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Tarkovsky's Philosophy of Love: Agape in *Stalker* and *Sacrifice*

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Abstract

This article explores how the main characters in Tarkovsky's movies *Stalker* and *Sacrifice* exhibit the Christian ideals of agape. With the New Testament, agape acquired metaphysical primacy and distinctive meaning as it came to be identified as originating from God and portraying a sacrificial act exemplified by the crucifixion of Jesus. Hence, agape necessarily entailed strong altruistic ethos and passionate commitment for the well being of others. Besides demonstrating the way in which Tarkovsky's main heroes in *Stalker* and *Sacrifice* exhibit the ideals of agape while each going through their own unique "hero's journey", the article also seeks to unravel how Tarkovsky's philosophy of love goes beyond mere "religious obstructionism". Although Zizek argues that Tarkovsky's ultimate message and solution to the ills of human existence is "religious obstructionism; that of self-sacrifice", Tarkovsky's philosophy of love provides much more complex and profound picture by entailing mystical characteristic and spiritual depth. Indeed, if one removes its metaphysical dimension, Tarkovsky's philosophy of love may even align with the secular tempered existentialist and humanist tradition.

Keywords: Andrei Tarkovksy, Tarkovsky, Agape, *Stalker*, *Sacrifice*, Love, Philosophy, Mysticism, Saint Paul, Zizek.

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Introduction

This article seeks to unravel Tarkovsky's philosophy of love, which is complementarily embodied in the two movies that he had directed: namely; *Stalker* and *Sacrifice*. According to Zizek (2006), "religious obstructionism; that of self-sacrifice" is the ultimate message or solution that Tarkovsky provides to the ills of human existence through his movies of *Stalker* and *Sacrifice*. However, statements and analysis given by Tarkovsky in his own interviews (Gianvito, 2006) and in his classical book, *Sculpting in Time* (1987), provide us a much more complex and profound picture. After all, in his own book, Tarkovsky (1987:200) declares that his main function, as a director, "is to make whoever sees my films aware of his need to love and to give his love, and aware that beauty is summoning him." According to the central thesis of this article, transformation through love (not the "religious obstructionism; that of self-sacrifice") is the ultimate message or solution that Tarkovsky provides to the ills of human existence through these two movies.

But then what kind of love does Tarkovsky refer to while stating about humans' "need to love and give love"? In order to support the central thesis, the article will first demonstrate how and why Tarkovsky's ideal of love is deeply rooted in the the Christian notion of Agape as formulated by the spiritual leaders of that tradition such as John and Saint Paul (Wirzba and Benson, 2008). Secondly, the article will argue how Tarkovsky's philosophy of love goes far beyond mere "religious obstructionism" by entailing mystical characteristic and spiritual depth akin to perennial philosophy (Huxley, 1945). Even so, if one removes its metaphysical dimension, Tarkovsky's philosophy of love is not in contradiction but rather in conjunction with the secular tempered existentialist or humanist tradition espoused by Erich Fromm (1956 and 1999), Viktor Frankl (1992), Rollo May (1969). All these, in turn, constitute one of the main reasons why Tarkovsky's movies are still appealing to the non-religious spectators in our "secular age" (Taylor, 2007).

To this end, the article will be divided into four sections. First section will provide key analysis of Tarkovsky's philosophical reflections on *Sacrifice* and *Stalker* while providing a key narrative for both movies. The second section will expose how Tarkovsky's ideal of love derives from the Christian ideal of Agape, which particularly stands for the "love of God for men" irrespective of humans' sin or love in God (Nygren, 1953; Lewis, 1960; May 1969; and Selig, 2015). Third section will scrutinize how Tarkovsky projects his ideal of Agape on the main heroes in both *Stalker* and *Sacrifice*. Utilizing Joseph Campbell's notion of Hero's Journey, one may even call them spiritual heroes who go through a spiritual crisis to create a better version of themselves (Bray, 2017 and Campbell, 2004). After briefly revealing the mystical and spiritual depths of Tarkovsky's cinematic language, the fourth section will highlight that if one leaves aside his metaphysical dimension, Tarkovsky's philosophy of love can be reconciled with secular tempered humanist tradition espoused by scholars such as Erich Fromm and Viktor Frankl (Robbins, 2015).

Tarkovsky's Philosophical Reflections on *Stalker* and *Sacrifice*

Tarkovsky's "Stalker" is one of the greatest landmarks in cinema history. The movie's sensational landscapes, ethereal music and imageries, along with the script's psycho-philosophical depths, renders it an exceptionally enigmatic piece of visual poetry (Turovskaya, 1989). The plot of the movie is loosely based on the science fiction novel, *Roadside Picnic*, written by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky. The plot revolves around the journey that three people make to a place called "the zone" (zona). The zone is a deserted and forbidden area closely protected by the government authorities in which there is a room where it is believed that people's most innermost wishes are fulfilled (Pourtova, 2017). Travelling into the zone is not only challenging because of the forbidden entry but also due to its dangerous nature. The zone is a place full of complicated and deadly traps (McLenachan, 2014).

Given the dangers and difficulties of reaching the zone, people, who would like to take the risk of traveling into the zone, have to hire a professional guide or a "stalker" – hence the name of the movie. Accordingly,

the plot of the movie unfolds as the “Writer” and the “Professor” embark upon an existential Odyssey with the “Stalker” into the zone. Towards the end of the movie, the “stalker” announces that they have finally reached to the room in the zone. However, both the writer and the scientist refuse to enter the room and the trio return without entering the room.

In his untimely book *Sculpting in Time*, Tarkovsky (1987:199) unequivocally articulates the central message that he intended to communicate through his movie by asserting that; “In *Stalker* I make some sort of complete statement: namely that human love alone is—miraculously—proof against the blunt assertion that there is no hope for the world. This is our common, and incontrovertibly positive possession. Although we no longer quite know how to love...”

Furthermore, Tarkovsky (1987:200) maintains:

In the end, everything can be reduced to the one simple element, which is all a person can count upon in his existence: the capacity to love. That element can grow within the soul to become the supreme factor, which determines the meaning of a person's life. My function is to make whoever sees my films aware of his need to love and to give his love, and aware that beauty is summoning him.

At first, Tarkovsky’s assertion is that his movie *Stalker* is fundamentally about the miraculous nature of human love, which may occur as quite puzzling. Nevertheless, in the third section it will be demonstrated how the two heroes in *Stalker* and *Sacrifice* (stalker himself and Alexander) embody the ideals of love according to Tarkovsky.

Sacrifice is the last masterpiece of Tarkovsky, which he produced while living in exile from the Soviet Union (The *Sacrifice*, 1987). The film was shot in Sweden just before Tarkovsky’s untimely death due to lung cancer. In the movie, Tarkovsky utilizes the allegory of tree of life in both the first and the last scene of the *Sacrifice* in order to powerfully evoke his notion of transformation through love.

Since Plato, various thinkers have resorted to the use of allegories to render complex ideas visible and intelligible (Tarnas, 2011). The *Sacrifice* also opens and closes with the allegory of ‘tree of life’. In the first scene, Alexander asks his son (Little Man) to give him a hand as he tries to plant a dead barren tree near the lake. While planting the tree together, Alexander tells the Little Man a story about how once upon a time an old Orthodox monk named Pamve planted a tall barren tree on a mountainside just like he is doing. Then, Pamve entrusted his young disciple Ioann Kolov to water the dead tree every day until it came to life. Every morning, Ioann would fill the bucket with water and climb up the mountain to water the dead tree. Ioann has done the same thing for three years and one day, as he climbed up the mountain, he saw that the whole tree was covered in blossoms!

The narrative of Tarkovsky’s *Sacrifice* unfolds as radio announces the outbreak of a total nuclear war, which will bring the annihilation of life on earth. Confronted with the almost certain future of nuclear holocaust on the planet Earth and the “deadly, sickening, animal fear” that comes along with it, Alexander turns inward and prays to God to spare the human kind. In return, he promises to sacrifice and “relinquish everything that binds” him to life; his house and family including his most beloved son, the Little Man. Alexander wakes up the next day experiencing that his prayer to God has been heard and that everything is normal.

To keep his promise of sacrifice, Alexander takes his family for a walk in the countryside and then secretly comes back home to put his house on fire. When the family arrives home, Alexander confesses that he has burnt the house while running around in frenzy. Ambulance comes and two paramedics chase and seize Alexander who appears to have gone mentally ill.

While discussing on the role of an artist in society, Tarkovsky (1987:40) emphasizes that the idea of love necessarily entails an act of sacrifice. Indeed, this is one of the reasons why Tarkovsky chooses to direct the movie *Sacrifice*. While reflecting on his movie, he elaborates further on the indissoluble link between the idea of love and sacrifice by stating:

What nobody seems to understand is that love can only be one-sided, that no other love exists, that in any other form it is not love. If it involves less than total giving, it is not love...I am interested above all in the character who is capable of sacrificing himself and his way of life—regardless of whether that sacrifice is made in the name of spiritual values, or for the sake of someone else, or of his own salvation, or of all these things together (Tarkovsky, 1987:217).

Certainly, Tarkovsky's (1987:200) emphasis on the ontological primacy of the "capacity to love", becoming aware of the "need to love and to give love" in *Stalker* intersects and complements the remarks made above on the altruistic nature of sacrificial love. Indeed, this is also how the two movies, *Stalker* and *Sacrifice*, complement each other in displaying Tarkovsky's philosophy of love. As the next section will show, Tarkovsky's points directly reflects the disintictive meaning that Agape came to identified with the New Testament where Agape's metaphysical and ontological primacy is tied with its sacrificial characteristic (Brady, 2003). The next section will explore the ontological primacy of love and its sacrificial characteristics as the two most distinguishing components of Agape embodied by the Christian heritage.

Early Christian Heritage of Agape in New Testament: John and Saint Paul

The Christian notion of Agape stands for the unconditional love of God for humankind regardless of his or her sins. In his famous book *The Four Loves*, C.S Lewis (1960) distinguished and described Charity (Agape) as "the highest level of love known to humanity: a selfless love that is passionately committed to the well-being of others". Following Lewis, a pioneer in existential psychology, Rollo May (1969: 37-38), expanded on these four types of love and enumerated them as:

- 1- Libido, sexually charged lust.
- 2- Eros, the drive of love to create and the ascending urge towards higher forms of being and relationship.
- 3- Philia, friendship and brotherly love and
- 4- Agape, divine love.

Since the beginning of the ancient Greek civilization, Eros, as the "drive of love to create and pro-create" (May 1969: 78), played a significant role in shaping the mental imaginary of the Western mind (Tarnas, 2011). With Plato, the concept of Eros has established itself as that unfettering force which uplifts men towards heavenly ideas and thus serving as a vehicle for the particular to ascend to the universal (Wagoner, 1997). Certainly, for Plato it was through the reason that one starts to seek the particular beauty in this world of appearance and then charge the wings of Eros to ascend to the world of ideas.

Nevertheless, the Christian notion of Agape is cherished as the highest form of love available to humankind since Agape originates from the God (Nygren, 1953). In contrast to Eros, Agape is the pure form of divine love and it is devoid of any egocentric acquisitiveness towards the object of the beauty and love (Abrahamov, 2011: 12-13). Although Nygren clear cut anthitehtical typology between eros and agape is not without its critics (Armstrong. 1961; Streiker, 1964), his dichatomous typology of two loves is valuable to

the extent that it captures the most distinguishing features of Agape embodied by the New Testament [See Table 1].

Eros versus Agape. Nygren's Two Types of Love

<p>Eros is primarily man's love; God is the object of Eros. Even when it is attributed to God, Eros is patterned on human love.</p>	<p>Agape is primarily God's love; "God is Agape." Even when it is attributed to man, Agape is patterned on Divine love.</p>
<p>Eros is acquisitive desire and longing. Eros is an upward movement. Eros is man's way to God.</p>	<p>Agape is sacrificial giving. Agape comes down. Agape is God's way to man</p>
<p>Eros is egocentric love, a form of self-assertion of the highest, noblest, sublimest kind.</p>	<p>Agape is unselfish love, it "seeketh not its own," it gives itself away.</p>
<p>Eros is the will to get and possess which depends on want and need.</p>	<p>Agape is freedom in giving, which depends on wealth and plenty.</p>

Source: Adopted from Anders Nygren (1953. 210)

Although the term Agape appeared numerous times in various meanings since Homer (Brady, 2003:54), it acquired a new metaphysical context and distinctive meaning through the New Testament. With the New Testament, agape came to be identified with unconditional and self-sacrificing love of God for humans which is best exemplified through the crucifixion of Jesus. Indeed, the suffering of Jesus at the cross as the son of God for all the human sins plays the most central role in the imagination of the Christian psyche. Thus agape is not just an abstract unconditional divine love but love demonstrated by the sacrifice of God's most beloved son!

According to this article, the most distinguishing features of Agape is composed of two elements. First, Agape retains utmost ontological, metaphysical and epistemological primacy due to the very fact that it "originates in God and God is love" (Wirzba, 2008; Brady, 2003) Second, Agape is quintessentially sacrificial due to the atonement of Jesus and thus necessarily contains the altruistic and other-centred love ethos (Hill, 2002).

Indeed, the first First Epistle of John establishes how agape originates in God by declaring that: "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love." (Brady, 2003:75). By equating love with God, agape is then granted ontological, epistemological and metaphysical priority. But then, the Christian notion of agape inevitably contains sacrificial ethos as John continues: "God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins." (John 4:7-12)

Hence, Agape's metaphysical and ontological primacy is indissolubly linked with its sacrificial characteristic. One can observe the same sacrificial emphasis in the letters of Saint Paul. In the Chapter 13 of his letter to the Corinthians, for instance, Saint Paul establishes "faith, hope and love" to be the most fundamental Christian virtues. Among the three virtues "faith, hope and love", however, Saint Paul considers love as being the greatest. According to Saint Paul (Wagoner, 1997: 43) love has the utmost ontological and epistemological value among the three since "Love never fails... It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always preserves."

As stated previously, agape necessarily contains other centred altruistic characteristic since it is devoid of egocentric acquisitiveness. This characteristic is certainly expressed by Saint Paul (Wagoner, 1997: 42) when he declares: "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud... It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs." In his letter to Epistolians, Saint Paul makes sure to provide the sacrificial act of Christ as a model for Agape to be emulated by all Christians. As Paul declares: "God in Christ has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5:1-3). Indeed, Agape as an unselfish love which gives itself away through the act of sacrifice is an ideal which every Christian must aspire for. As Paul urges upon, "If the love of God was manifested in the self-giving of Christ, how could the love of Christ be shown to others except in the same way?" (Brady, 2003:69). Given the basic tenets of Agape particularly outlined by Saint John and Paul, the next section will demonstrate how Tarkovsky's heroes reflect the ideals of Agape.

Tarkovsky's Spiritual Heroes Reflecting the Ideals of Agape

While Alexander's sacrificial act for the sake of saving the World from nuclear catastrophe in the movie *Sacrifice* is quite evident, Tarkovsky asserts that his movie *Stalker* is fundamentally about the fact that miraculous nature of human love may occur as less obvious. Yet, when one focuses on the main character of the movie, it is not difficult to see why Tarkovsky makes that statement. In his interviews on *Stalker*, Tarkovsky (Gianvito, 2006: 61) emphasizes that out of the three main characters who embark on the journey to the zone, the stalker is "the one who pleases me the most" and that he reflects "the best part of me".

Indeed, in the eyes of Tarkovsky, the main character stalker's selfless devotion to serve people by taking them to the zone makes him a spiritual hero. For stalker, the belief in the zone and belief in the hope that zone may bring to humanity is what really matters. Whether the zone's acclaimed miracles are truly real or not is not the ultimate concern. As Tarkovsky (Gianvito, 2006: 57) comments in his interviews, "What is important to Stalker is to light a spark, a belief in the heart of people."

Furthermore, Tarkovsky appraises the selfless love and irrational devotion that the stalker's wife has towards her husband despite all the miseries caused by her husband's declared mission. "Her love and her devotion" Tarkovsky (1987:198) remarks, "are that final miracle which can be set against the unbelief, cynicism, moral vacuum poisoning the modern world, of which both the Writer and the Scientist are victims." Indeed, both stalker and his wife have a strong commitment to a higher purpose, which requires

a great deal of sacrifice, just like the main character Alexander in the movie *Sacrifice*! Hence, it is quite evident how these three characters (stalker along with his wife and Alexander) exhibit the ideals of Agape, “a selfless love that is passionately committed to the well-being of others”.

To reframe it in terms of the Jung inspired comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell’s notion of “hero’s journey” or monomyth (Campbell, 2004), Stalker is in the quest and in service for people to find hope, love and happiness for themselves. Just like in every hero’s journey, the stalker is confronted with a challenging task. Yet, it is through this very challenge that the hero also succeeds at creating a better and higher version of himself or herself. Hence, although both the heroes in *Stalker* and *Sacrifice* are anti-hero in regard to the criteria of Aristotelian tragic hero, they are still heroes with specific journeys and challenges formulated by the monomyth of Campbell (2004).

In the case of *Stalker*, the hero goes through a spiritual crisis while fighting against the chronic cynicism and resignation, “poisoning the modern world, of which both the Writer and the Scientist are victims.” A challenge or crisis is necessary for any hero’s journey. In the case of the character stalker, the crisis is spiritual as Tarkovsky (1987:93) states: “I believe that it is always through spiritual crisis that healing occurs. A spiritual crisis is an attempt to find oneself, to acquire new faith.” Accordingly, the hero stalker (Tarkovsky, 1987:93) goes through a challenge, “moments of despair when his faith is shaken; but every time he comes to a renewed sense of his vocation to serve people who have lost their hopes.” Certainly, stalker’s journey as a hero mirrors the journey of the movie’s director. After all, just like the hero stalker who is commissioned to “light a spark, a belief in the heart of people”, Tarkovsky (1987:200), as a director, declares his function “to make whoever sees my films aware of his need to love and to give his love, and aware that beauty is summoning him.” Indeed, it become evident how the central messages of both *Stalker* and *Sacrifice* add up to what Saint Paul wrote in Corinthians 13:13 “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

In the case of *Sacrifice*’s main character Alexander, the challenge of Hero’s Journey is even more daunting than the challenge posed to stalker and his wife. Tarkovsky (1987:222) describes Alexander as “a character who is perpetually crushed by depression” and who “has grown to hate the emptiness of human speech.” In a world where “word has lost all mystery and magic and speech has become mere chatter empty of meaning” as Alexander bitterly comments in the movie, it is no coincidence that the *Sacrifice* starts with Alexander telling the story of Pamdev and young disciple Ioann Kolov. According to Alexander Pamdev, the story embodies a deeper meaning which he shares with the Little Man:

Say what you will, but a method, a system, has its virtues. You know, sometimes I say to myself, if every single day, at exactly the same stroke of the clock, one were to perform the same single activity...the world would be a very different place. Yes, something would change! It would have to!

Indeed, young disciple Ioann Kolov’s full integrity with his word and sheer devotion in climbing the hill every morning to water the dead dry tree for three years has the utmost significance and meaning in a world where “word become mere chatter empty of meaning.” This is also the reason why it is essential that Alexander keeps his word to God by burning his house. Hence, by keeping his word to God, Alexander does not only save the World from nuclear catastrophe but also from chronic cynicism where the word has lost its all meaning.

For Tarkovsky (1987:209), Alexander is not a hero in the classic sense but “a thinker and an honest man, who turns out to be capable of sacrifice in the name of a higher ideal.” Given Alexander’s vow to God, his action of burning the house may appear as mentally ill to an outside observer. As Tarkovsky (1987:209) observes: “He nevertheless takes the crucial step, thereby infringing the rules of normal behaviour and laying himself open to the charge of folly... It may well be that through individual exertions such as his, which nobody notices or understands, world harmony is preserved.” Indeed, this is where Alexander gets

to be classified as one of Tarkovsky's spiritual heroes and exhibits the Christian ideal of Agape; an unselfish love which gives itself away through the act of sacrifice.

Then, the final scene of the *Sacrifice* unfolds. Camera shows the Little Man carrying the bucket to water the dead tree planted by his father in the first scene of the movie. In the meantime, the ambulance drives Alexander away from home. After watering the dead tree, the Little Man lies underneath the barren tree. Wondering about the mysteries of the world and the creation, he utters; "In the beginning was the Word. Why is that, Papa?" Although Alexander is gone and cannot provide the Little Man with any answers, the world underneath that tree is filled with mystery and magic. There is only silence accompanied with Bach's "Erbarne Dich, mein Gott".

Then, the camera slowly but steadily moves upwards. The camera movement stops once it reaches to the top of the barren tree where the rising sunlight flickers through its branches. The time is suspended and we are invited to witness the subtle movements of something that is becoming alive. It is in this very moment that the tree of life allegory reaches its full potential. The possibility of dead barren tree becoming alive with blossoming flowers, as in the story of Pamdev, is an image and allegory that powerfully stands for Tarkovsky's philosophy of transformation through love which prerequisites absence of egoistic acquisitiveness and strong altruistic self-devotion and sacrificial act. Yet, perhaps, it is not really the tree that we see out there in the world that is dead. The tree of life inside us had already been dead for a long time and we were not aware of it! Given his terminal cancer and being in exile, Tarkovsky completes the final scene of the film by dedicating it to his son Andrioshka who is apart from him living in the Soviet Union "with hope and confidence."

Mystical Depths of Tarkovsky in our "Secular Age"

The unique cinematic language and the visual poetry of Tarkovsky critically rest upon his innovative and masterly utilization of the time (Bello, 2014) and visual texture (Johnson and Graham, 1994). In *Stalker*, for instance, Tarkovsky accentuates the very density of time and the rotten material texture of the physical setting (the very face of stalker himself, cars, and indoors buildings) to provide the effect of strong spiritual reality behind the disintegrating physical. "It is this disintegration of the very material texture of reality" as Zizek (2006) perceptively remarks, "which provides the spiritual depths". Hence, through the innovative use of time itself and material texture, "Tarkovsky affects us at a level which is much deeper, much more crucial for our experience than all the standard spiritual motive of elevating ourselves above material reality and so on." (Zizek, 2006).

Indeed, Tarkovsky is able to deliver the spiritual motive of elevating ourselves above material reality through not only the script and the plot of the movie but also the spectator's personal experience of the density of time and the visual poetry, which permeate throughout his movie (Baglivo, 1984). In addition to these, the haunting Zen-like music of *Stalker* and the uncontaminated natural beauty of the landscapes in the Zone (in stark contrast with the rotten physical world surrounding that beauty) are also crucial elements in creating that unique mystical effect in Tarkovsky's cinema. In the very last scene of *Sacrifice*, our notion of time gets suspended when the camera movement stops once it reaches to the top of the barren tree where the rising sunlight flickers through its branches. Spectator is invited to witness the transcendent reality while gazing at the subtle movements of tree branches.

I consciously use the term "unique mystical effect" in Tarkovsky cinema simply because the experience of the density of time and the presence of hidden but unified spiritual reality behind the multitude of the material world embody the key aspect of mystical thought. Despite their variety of expressions among different religious or philosophical traditions throughout the centuries and across different continents, Bertrand Russell (1997: 179) sums up the three cores features of the mystical thought:

- (1) That all division and separateness is unreal, and that the universe is a single indivisible unity;
- (2) That evil is illusory, and that the illusion arises through falsely regarding a part as self-subsistent;
- (3) That time is unreal, and that reality is eternal, not in the sense of being everlasting, but in the sense of being wholly outside time.

In this sense, watching Tarkovsky's movies is a reminiscent of having a mystical visionary experience. This is not something surprising given the fact that being in touch or in connection with Agape (as a distinct notion of divine love, which stands for the God's unconditional love for human kind) would necessarily entail some sort of mystical sensation or "personal religious experience" as famously examined by William James (2017) in his "Varieties of Religious Experience". Although Tarkovsky mystical roots on love and metaphysics is located in the cultural color of Orthodox Christianity, mysticism appear in almost every religious tradition. Furthermore, it is an integral part of not only Eastern but also Western Philosophy since its very inception by Pythagoras, Parmenides and Plato (Russell, 1974).

If one removes its metaphysical dimension from his philosophy of love, Tarkovsky's (1987:200) emphasis on the primacy of love "which is all a person can count upon in his existence", the necessity to develop one's "capacity to love" or becoming aware of the "need to love and to give love" are in conjunction with the themes adhered by secular tempered existentialist or humanist tradition. (Erich Fromm, 1956 and 1999; Viktor Frankl 1992).

Indeed, in classical book *Art of Loving*, Erich Fromm achieved a Copernican revolution by reversing the order of question from "Am I loved?" to "How much can I love?" which involves a shift of perspective. Indeed, people are more commonly interested in finding and receiving love from external sources rather than generating love and the capacity to love from within. As Fromm (1956: 36) observes: "Infantile love follows the principle: "I love because I am loved." Mature love follows the principle: "I am loved because I love."

For many of us, the problem with love is primarily about whether we are loved enough or are we certain that we are loved. However, we never seriously confront the question 'How much we can love?' Usually, people chase all their life to be loved by others in vain and get disillusioned or destructive in their search for love since they never seriously confront themselves about the fact that their inner or spiritual tank is empty of love, empty of love for themselves and for all the existence around them.

Indeed, it was in the concentration camps of Nazi Germany that Viktor Frankl came to realize the ontological supremacy of love over everything. While clinging to the image of his beloved wife in the concentration camps, Frankl (1992: 48-49) realized that:

For the first time in my life I saw the truth as it is set into song by so many poets, proclaimed as the final wisdom by so many thinkers. The truth—that love is the ultimate and the highest goal to which man can aspire. Then I grasped the meaning of the greatest secret that human poetry and human thought and belief have to impart: *The salvation of man is through love and in love.*

Hence, it is critical to observe how Tarkovsky's (1987:200) emphasis on the primacy of love "which is all a person can count upon in his existence", the necessity to develop one's "capacity to love" or becoming aware of the "need to love and to give love" are in conjunction with the themes exposed above.

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