendere e formulare l'idea della "correlazione concreta delle tre ipostasi divine, del loro "essere – uno" ed "essere – distinte".⁸¹

La concezione dell'unità e distinzione tra le persone divine sono rimesse alla sua antropodicea, dove il punto di partenza è l'uomo con la sua conoscenza e il processo intellettuale della conoscenza del dogma, e le opere: filosofia, arte, letteratura, musica. Se in queste opere troviamo la mancanza di Dio, tutto ricade nella falsità e perde il suo vero senso, diventando peccaminoso, cioè compiuto secondo l'*homoioisios*. Solo l'armonia nelle relazioni umane, armonia nell'arte, musica ed estetica offre una prospettiva della realtà vera, cioè ci offre una verità del mondo in cui è presente Dio quale noi dobbiamo trovare, così diventando *homoioisios* per amore e collaborazione con la grazia del Creatore.

Anche oggi la politica ha bisogno di Dio, come punto di partenza e punto d'arrivo nelle norme morali e nel comportamento delle persone. Nel contesto delle guerre mondiali vediamo la sua mancanza, e invece solo una politica *homoioisiosana*, che disprezza il valore dell'uomo e calpesta la dignità umana. In tal caso bisogna che la Chiesa e le genti dimostrino la loro cristianità, essendo "il sale della terra" e combattendo la propaganda non cristiana.

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⁸⁰ Cf. *Colonna*, p. 52; cf. *Stolp*, p. 90; cf. L. Žák, *Verità come ethos*, p. 253.

⁸¹ Cf. *ibidem*, p. 254.



From "Lacking" to "Perfecting" Humanity: Soteriology in Philosophy

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1. Introduction

In the English language, the words "salvation" and "redemption" are part of daily vocabulary. For example, a shopper in a British supermarket can read on her receipt that she saved a certain sum of money on her shopping. A well-known charity "Save the Children" believes that our human acts of goodness can save the suffering children. The *Salvation Army* (one of the world's largest Christian social welfare organisations) in its eleventh article of faith speaks of "continuance in a state of salvation". In a book *A Song for Jenny*, the author Julie Nicholson whose daughter (Jenny) was killed in the London bombings of 7/7 in 2005 utters the following words: "I couldn't save Jenny but Jenny saved me".² Julie, a Church of England minister, who is finding difficult to come to terms with the loss of her daughter and with the fact that she couldn't save her, eventually, when recalling the lovingness of Julie, finds strength and is able to move on with her life. What do these examples tell us about salvation? They pose further questions: Is salvation some kind of a gain (the shopping receipt example)? Is it about protecting the vulnerable other ("Save the Children", "Salvation Army", and *A Song*

¹ The full statement is: *We believe that continuance in a state of salvation depends upon continued obedient faith in Christ*; <http://www.salvationarmy.org.uk/salvation-army-doctrines> (visited on 8 July 2015).

² J. Nicholson, *A Song for Jenny: A Mother's Story of Love and Loss in the 7/7 London Bombings*, Harper, London 2011, the reference here is made to the dramatized version of the story, "Song for Jenny" by the BBC, broadcasted on 5 July 2015; <http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/proginfo/2015/27/a-song-for-jenny> (visited on 5 July 2015).

r *Jenny*)? Does salvation belong to the human realm (in other words, can human beings perform salvific acts)? Or, does it require some form of intervention from beyond that realm? Is salvation an ongoing reality or a one-off event? "What" are we being saved from? "Who" is saving? Towards "what"? These are complex questions. This paper aims to address some of them.

We shall consider a sample of soteriological approaches in philosophy. Denis Moreau's works⁸ will be helpful in clarifying the concept of salvation and tidying up our vocabulary in this context. We shall aim to find out whether the idea of salvation makes any sense to us today. One of the reasons for turning to philosophy rather than theology is that theology is not clear on what salvation really is. This is not to say that theology has anything useful to offer on the subject of salvation. On the contrary, theology is a rich resource for treating the subject (as several contributors to this issue of *Studia Bobolanum* rightly argue). After all, salvation is the most basic tenet of the Christian doctrine. Yet, salvation is an ambiguous idea. One would look in vain for "salvation" or "redemption" amongst indexes of manuals and handbooks of moral theology (with one or two exceptions such as Bernard Haring's *Free and Faithful in Christ*). *A New Dictionary of Christian Ethics* has none⁹. The history of moral theological reflection suggests that the relationship between salvation and morality is not straightforward. Therefore, it seems appropriate to turn to philosophy in the hope that a basic soteriological clarification can be achieved.

2. Philosophers on salvation: a few general remarks

Denis Moreau in his *The Ways of Salvation*⁶ and "Clarifying the Concept of Salvation: A Philosophical Approach to the Power of Faith in Christ's Resurrection"⁷ examines a number of twentieth century philosophers and finds that salvation is a concern for many of them. For example, Jean-Paul Sartre, in his autobiography *The Words* claims that salvation was his life goal: "My sole concern has been to save myself – nothing in my hands, nothing up my sleeve – by work and faith. As a result, my pure choice did

⁸ See footnotes 5 and 6.

⁹ See B. Häring, *Free and Faithful in Christ: Moral Theology for Clergy and Laity*, vol. 1-3, Crossroad, New York: 1978, 1979, 1981.

¹⁰ J. Macquarrie, J. Childress (eds), *A New Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, SCM Press, London 2013.

¹¹ Id., Moreau, *Les Voies du salut*, Bayard, Paris 2010.

¹² Id., *Clarifying the Concept of Salvation: A Philosophical Approach to the Power of Faith in Christ's Resurrection*, „European Journal of Philosophy of Religion" 2011 n. 2-3, p. 387-407.

not raise me above anyone. Without equipment, without tools, I set all of me to work in order to save all of me"⁸. In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre mentions (though he doesn't develop it) an ethics of salvation: he speaks of "indifference, desire, hate, sadism" and says that "these considerations do not exclude the possibility of an ethics of deliverance and salvation. But this can be achieved only after a radical conversion which we cannot discuss here"⁹. Unfortunately, Sartre doesn't tell us how exactly a radical conversion brings about deliverance and salvation. But, it seems that salvation (as well as deliverance, presumably, from the obstacles to salvation) is the result of conversion. In order to be saved we need to be first converted (in a radical way) and freed from such states as "indifference, desire, hate, and sadism". Ludwig Wittgenstein, in his *Culture and Value* speaks of certainty as a necessary condition for salvation: "If I am to be really saved, what I need is certainty, not wisdom, dreams, or speculation. (...) For it is my soul with its passions, as it were with its flesh and blood, that has to be saved, not my abstract mind"¹⁰. Wittgenstein speaks of the embodied person (soul, flesh and blood) as being in need of salvation. Michel Foucault declares: "I know that knowledge has the power to transform us, that truth is not just a way of deciphering the world (...), but that, if I know the truth, then I will be transformed, maybe even saved. Or else I will die"¹¹. Interestingly, salvation here is a stage further after transformation. It is brought about by truth which is bigger than understanding. What is important to note here is that even if the writings of Sartre, Wittgenstein, and Foucault don't offer a clear and uniform approach to salvation, nevertheless, the idea of salvation is important for these philosophers.

Moreau notes that, historically, among the Greeks and Romans, the word "salvation" meant the state of being or remaining whole and in good health, physical as well as moral and spiritual. Salvation indicated both reaching a desirable way of life as well as the process of attaining it. It had to do with being either removed from a situation or released from a danger that separated one from salvation¹². Often that danger was the outcome not of a person's wickedness or the choices they made but was brought about by forces outside their control (bad luck) which made them vulnerable and

⁸ J.-P. Sartre, *The Words*, translated by B. Frechtman, Vintage Books, London 1981, p. 255.

⁹ Id., *Being and Nothingness*, translated by H. E. Barnes, Washington Square Press, New York 1956, p. 534.

¹⁰ L. Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, translated by P. Winch, Blackwell, Oxford 1974, p. 32-33.

¹¹ M. Foucault, *An Interview with Stephen Riggins*, „Ethos" Autumn 1983 n. 1/2.

¹² See D. Moreau, *Clarifying the Concept of Salvation*, p. 390.

thus in need of salvation. Martha Nussbaum discusses this kind of vulnerability in her *The Fragility of Goodness*¹³, and she suggests that the theme of vulnerability through bad fortune was dominant in much of classical Greek philosophy. Plato's philosophy is an attempt to address this problem and to show that there is a way of speaking about human values as unaffected by bad luck. There is perfect goodness which chance and change cannot alter. In other words, Plato attempts to find the source of value in a realm (Forms) which is not affected by the unstable influences of luck. Plato introduces a serious of distinctions such as material/immateral or body/soul, for which he is later criticised (by Nietzsche, for example) for endorsing a view of salvation as a kind of release or withdrawal from reality. Plato would probably disagree with such a reading of his philosophy. However, it is fair to say that there are accounts of salvation that perhaps misread Platonic dualisms and promote salvation in forms of escapism from the (embodied) reality. What is important to note at this point, in addition to what we indicated earlier (salvation as being superior to transformation, conversion and truth as what secures salvation, passions as obstacle to salvation) that salvation has to do with attaining something that is better, more stable, manageable, untroublesome, and most desirable.

Giles Fraser (in his *Redeeming Nietzsche*) detects a common pattern in stories of salvation. The pattern starts with an understanding that "humanity (or in some cases an individual person) has become alienated or estranged from something of fundamental importance" and ends with the description of "the means by which that alienation is overcome"¹⁴. Salvation is often presented as "becoming one with" (in Plato, it is the union with the Forms; in Christianity, it is oneness or mystical union with God). It is "being at one with something that has been lost, stolen, defaced or forgotten – hence at-one-ment"¹⁵. Foucault, as we saw earlier, evokes truth as the means of liberation (Christianity claims that Christ is that Truth, something that Nietzsche rejects). We can probably now answer some of the questions we posed at the start of this paper, especially the 'what from' and 'to what' questions. Salvation seems to be *from* "alienation", "instability" (chance and change), "unmanageableness" (both external, as in the case of luck, and internal). The aim ("to what" of salvation) is "at-one-ment", union, connection or reconnection.

¹³ M. C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1986.

¹⁴ G. Fraser, *Redeeming Nietzsche: On the Piety of Unbelief*, Routledge, London-New York 2012, p.45.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

We shall continue our elucidation of philosophical meaning(s) of salvation by turning again to Moreau. For him, salvation amounts to the "return to a desirable former state that had been lost (as when one is saved from a sickness or a shipwreck), the safeguarding of this state against a threat (as one saves one's freedom from a potential oppressor, or one's life from a danger), or, finally, the improvement attaining this state represents"¹⁶. This definition suggests that there are three movements pertaining to salvation: returning, safeguarding and improvement (we shall return to them later). Moreau points out that scholars speak about salvation in the negative sense whereby to be saved means to be "delivered and freed, rescued and ripped away from a dangerous situation", and the positive sense when "to be saved means being granted some good, reaching a state seen as beneficial or desirable, progressing from trials and wretchedness to a state of happiness and fulfilment"¹⁷. Moreau attempts to find both negative and positive aspects in any soteriology. Within this general framework he identifies several types of soteriology: auto-salvation (salvation is achieved through oneself), hetero-salvation (salvation is achieved through someone else, something external to the self), individual salvation, group or collective salvation, this world and other world-salvation, theo-soteriology and anthropo-soteriology, partial, and total salvation¹⁸. These are useful soteriological categories for grouping or locating the views on salvation. One category that is missing here and which is important for our discussion is the category of salvation-rejectors, those who claim that the concept of salvation is useless and needs discarding (we shall return to this claim in the course of this study).

We have noted earlier that Sartre, Wittgenstein, and Foucault are pro-salvation even if they don't elaborate on its meaning, something that Immanuel Kant, as we shall see next, does in a rather detailed way by turning to specific Christian (soteriological) doctrines of atonement, justification, and sanctification.

3. Immanuel Kant on Salvation

Kant in his *The Conflict of the Faculties and Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason*¹⁹, uses religious doctrines of salvation in order to show how

¹⁶ D. Moreau, *Clarifying the Concept of Salvation*, p. 390.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ See *ibidem*, p. 391.

¹⁹ I. Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, in: *Religion and Rational Theology*, the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1996, id, *Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason*, in: *ibidem*.

the Reason works²⁰. In line with what we said earlier about the human limitations, alienation or lacking humanity as the starting point in the pattern of salvation, Kant begins with precisely the same premise. He believes that human beings are corrupt. They tend to think of personal happiness first before they consider duties towards others. Even though good maxims (based on the categorical imperative) can help us to overcome our evil inclinations, we may have to appeal to "a higher, and for us inscrutable, assistance"²¹. So, even though Kant is indirectly endorsing the idea of auto-salvation when our acts pass the test of the categorical imperative, he is not hostile towards theo-soteriology; in fact he validates it when he suggests that we should appeal to a higher assistance if we are stuck in evil maxims. There is always a lacuna between good and evil maxims. John E. Hare calls this lacuna "the moral gap". He discusses it in his *The Moral Gap and God and Morality*²². He follows Kant's (and Kierkegaard's) approach when he explains that the gap in question is the gap between our desire to live good life or life that is pleasing to God (for him these two are the same thing) and our inability to lead such a life due to our imperfect condition. Hare shows how the soteriological doctrines help Kant to address this gap. Kantian notion of atonement, for example, has to do with "revolution of the will" which is basically "the reversal of the basic ground of all our maxims, and it is seen only by God. What we experience is the slow process of reform. Atonement presupposes that the revolution of the will has taken place"²³. According to Hare, Kant is assuming the logical priority of justification, the doctrine which would not be "usable by Reason if we did not translate God the Son as humanity in its moral perfection, and God the Father as the idea of holiness"²⁴. Hare explains that, for Kant, the doctrine of justification is a "way of saying that a human being comes to have a morally good disposition when the idea of holiness picks out her or his disposition as instantiating

²⁰ According to Kant we all are first subject to 'the evil maxim'; we put our own happiness first and then think of duty. We are corrupt and all specific maxims start with the evil ones. For Kant, duty enables us to arrive at the good maxim. As long as our actions pass the test of the categorical imperative, we can follow after happiness.

²¹ Id, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, vol. 6, p. 45.

²² J. E. Hare, *The Moral Gap: Kantian Ethics, Human Limits and God's Assistance*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1996; id, *God and Morality: A Philosophical History*. Blackwell, Oxford 2007. A succinct summary of Hare's approach to the moral gap can be found in: id, *Atonement, Justification, and Sanctification*, in: *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, Wiley-Blackwell 2010², p. 622- 629.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 624.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

humanity as it ought to be"²⁵. The work of God the Spirit is translated for use by Reason in terms of sanctification, which is "the gradual discipline of reform which leads to a greater conformity of a person's life to the demands of the moral law"²⁶. We can detect here the three movements from Moreau's list (returning, safeguarding and improvement): returning from evil to good maxims, being safeguarded by Reason which always follows the moral law, and improvement when we gradually meet the demands of the moral law and act in accordance with the categorical imperative. For Kant, Reason is the ultimate authority in formulating the moral law and overcoming our limitations, yet God is always at work in the whole process.

Graham Gordon links (even more directly than Kant and Hare) our human alienation and imperfect condition with salvation when he talks about sin and salvation as inter-connected: "sin is the cause of our need for salvation"²⁷; "salvation is the remedy for sin"²⁷. Gordon distinguishes three broad conceptions of sin: sin as wrongdoing, sin as bondage, and sin as alienation. They have three corresponding conceptions of salvation: salvation as pardon, salvation as rescue, and salvation as reconciliation. Gordon points out that almost all religions are animated by the idea that human beings *as such* stand in need of salvation. But this could not be the case if sin consisted simply in wrongful actions. Sin is more than individual acts. It is a condition that affects every human being, independently of their freely chosen actions. What is this condition? Gordon notes that, for example, in early Judaism the "bondage into which sinfulness cast the Jewish people was their vulnerability to natural and political disasters, and especially their subjection to foreign rulers"²⁸. This is similar to what we noted earlier in Greek philosophy and its preoccupation with luck. We are affected by conditions we have not created. We are constrained by them. Our mortality is probably the best example of bondage, though this is more obvious to the religions of the West (Abrahamic religions) than of the East (in which the belief in reincarnation and the endless round of birth and rebirth is what holds us captive). Gordon is adamant to point out that "conceptions of sin and salvation are intrinsic to a religious understanding of human experience"²⁹. He is also keen to request that philosophers who reject religion should "explain what is wrong with the ideas of sin and salvation, and

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 525.

²⁷ See G. Gordon, *Sin and Salvation*, in: C. Mester, P. Copan (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, Routledge, London-New York 2007, p.576-584.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 577.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

how, in their more enlightened world, these concepts are to be replaced⁷³⁰. We shall now turn to one such philosopher who rejects the Christian notion of salvation and who does explain in great detail what he sees as wrong with salvation, Friedrich Nietzsche.

4. Friedrich Nietzsche on Salvation

Nietzsche seems to be obsessed with the topic of salvation. This obsession starts in his childhood, which was marked by the Pietistic upbringing. Even when he becomes an atheist, he still discusses salvation, but in a world without God. According to Fraser, Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* is an attempt to articulate salvation as art: "life is only justified as an aesthetic phenomenon"⁷³¹. Nietzsche's attack upon Christian soteriology takes place in his *On the Genealogy of Morals* and *The Anti-Christ*. It is here where Nietzsche advances "the idea of the *Übermensch* (Superhuman) as his own version of what redeemed humanity ought to look like"⁷³². Fraser argues that Nietzsche's approach to salvation is doomed to fail because "Nietzsche fails to appreciate the full horror of human suffering"⁷³³. For Fraser, Nietzsche's conception of horror, suffering, and the nihil are "the imaginings of the comfortably off bourgeoisie"⁷³⁴. Similarly, Martha Nussbaum calls Nietzsche "an armchair philosopher of human riskiness"⁷³⁵. Still Nietzsche offers a detailed rejection of both the concept of salvation and the way Christianity imposes it on our world view.

Nietzsche accuses Platonic and Christian versions of asceticism with the charge of cowardice: "Platonic (and Christian) other-worldliness is a reflection of human failure to face with courage the way of the world"⁷³⁶. For Nietzsche, the Platonic and Christian celebration of a world beyond time and change is a sign of "the ultimate expression of nihilism, of the divinisation of death and nothingness"⁷³⁷. Fraser explains that the "problem of the whole trajectory of Plato's soteriology is that, in seeking to liberate us from a world of change, chance and becoming, it is actually splitting human life from that which makes it what it is. Plato's and Christian soteriology is metaphysical suicide. It is not a means of overcoming nihilism, but its

ultimate expression"⁷³⁸. Western metaphysics is built upon a "misconceived soteriology of safety"⁷³⁹. Nietzsche sees "Christians as being world-denying life-haters"⁷⁴⁰. But, as Fraser rightly asks, "is Nietzsche himself any better? At least the Christian tradition does have about it the very strong insistence that God made the world and so, ultimately, the world is good. (...) The 'negative' assessment of the world made by Christianity can only ever be provisional"⁷⁴¹. In the Christian scheme, God is our creator and we are called to respond to God. In Nietzsche's scheme, we (autonomous beings) give birth to ourselves. This is an auto-salvation (to use Moreau's language) and it is at its extreme. Christian soteriology which suggests that without God life has no meaning must be rejected: "Christianity has spread a disease of self-hate simply in order to sell itself as the cure"⁷⁴². Nietzsche is concerned, as Fraser explains, that "post-Christian cultures which have not dug out the roots of their Christian past and which consequently inherit the 'Christian' counter-factual will simply replace 'God' with another, less theological sounding centre, which is just as damaging as the God idea. The 'death of God' is not enough. Nietzsche's message is not just that there is no God, but that the very idea that human life requires some source of meaning external to itself is both false and ultimately degrading"⁷⁴³. Human beings will perpetuate their self-alienation as long as they subscribe to the soteriological way of thinking. So, Nietzsche is not just rejecting Christian soteriology but he denies that salvation is necessary at all (except in so far as we require to be saved from the thought that we require salvation). His approach contrasts with what we saw in from pro-salvation philosophies of Kant, Hare and Gordon. While there is much in Nietzsche's philosophy that Christian and other religious philosophers would find problematic, there are some who take on board his point about human alienation and agree with Nietzsche that anything that trades in our humanity for a stake in the life beyond this life is problematic. This precise point is elegantly discussed by Fiona Ellis in her "Scruton's Wagner on God, Salvation, and Eros"⁷⁴⁴ to which we shall turn next.

⁷³⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁷³¹ G. Fraser, *Redeeming Nietzsche*, p. 2.

⁷³² *Ibidem*.

⁷³³ *Ibidem*.

⁷³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

⁷³⁵ Referred to in *ibidem*.

⁷³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 64.

⁷³⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁷³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 65.

⁷³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 66.

⁷⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 67.

⁷⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁴² *Ibidem*.

⁷⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 73.

⁷⁴⁴ F. Ellis, *Scruton's Wagner on God, Salvation, and Eros*, „British Journal of Aesthetics” 2010 n. 2, p.169-187.

5. Fiona Ellis on Salvation

Scruton is concerned here to describe and perhaps even to defend the conception of soteriology which is expressed by Wagner in his opera *Tristan and Isolde*⁴⁵. Wagner's approach is Nietzschean in the sense that he denies that we are unsaved without God, and holds that we are capable of saving ourselves. This can be expressed in more Nietzschean terms with the thought that we do not require to be saved, but the important thing is that there is a rejection of any external source of salvation, and the human being is brought back into the centre of the stage – we do not need God, we can save ourselves. It is fundamental to this Wagnerian position that a theistic framework requires that the value of human existence is downgraded, that all that really matters is that we proceed to a further, superior, realm, and that what we do in all of this is irrelevant. This type of Nietzschean thinking rejects theism and holds that the only alternative is to put the human being back into the picture. This is how Scruton's Wagner sees the relevant options; his aim is to show how we can save ourselves by falling in love – not with God, but with another human being. There follows an account of erotic love in which the lovers themselves become rather God-like – they are deified in their love for each other, and meaning is bestowed upon their lives. The proof of this is in the fact that they are willing to sacrifice themselves for their love – the love they experience is so meaningful that they will die for it. They ask: what could be more meaningful than that? Hence we have an account in which human beings are capable of saving themselves. The aim of such an understanding of salvation is to reclaim their all too human lives. There is no banking after the theist's heaven. For Wagner, heaven is an empty dream (the Nietzschean influence).

Commentators have worried about Scruton's Wagnerian position. Lucy Beckett, for example, is anxious that it offers a fake form of salvation which threatens to lapse into idolatry⁴⁶. The lovers are not relating to anything beyond themselves, and it would be more accurate to describe their love as a form of hell. Emmanuel Levinas talks about the "dual egoism"⁴⁷ of erotic lovers when we remove God from the equation. Pope Benedict XVI

makes a similar point in his Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est* when he talks of the false intoxication that can get a grip in this context⁴⁸.

Ellis argues that there is a middle position between Scruton's "redemption by our own resources"⁴⁹ and the kind of theism he rejects. He rejects theism on the ground that it is irrelevant to human life and meaning, and worries in any case that there are no good reasons for accepting God's existence. Ellis takes the theist option more seriously, and makes it clear that it is no part of theism – Christian or otherwise – that our lives on earth do not matter and that what we do makes no difference. Life on earth has significance and we have a fundamental role to play in our salvation. The further crucial thought, however, is that God has an equal role to play in this dialectic, unsurprisingly so because, for the theist, we cannot capture what it is to be properly human without bringing God into the equation. Where does that leave erotic love? The background to Nietzsche's and Wagner's criticisms is a position which downgrades the significance of erotic love (Nietzsche tells us that Christianity poisoned eros) to replace it with a conception of Christian love in which desire has been removed altogether. (This position was popularised by Anders Nygren in his 1930 book *Agape and Eros*⁵⁰). In her paper *Insatiable Desire*⁵¹ Ellis argues against this dualism of eros and agape (eros all too human and imperfect; agape all too perfect and inhuman). She reinstates a conception of Christian love which is both eros and agape involving (compare *Deus Caritas Est* encyclical, and Neoplatonism), allowing thereby that we relate to God by loving erotically as well as agapically. So yes, Scruton's Wagner is right that eros has to be brought back into the picture, but not at the expense of God and not at the expense of morality, and not, of course, at the expense of life in the here and now. On this way of thinking the supposed pernicious dream of the theist is no longer the hell envisaged by Wagner and Nietzsche (and perhaps Scruton). Rather, it is not a million miles away from what they are wanting to say themselves, in one important sense. In another sense, however, it is very different.

For Ellis, it is clear that any version of disembodied soteriology misdescribes and underdescribes the options, and that it is no part of the Judeo-Christian position that what we do counts for nothing, and that life

⁴⁸ See Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*, Rome 2005; http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html.

⁴⁹ See F. Ellis, *Scruton's Wagner*.

⁵⁰ See A. Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, translated by Ph. S. Watson, Chicago University Press, Chicago 1982.

⁵¹ Id, *Insatiable Desire*, „Philosophy“ April 2013 vol. 88, p. 243-265. See also id, *Two Erotic Ideals*, „Religious Studies“ 2014 vol 51, n.1, p.41-59.

⁴⁵ See R. Scruton, *Death-Devoted Heart: Sex and the Sacred in Wagner's Tristan and Isolde*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2004.

⁴⁶ See L. Beckett, *Scruton: Death-Devoted Heart – Sex and the Sacred in Wagner's Tristan and Isolde*, „Opera Today“ 14 Jan. 2005.

⁴⁷ See E. Levinas, *Phenomenology of Eros*, in: id, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, translated by A. Lingis, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, The Hague-Boston-London 1979, p.256-266.

an earth is without intrinsic value or meaning. Ellis is committed to the embodied notion of salvation which she understands as a perfecting of humanity and she is interested to determine whether we need to bring God into our soteriological debate. Does becoming at one with our proper humanity require God, especially as such terms as "divine" or "sacred" (Scruton uses them), could be used non-theistically? Ellis is keen that the divine requires reference to God. It seems that once we remove this reference, there is a danger that the divine gets reduced to a matter of mere feeling: "if it feels divine, then it is" and perhaps it can lead to dehumanisation.

6. Conclusion

There is still much to be said about the notion of salvation in philosophy. This brush stroke picture of (pro- and anti-) soteriological views leads us to many more questions. What do we really mean when we say that love is the means of salvation? Could the notions of love we touched upon here be extended further? Is there a way of combining some of the presented approaches with specific theological accounts (for example, Ellis's embodied soteriology with Thomas Aquinas' or Karl Rahner' views on grace)? Our study could be further enriched by investigations of such concepts as "lack", "reparation", and "healing". It could benefit from inter-disciplinary conversations with theology, psychology, anthropology, and art; each of these disciplines has much to say about the movement from lacking of humanity to its perfecting.

Embodied soteriology makes much sense. Ultimately, salvation is about acting lovingly towards the other (Salvation Army's social action, *Song for Jenni*), mentioned in the Introduction, are good examples of such an understanding). We do not need to trade in our humanity for a stake in the life beyond this life. Such life if it exists is a gift, a mystery, a different matter. The point is that we are responsible for our salvation through loving, but this capacity has a divine source. In loving like God, we become God-like. We unite with Him in that sense alone. If we do accept that we are responsible for perfecting our humanity, we are already open to God in this move. We are unfulfilled or un-saved to the extent that we fail to perfect humanity and neglect morality. So, it seems that soteriology is not redundant but (as with any ambiguous idea) it needs to be clarified (as we have tried to do) and constantly revisited in order to remain relevant.



Outlines a non-theistic foundation of Christian faith

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Since last century Western Christian theology has been facing the challenge of modern atheism, with its denial of the traditional understanding of God as it is revealed in the Biblical sources and handed out in the dogmatic tradition of the Church. The *theistic* belief that God is a necessary, omnipotent, supernatural and personal being, external and beyond the created and finite order, was either completely rejected or replaced by a dynamic and more dialectical concept of the absolute being.

The 19th century philosophical movement initiated by the work of German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, inspired by the mysticism of Jakob Böhme and the Idealism of Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, found its theological version in the *Death of God* theology, originating in the 1960's. According to this theology, God (*infinite*) has negated Godself in the humanity of Jesus (*finite*). The dialectical (*kenotic*) divine movement from infinite to finite must interpret the traditional Trinitarian doctrine in a non-theistic paradigm. By a movement of self-denial God *the Father* gives up not only his "absolute" attributes as being necessary, omnipotent, impassible and immutable, but also God's same being. God is God, by becoming *human* as God *the Son*. In this divine event of self-emptying, which has at the moment of the cross its climax (the so-called "speculative Friday"), the Holy Spirit emerges as the Community of believers.

Most of Western and Christian Theology of the past century has in a variety of ways assumed this paradigm and reinterpreted the traditional theism. The theology of Jürgen Moltman and Eberhard Jüngel, just to mention two representatives, has been an attempt to reconstruct Christian