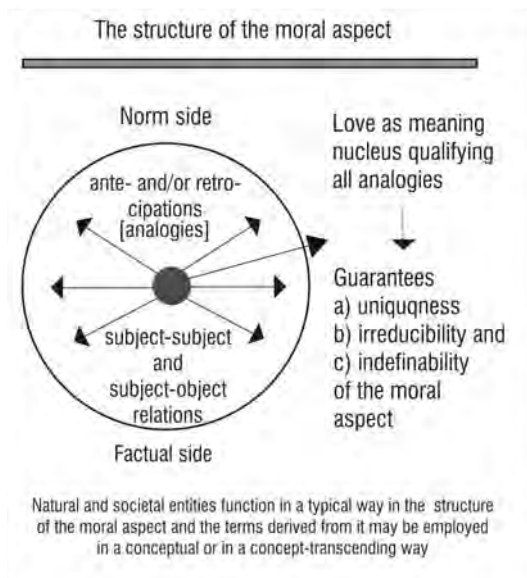


The theological significance of an analysis of the meaning of love from the perspective of the philosophy of theology

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to explore the structural features of love as succinctly captured in the sketch below. In order to achieve this goal attention will be given to a number of distinct but related issues. It will be argued that the core meaning of love primarily refers to a distinct aspect, mode or function or reality, namely the *moral aspect* (§3 and §4). Although it is unique and indefinable (§4 and §5), it intrinsically also *coheres* with all the other aspects of reality (such as the numerical, the biotical, the logical-analytical and the sign-mode) (§6). In order to account for this inter-modal coherence the nature of analogies and metaphors are elucidated (§7). Owing to its uniqueness the core meaning of the moral aspect (like all the other aspects) is irreducible (§5). The argument is extended by taking into account that every concrete (natural and social) entity and process has a typical function within the moral aspect of reality (partially §9 and §10). Moral subject-subject relations form the basis of the way in which Buber over-emphasized such relations (§3) and discussing his view will provide the possibility to show that moral subject-subject relations are indeed differentiated by multiple contexts (§3). Buber's influence on Alders, Stoker and Heyns is seen in the restriction of the meaning of the ethical to subject-subject relations (§ 9). Only against this background it is possible to account for the richly nuanced meaning of love (§10). Finally an important epistemological distinction is related to the moral aspect, explaining the difference between conceptual knowledge and concept-transcending knowledge (§11). The overall picture that emerges from this analysis relates to all the academic disciplines, including theology. In the course of the argument the theological significance of some of the distinctions is highlighted.

Sketch: Concluding perspective presented as preface



1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Most human beings enter this world within the context of the *loving* care of a mother, father and in many instances other family members. Parents express their intimate relationship with their children by loving them and telling them that they love them. Before a couple gets married they presumably declare their mutual love. The word *love* is also employed in many other contexts. In all these instances we experience *love* in inter-human relationships, i.e. in the context of subject-subject relations.

The well-known personalistic thinker, Martin Buber, developed his peculiar view on the nature of love in his book *Ich und Du* (1923) by over-emphasizing subject-subject relations. We start with a brief discussion of his views in order to show that it is insufficient merely to focus on subject-subject relations, because as such it does not explain the different *kinds* of moral relationships of love with which we are acquainted in everyday life – the theme of the succeeding paragraph that accounts for love in multiple contexts (§3).

It should be noted that the kind of analysis developed in this article differs from an empirical study. Its aim is to ascertain the functional and structural ontic conditions making possible our experience of love within different contexts. Because the technical philosophical expression that captures this idea of “making possible” is transcendental, one may characterize the method used in this article as transcendental-empirical.¹

2. PERSONAL LOVE IN THE THOUGHT OF BUBER

In his mentioned work Martin Buber develops a dualistic view of reality. He places all emphasis upon the *personal encounter* of human beings *in love*. This personal encounter in love is then dialectically positioned by opposing it to all impersonal relations between human beings and the

¹ A more detailed explanation of the nature of the transcendental-empirical method is found in Strauss 2006 – see page 111-123.

external world. According to Buber reality reveals itself to humankind in two ways, since the 'I' stands in two fundamental relations: the *I-Thou* relationship and the *I-It* relationship. For Buber no *I-in-itself* exists, since the word 'I' always encompasses one of these two relationships. 'He' and 'She' falls within the "I-It" relationship. The world as we experience it, with the 'It', 'He', and 'She', even with internal experiences or secrets reserved for the initiated, is already constituted by 'Its', by objects. The experiences of this world are not reciprocal, and affect only the human being who experiences them. Thus, the world-as-experience belongs to the fundamental term "I-It." In contrast to this the fundamental "I-Thou" relationship forms the basis for the world-of-relationship that knows no inner barriers since only 'Its' are mutually delimited. The "I-Thou" relationship exists in the presence of an encounter, since only in this relationship does the present reveal itself. The objects of the "I-It" relationship, however, are experienced in the *past*. The individual 'Thou' becomes 'It' after the experience of encounter, and the individual 'It' can become 'Thou' by stepping into the experience of an encounter.²

Love is the distinguishing mark of the personal "I-Thou" relationship. Buber expands his approach in a world-historical and religious context (he was Jewish). Every great culture continually draws its spark of life from an original experience of encounter, from an answer to the Thou. When these renewing relational occasions are lost, a culture stultifies and becomes subject to that fate which rests on every human being in the full weight of a dead world mass. Liberation from this situation, to being children of God, according to Buber, comes only from new experiences of encounter, a fateful answer from human beings to their Thou. Only in this way can a culture renew itself. In the dominant idea of fate, which subjects humankind to social, cultural, psychic, historical and other laws, it is forgotten that no one can meet fate unless proceeding from a position of freedom.³

According to Buber, faith in fate surrenders humankind to the overpowering grip of the It-World, whereas a person becomes free in the I-Thou relationship, free also from the grip of a rationally obvious system (Buber's reaction against rationalism), a freedom fundamentally indicated by liberation from faith in unfreedom. The meaning of life is to be found, according to Buber, in the embrace of *fate* and *freedom*.

The word *love* is central in this supposed encounter between person and person. Does it provide an insight into the mystery of human existence? Can we truly say that *love* is the actual core of human existence – or at least that it should be? Both Classical Greek and Eastern philosophy emphasize the ethical (moral) nature of a person – as can be seen in the characterization of an individual as a *rational-moral* creature.

Does it make sense to see *love* as the essence of being human? We now look at this problem from the perspective of *love* in multiple contexts.

3. LOVE IN MULTIPLE CONTEXTS

We are immediately confronted with the problem that love reveals itself in many ways. Human beings are embedded in distinct and uniquely differentiated relationships of love – such as *family love*, *marital love*, *patriotism*, and so forth (for a related explanation, see Dooyeweerd 1999:125). Yet, no one of these distinct relationships can be identified with the *central*, *radical* and *total* bond of humanity – transcending all the branches of life. What does this reference to

2 With his 'I-It' relation Buber touches upon genuine moral subject-object relations without being able to develop a meaningful perspective on them.

3 Notice this internal dialectical tension in Buber's thought: *natural law* and *freedom* reciprocally presuppose and threaten each other.

what is radical, central and total mean? The purpose of employing these terms is to account for the decisive and all-encompassing relationship between humankind and God, because this relationship indeed concerns the human *heart*, the *root* of our existence that exercises its *central* and *direction-giving* influence by laying claim to all of life (life as a whole, life in its *totality*). The other side of the coin of this radical, central and total (RCT) relationship is given in the multiplicity of differentiated, peripheral and partial (DPP) relationship found in diverse societal contexts.

In the light of this distinction between RCT and DPP relationships it must be clear that all moral relationships of love exhibit the nature of DPP relationships. Since the latter involve the differentiated branches of human life they ought to be distinguished from the *root* dimension of creation, that can also be designated as the religious dimension of creation if the term religion is understood in its RCT sense and not restricted merely to one branch of life, such as organized within a particular denomination of the institutional church.

As soon as the RCT dimension of being human is contemplated it becomes clear that this dimension *transcends* all DPP relationships. The ultimate RCT question is straight-forward. It does not concern membership of some or other church denomination, marital relationship, state citizenship, cultural affiliation, and so on – for the sole issue is whether or not one is a *Christian*.

Scriptures, in its reference to this RCT dimension of creation, with good reason points at the *heart* of human existence – which is, according to the poet of Proverbs, the wellspring of life (Proverbs 4:23). The human self-hood, the human I-ness, collectively incorporated in the New Humanity in Christ, is normed by the central commandment of love, expressed in the calling to serve God and our fellow human beings whole-heartedly. The RCT-DPP distinction therefore ultimately is a matter of *self-knowledge*, knowledge of the heart of human existence.

The situation is further complicated by the fact that the Bible explicitly employs the word *love* both in a RCT and a DPP sense. In other words, the Bible frequently uses the word *love* in a *differentiated* way, referring to a particular facet, among others, of human existence and it frequently also happens that the Bible uses love in an RCT sense. Naturally, when love is used in a *differentiated* sense, it should not be confused with love in its *central* sense – as it is expressed, among others, in the central *religious* commandment of love. This commandment, which demands that we love God and our neighbour with all our heart, belongs to the RCT dimension of creation and therefore contains an appeal to *all* facets of our existence. When we talk about marriage, family or patriotic love, however, we are only referring to a specific limited sector of our existence and not to life in its totality.

Later on we shall, with reference to specific Bible texts, return to this difference. We first focus on the following question:

Does this distinction between the central and differentiated meaning of *love* (and *faith*) bring us any closer to a *definition* of the meaning of love (or faith)?⁴

4. THE PROBLEM OF DEFINING LOVE

As familiar as we are with the use of this word, so difficult it seems to *define* it. Every definition requires defining *terms*, terms that can explain what is meant. However, sooner or later we have to step back and ask about the meaning of the terms employed in the definition, i.e. we have to define the *defining terms*. Subsequently another step backwards is required in order to define

⁴ Heb. 11:1 does not contain a *definition* of faith, because it simply repeats the core meaning of the certitudinal aspect of reality in the terms of the phrase “to be sure” and “to be certain”: “Now faith is being sure of ... and certain of ...”.

these second level terms. But can we stop at this *third level*? If not, further levels of defining terms are required, pushing us into the logical fallacy of a *regressus in infinitum*. How do we escape from this apparent dead alley?

We may benefit from looking at various other academic disciplines where this issue was resolved through the acknowledgement of what became known as *primitive terms*, i.e. of terms with which one has to start without being able to *define* them. The implication of this assumption is that *conceptual knowledge* ultimately depends upon *indefinable* terms – actually underscoring the *self-insufficiency* of human thinking and concept formation. Although still continuing the long-standing legacy that ethics deals with the “good,” Ewing did advance a proper understanding of the problem of indefinability, for he mentions that the British moral philosopher, G.E. Moore, believed that the good has no definition: “I think we shall see that some terms must be indefinable if anything is to be defined at all” (Ewing 1962:87).

The general idea of a modal⁵ aspect holds that the *core meaning* of any aspect brings to expression its *irreducibility*, which is reflected in its *indefinability*, explaining why it is also designated as *primitive*.⁶

Philosophers and theologians always wrestled with this problem within the related context of contemplating the relationship between *unity and diversity* which is intimately connected with the perennial problem of *uniqueness and coherence*.⁷ Philosophy of theology may benefit from a brief look at the disciplines of linguistics and mathematics because such a detour will deepen our insight into the problem of *indefinability*.

4.1 Linguistics

Semantics, as a sub-discipline of general linguistics, had to accept “meaning” as a primitive term. For example, when the distinction by Immanuel Kant between analytic and synthetic propositions (cf. Kant 1787:10 ff.) is pursued, an attempt can be made to define a typical semantic phenomenon such as *synonymy* in terms of analyticity. Two sentences have the same meaning only if each one of them entails the other one in an analytic sense. Yet Quine highlighted the circularity of such an attempt. Analyticity is defined in terms of meaning (a sentence is supposed to be analytically true if it is true only on the basis of its meaning), whereas meaning (in this case: similarity of meaning = synonymy) is defined in terms of analyticity. Fodor said that “there is no meaning-independent way of characterizing either analyticity or meaning (Fodor 1977:43).

4.2 Mathematics

Similar to the way in which linguistics had to accept (assume) “meaning” as something basic and primitive, axiomatic set theory also had to accept primitive terms. For example, within the version of axiomatic set theory that was developed by the mathematicians Zermelo and Fraenkel (therefore also known as Zermelo-Fraenkel Set Theory), “member of” (cf. Fraenkel *et al.*, 1973:23) is introduced as a *primitive* term. Gödel also remarked that as yet we do not have a satisfactory non-circular *definition* of the term “set.”

5 The term *modal* is derived from the Latin phrase *modus quo* referring to a *function* or *mode of existence*. Because the various aspects indeed make possible the diverse functions of concrete (natural and social) entities and events within them, they are also designated as *modal* aspects.

6 Korzybski underscores that one cannot define ad infinitum: “We thus see that all linguistic schemes, if analyzed far enough, would depend on a set of ‘undefined terms’. If we enquire about the ‘meaning’ of a word, we find that it depends on the ‘meaning’ of other words used in defining it, and that the eventual new relations posited between them ultimately depend on the ... meanings of the undefined terms, which, at a given period, cannot be elucidated any further” (Korzybski, 1948:21).

7 We shall explore this issue in our discussion of the inter-modal connections between the moral aspect and the other aspects of reality (see §8).

The operation 'set of x's' (where the variable 'x' ranges over some given kind of objects) cannot be defined satisfactorily (at least not in the present state of knowledge), but can only be paraphrased by other expressions involving again the concept of set, such as: 'multitude of x's', 'combination of any number of x's', 'part of the totality of x's', where a 'multitude' ('combination', 'part') is conceived as something that exists in itself, no matter whether we can define it in a finite number of words (so that random sets are not excluded) (Gödel, 1964:262).

In terms of his *logicistic* approach to mathematics Russell believes that with the aid of his class concept, which is supposed to be purely *logical* in nature, he can reduce mathematics to logic. However, he did not realize the circularity entailed in his argumentation. He speaks of $1 + 1$ as the number of a class w which is the logical sum of two classes u and v (with no common terms and each one term only – Russell 1956:119). Clearly, Russell already had to use the terms 'one' and 'two' in order to advance his attempted definition of $1+1$ – showing the *circularity* present in his 'definition'.

Our argument will be that within our experience of the diversity in reality the moral aspect of *love* also represents a basic term that is equally *indefinable*. But this aim requires that we first explore another issue lying at the foundation of the issue of indefinability, namely *irreducibility*.

5. INDEFINABILITY AND IRREDUCIBILITY

The diversity of experiential aspects within creation depends first of all on their *mutual irreducibility*, manifested in their *uniqueness*. This irreducible uniqueness ensures that there are only two options when it comes to *concept* and *definition*:

- (i) Provide mere synonyms for the core meaning of an aspect.
- (ii) Define the core meaning of an aspect in terms derived from a *different aspect*, i.e. one that is *irreducible* to the first-mentioned aspect.

Option (ii), namely attempting to define *love* by employing terms derived from non-ethical aspects, terminates in reduction and this results in a clash of laws, also known as *antinomies*.⁸ Reflecting on option (i) suggests that we can only end up by uttering tautological statements, such as *love is love*, *life is life* or *continuity is continuity*. Yet this stance at least rejects reductionistic "nothing but" claims, such as when it is alleged that "love is nothing but ..." – and then the open space can be filled in by anything *different* from the core ethical meaning of love, such as *instinct*, *lust*, *feeling*, *duty*, and so on.

Scheler, for example, attempts to define *love* in terms of *movement*, *concrete-individual* value-laden objects and *ideal values*.⁹ Fellsches concedes that *love* cannot be brought under an exact concept.¹⁰ Yet he proceeds by explicating a number of things about love, such

8 Just recall the antinomies of Parmenides and his pupil, Zeno (Achilles and the tortoise, the flying arrow), who argued against multiplicity and motion in his attempt to "define" them purely in spatial terms. With his formulation of the law of inertia, Galileo much later realized that motion is an original and irreducible mode of explanation (see Galileo, 1973).

9 "Liebe ist die Bewegung, in der jeder konkret individuelle Gegenstand, der Werte trägt, zu den für ihn und nach seiner idealen Bestimmung möglichen höchsten Werten gelangt; oder in der er sein ideales Wertwesen, das ihm eigentümlich ist, erreicht" (Scheler 1973:164).

10 What is valid for experience also applies to love, namely "dass sie nicht auf einen exakten Begriff zu bringen ist" (Fellsches 1999:784).

as its *relatedness* to something; that love entails a self, another self and the relation between these two (in philosophical parlance, it concerns a subject-subject relation); that it disregards of *power*,¹¹ and so on.

6. THE MEANING OF LOVE IS EXPRESSED IN COHERENCE

What is actually happening here is that Scheler does not define the core meaning of love but simply, without realizing what he does, explores the other side of uniqueness, namely *coherence*. Acknowledging the uniqueness (irreducibility and indefinability) of love provides us just with the first part of the picture, because the *meaning* of love only comes to expression through its *coherence* with all the non-ethical aspects of reality.

Yet, this additional perspective is valid only if the original core meaning of love is accepted in the sense that, within the moral aspect, it *qualifies* all references to other aspects of reality. The mere fact that Scheler does not recognize this qualifying role of the ethical aspect, shows that instead of analyzing this inter-aspectual (or: inter-modal) coherence, he indeed attempts to *define* love in non-ethical terms (movement, values, subject-subject relations). Such a path leads to the reduction of love to whatever non-ethical terms (or more than ethical terms) are employed.

Movement relates to the original meaning of the kinematical aspect of *uniform motion* (constancy) and therefore does not “define” love at all. Of course, by virtue of the interconnection between different aspects, the ethical aspect does *analogically* reflect the coherence between these two aspects, for genuine love relationships display the feature of *ethical persistence* (constancy), even if they may only have a relatively short duration. But *ethical endurance* (persistence; constancy) is not the same as, for example, the *economic persistence* of a currency, or the *biotic persistence* (the life-span of a living entity), and so on. Although the term *value* does have a bearing on the ethical – we speak of *ethical values* – we have to question the “basket” understanding of morality according to which all forms of normativity are embraced by it, also found in theology and theological ethics. To be sure, there are also other kinds of values, such a religious values, economic values, cultural values, and so on. Consequently, as such it cannot be a *distinctive defining feature* of the ethical. Likewise, there are also multiple non-ethical *subject-subject relations* (such as lingual subject-subject relations, social subject-subject relations and aesthetic subject-subject relations), disqualifying at once also subject-subject relations to serve as a distinctive defining feature of love (as Buber attempted to do). These two properties – values and subject-subject relations – represent *properties* shared by *different* aspects.

7. ANALOGY AND METAPHOR

The traditional Thomistic view of the *analogia entis* ensured that the theme of analogical knowledge remained alive within theological circles. However, the underlying problem regarding similarities and differences represent one of the general philosophical issues that is unavoidable within theology. We will develop an alternative *new* understanding of the relation between analogy and metaphor by contrasting it with the recently advanced “embodied” view of metaphor found in the approach of Lakoff and Johnson. The theological significance of our own new view will be presented in §11 within the context of a discussion of the difference between conceptual and concept-transcending knowledge.

11 Compare the following German saying: “love governs without force, and serves without becoming a slave.”

Lakoff and Johnson also acknowledge the basic nature of love (its uniqueness): “Our experience of love is basic – as basic as our experience of motion or physical force” (Lakoff and Johnson 1999:70). To this view they add that the “inherent structure” of love is “nonmetaphorical” (Lakoff and Johnson 1999:70). Yet, according to them, “abstract concepts” are conceptualized by multiple metaphors.¹² They speak of conceptual metaphors and cross-domain mappings – where these domains are also *conceptual* in nature. They believe that without these mappings the domain of love would shrink to a mere skeleton: “Without the conventional conceptual metaphors for love, we are left with only the skeleton, bereft of the richness of the concept” (Lakoff and Johnson 1999:72). They substantiate their view with reference to conventional understandings of love: “Love is conventionally conceptualized, for example, in terms of a journey, physical force, illness, magic, madness, union, closeness, nurturance, giving of oneself, complementary parts of single object and heat” (Lakoff and Johnson 1999:71).

If love is truly *basic* then it is, as argued above, not only irreducible but also *conceptually* indefinable. For this reason it is strictly speaking incorrect to speak of the *concept* of love. What can be conceptualized are the multiple *moments of coherence* between the ethical aspect and those aspects lying at the foundation of this aspect. We called these moments of coherence *analogical moments* because they refer to some or other aspect in which the analogical term appears in its original (irreducible) sense. Some of the “conventional metaphors” mentioned by Lakoff and Johnson actually fall within the category of aspectual analogies (modal analogies). The meaning of love indeed entails *moral*¹³ *union* (two-oneness – numerical analogy), *moral closeness* (spatial analogy), *moral nurturance* (cultural analogy of care) and moral participation (an analogy of the whole-parts relation that has its original seat within the spatial aspect).

Modal functional (inter-aspectual) analogies can at most be *substituted* by synonymous terms (for example when continuous extension – the core meaning of the spatial aspect – is ‘synonymised’ by words and phrases such as *being connected*, *coherent* or even the expression the *whole-parts relation* – see Strauss 2002).

In the absence of an articulated theory of modal functions, the nature of inter-modal (inter-aspectual/inter-functional) connections is distorted in the theory of conceptual metaphor. The effect is that instead of analyzing the ontic meaning of the moral aspect – with love as its unique and indefinable meaning-nucleus – Lakoff and Johnson embarks on an investigation of the “concept of love” by asking whether or not it is “independent of the metaphors for love?” (Lakoff & Johnson 1999:71). Concepts and conceptual domains reflect the analytical activities of human subjects. But discerning inter-modal connections between different aspects in reality presupposes their *ontic* existence-in-coherence. For this reason the inter-modal connections between modal aspects are seen in their backward-pointing (retroicipatory) and forward-pointing (anticipatory) analogies. It is through these (retroicipatory and anticipatory) analogies that an aspect demonstrates its structural participation in an unbreakable meaning-coherence.

The expression “conceptual metaphor” – although described in an intelligible way by Lakoff and Johnson – conflates the sign mode with its foundational logical-analytical aspect. Concepts are not words – and therefore they are also not metaphors. If the word “lion” brought with it all the features entailed in the *concept* lion, then the metaphor referring to General De la Rey as “the lion of Western Transvaal” would be contradictory, for clearly a human being is not

12 “Our most important abstract philosophical concepts, including time, causation, morality, and the mind, are all conceptualized by multiple metaphors, sometimes as many as two dozen” (Lakoff and Johnson 1999:71).

13 We are employing the terms moral and ethical as synonyms, although it is also possible to differentiate them by referring to the *moral* as the aspect or reality that delineates the field of investigation of the scholarly discipline called *ethics*.

a lion. Logically speaking it is contradictory to envisage a *square circle* – but in its metaphorical use of words language is not troubled by this at all, for we are all used to speak of a *boxing ring* (which is actually square!).

Lakoff and Johnson see in their “theory of conceptual cross-domain mapping” an approach that can account for everyday and novel cases, for “the theory of the novel cases is the same as the theory of the conventional cases,” which is “thus best called a theory of metaphor” (Lakoff & Johnson 1999:70).

The cross-domain mappings operative in “conceptual metaphor” do require a truly conceptual understanding of the constitutive elements of the (original) domains. Their guideline states that difficulties emerge whenever such mappings are understood in a literal instead of metaphorical sense.

It is precisely this difference between the literal and metaphorical which shows that metaphor has its original seat within the sign mode and not within the logical-analytical aspect. It pre-supposes the conceptual-logical dimension (as a foundational aspect), but ought to be distinguished from it.

Although metaphors transcend the logical-analytical mode, their lingual meaning cannot be understood except on the basis of concept formation. Without the foundational role of (analytical) concept formation, the entire distinction between a *source domain* and a *target domain* becomes meaningless, as well as the distinction between *literal* and *metaphorical*. Precisely because a metaphor is not a concept, it can employ words metaphorically without violating the analytical scope of some or other concept to which the word(s) under consideration may refer (compare the mentioned example of General De la Rey metaphorically designated as the “lion of Western Transvaal”).

Since the choice of source and target domains is relatively arbitrary, it is understandable why metaphors could be *replaced* by other metaphors, apparently unrelated to the initial ones. It is only in the case of purely *functional modal analogies* that every attempt at such an exchange is unsuccessful, since the invariable effect is that modal (functional) analogies are simply substituted by or with synonymous terms. Look for example at different ways to capture the spatial analogy within the structure of the social aspect (leaving aside the fact that one has to distinguish between analogies on the law side and the factual side): social distance; social next-to-each-other; social super- and sub-ordination; social position; social stratification, and so on. All these expressions are in an important way connotatively synonymous – namely insofar as they (analogically) reflect some or other structural feature of the spatial aspect. This possibility to ‘synonymise’ modal analogies is absent in the case of analogies between entities (or entities and modal properties/modal domains) as designated by metaphors. One may replace the metaphor “the nose of the car” by referring to the “bonnet of the car.” Whereas we do have denotative *synonymity* in this case, connotative *synonymity* is absent.

In fact, we have to expand our argument that aspectual analogies (similarities and differences between aspects of reality) ought to be distinguished from metaphors, because there are actually four possibilities. Metaphors represent three kinds of analogies:

- 1) Analogies between different entities (E–E: “the nose of the car”);
- 2) Analogies between entities and functional aspects (E–A: such as the “web of belief”);
- 3) Analogies between aspects and entities (A–E: such as the “social glue” of society).

These three categories of analogies are true metaphors because they are *replaceable* by others

totally different from the initial ones. For this reason the fourth option, inter-aspectual analogies, are not called metaphors – owing to the irreducibility of functional aspects their modal analogies cannot be replaced, except by synonyms as we have noted in connection with continuous extension. In §11 the theological significance of this way of distinguishing between different kinds of analogies will be explained.

Our analysis of the inter-modal coherence between the moral aspect and the other aspects of reality in the next paragraph commences by looking at a well-known biblical passage.

8. ASPECTUAL ANALOGIES REFLECTING THE COHERENCE BETWEEN THE MORAL ASPECT AND OTHER ASPECTS OF REALITY

Suppose we say that love is patient and kind, that it trusts, protects and rejoices with the truth (cp. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7). Are we not then addressing issues such as moral politeness (social analogy within the ethical aspect), moral trust (fiduciary analogy), moral care (cultural-historical analogy), and moral truth (logical-analytical analogy). Without entering in a theoretical analysis the Bible simply explores in a perfectly meaningful way the interconnections between the moral aspect and the other aspects of reality.

Of course a systematic theoretical analysis will expand the scope of the above-mentioned analogies implicit in the text of Corinthians. For example, such an analysis can point out that relationships of love always reflect an element of coherence with the one and the many (the numerical). The reference to the *ethical unity* of a married couple only makes sense because two people are *united* in it – it is a moral *bi-unity*. The fact that marriage is described as an intimate moral relationship says something about the *moral proximity* of marriage partners. They share a *peculiar moral sphere* in life, with a clear demarcation and awareness of what is *inside* and *outside* (we versus they). Amidst the *changing* environment a marriage has to *endure*, it ought to display *ethical persistence* and *moral adaptation* (the kinematical, physical and biotical analogies). Love implies mutual attraction (physical analogy),¹⁴ often manifested in *emotional* ties. Without the necessary *moral sensitivity* (sensitive-psychical analogy), without being *morally considerate* (logical analogy) and without avoiding what is *morally excessive* (economic analogy) there will be no *moral harmony* and no *moral justness* (aesthetic and juridical analogies).

None of these moral analogies can be replaced like metaphors. Yet, metaphors about love can enrich the inter-aspectual meaning of modal analogies – for example when *ethical persistence* is metaphorically depicted as the *journey of love*.

Although some of the examples of modal analogies within the ethical aspect were coloured by the typical nature of marriage it should be kept in mind that the basic meaning of the moral aspect has an intrinsic *modal universality*. This claim merely states that whatever there is – albeit concrete (natural and societal) entities and processes of whatever kind – has a function within the ethical aspect. The meaning of the moral aspect of love should start with this unspecified modal universality of the ethical aspect. If it is not done one may run into difficulties to distinguish, for example, between law and morality. In this context the moral subject-object relation will receive some brief attention as well.

9. LAW AND MORALITY

Since Kant, we inherited a distinction between law and morality in terms of the following

14 Jüngel points out that that repulsion contradicts the meaning of love, although *mere* attraction still needs something more – selflessness in favour of the Other (Jüngel 1978:438).

opposition: law is said to be *universal*, *external* and *compulsory*, whereas morality is supposed to be *individual*, *internal* and *voluntary*. To understand what is here at stake, one has to consider the distinction between *collective* and *communal* societal relationships on the one hand and *coordinated* societal relationships on the other.¹⁵ By describing law as universal, external and compulsory, the jural aspect is identified with typical collective jural relationships – such as those found within the *state*, where the ‘external’ authority of the government applies ‘universally’ and in a coercive (compulsory) way to all subjects. When morality is defined in terms of ethical coordinated relationships, it is characterized as individual, internal and voluntary. However, we may reverse the picture completely simply by choosing the nuclear family (a moral societal collectivity), for then the authority of the parents is valid for all children (‘universal’); it is external to them and compulsory for them. Alternatively, instead of considering state-law we may look at a coordinated jural relationship, such as what is found within contractual relationships. In this case every individual is free to enter (or not to enter) into a contract, it is a purely individual decision and therefore not external but internal. Now it is law that is individual, internal and voluntary and morality that is universal, external and compulsory. It is therefore clear that the general modal meaning of law and morality ought to be understood in abstraction from all collective, communal and coordinated relationships.¹⁶

Fellsches discusses three kinds of love, namely *erotic love*, *friendship love* and *general human love* (in the sense that all human beings share in the capacity to love) (Fellsches 1999:785-787). These are all examples of moral subject-subject relationships. Some ethicists followed Buber, Aalders and Stoker in *restricting* the meaning of the moral aspect to moral subject-subject relationships.

Stoker explicitly says that a mere love for nature does not reveal the *ethical* or *moral* dimension, since the latter only occurs when the former is viewed in the light of ‘persoonlijkheidsliefde’ (literally: ‘personality love’ – see Stoker 1941:29).¹⁷ In order to explain his intention Stoker gives the example of torturing an animal. Such an act is not immoral because it is an animal that is tortured, but because a human being performs the act. By torturing an animal, the human being displays a lack of self-love and does not fulfil the calling we as human beings have to rule over creation. It is striking that Heyns nonetheless refers to *love* that is *non-moral* in nature, namely love for entities in nature (things, plants and animals). The logical consequence of restricting the moral domain to the moral subject-subject relations (starting with Buber), is that since animals are not persons, they by definition fall outside the ethical domain. By contrast, the reality of love for things, plants and animals decisively shows that the moral aspect also embrace *ethical subject-object relations* – during the past few decades theologically reflected in increasing concerns for environmental issues (global warming etc.).¹⁸

What, within legal philosophy, is known as legal-ethical principles or the principles of

15 Collective relationships display both a durable relation of super- and subordination and a solidary unitary character, communal relations evince one of these two features and coordinational relationships none of them.

16 Habermas has this confusion in mind when he warns us that one must not succumb to what he calls an ingrained prejudice, namely that “morality pertains only to social relationships for which one is personally responsible, whereas law and political justice extend to institutionally mediated spheres of interaction” (Habermas 1996:109).

17 Later on Stoker preferred the term “persoonsliefde” (person-love) as accepted by Johan Heyns in his works on ethics (see Stoker 1967:227 e.v.).

18 Without entering into a discussion of it, it should be noted that in the absence of distinguishing properly between moral subject-subject and subject-object relations may lead to the idea that plants and animals are also bearers of “subjective rights”

juridical morality (see Hommes 1972:481-456), such as the criminal legal principle of fault, the principle of *bona fides*, that of *equity*, the juridical *personality principle*, and so on, are actually all instances of *justice*. In other words, the meaning of love is also reflected within the structure of non-moral aspects, such as the jural in the case of principles of the jural morality.

10. LOVE IN MULTIPLE SENSES

The first way to deal with the multiple senses in which the word love can be used is to make the claim that the semantic *domain* of the word *love* encompasses a multiplicity of nuances. Semantic field theory (see Geckeler 1971 and 1978) accounts for these meaning-nuances by means of Venn-diagrams. Synonymous words share at least one meaning-nuance from their respective semantic domains, while each word should at least also have one meaning-nuance that is distinct from the other word. For example, the Afrikaans words /donker/ and /duister/ share the nuance of “absence of light” – whereas the “deep tint” as a meaning-nuance of /donker/ has as its correlate an equally unique meaning-nuance in the meaning-nuance “sinister” of the word /duister/. If no single meaning-nuance overlaps an antonym is at hand.

However, the meaning of love opens up further complications that cannot be accounted for solely with an appeal to the semantic domain of words. What is needed is an important epistemological distinction that has direct relevance for the theological use of the term love in a central religious sense, a differentiated (DPP) sense (see §3), and in what will be called a concept-transcending sense (the idea of God's love).

11. CONCEPTUAL KNOWLEDGE AND CONCEPT TRANSCENDING KNOWLEDGE

What happened when Jesus was approached by the Pharisees with regard to divorce (Matt. 19:8)? Christ held that what God has put together, no person may put asunder, to which the Pharisees replied by asking why Moses prescribed the use of a letter of divorce? Jesus in turn replied, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning” (Mt. 19:8). Jesus appeals to the beginning – in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Gen.1:1). This is an appeal to the original creation: in principle (i.e., by virtue of the creational principle for marriage) no-one may divorce, even as a person's sinful heart and anti-normative acts (cf. Mt. 15:19) may require it factually.

The Bible regularly uses the word *love* in a differentiated sense, referring to a particular aspect of human existence. Just as frequently the word *love* is also employed in a radical religious sense, i.e. in a RCT sense. Yet, when love is used in a differentiated sense it should not be confused with love in the central religious sense of the word – as it is for example expressed in the central commandment of love. This commandment, demanding that we love God and our neighbour with all our heart, belongs to the RCT dimension of creation and contains, for exactly this reason, an appeal to *all* the facets of our existence. For that reason the second part of the central commandment of love is implied by the first part, because our fellow human beings are equally created in the image of God and it calls for love of God. However, when we talk about marital love, family love or patriotic love, we are only referring to one specific sector of our existence and not to its totality. The RCT meaning of the central commandment of love does not contain these *typical specifications* – such as marital love, family love and friendship love – because the latter forms of love are derived from differentiated (typical) creational principles. Of course the law or structural principle holding for a specific kind or type of entities continues to have its own universality, but this universality is *specified*. The law for being a marriage is

universal in the sense that it holds for *all* marriages. But because not everything is a marriage, this type of law is specified – it applies to marriages only. In general, one can say that modal laws encompass all possible entities, whereas typical laws (type laws) only hold for a limited class of entities. Natural and social entities therefore function in a ‘typical’ way within every modal aspect.¹⁹

We have noted that this difference is clearly present in the Bible. In distinction from those portions of Scripture which pertinently refer to the central sense of the commandment of love (such as Mt. 22: 37-40, Dt. 6:5, and Lev. 19:18), we find many sections in which love is positioned alongside terms derived from other facets of reality. Consider the statements in Gal. 5: 22 and I Tim. 6: 11. The first reference speaks of the “fruit of the Spirit”, and then mentions “love, joy, peace, ...” and so forth. It also mentions that towards which we should be striving, namely “faith, endurance and gentleness.”

Note, by the way, that something similar happens to the word *faith*: it is sometimes used in the sense of a *total heart commitment* to God and at other times – such as in the mentioned case of I Tim.6:11 – to indicate a virtue which is valued next to and in distinction from other virtues.

When the word *love* is used to refer to anything functioning within the moral or ethical aspect of reality we meet a *conceptual use* of this term. This remark applies to the core meaning of all the other aspects of reality, for terms derived from them can also be used in a conceptual way.

A multiplicity of entities have their number – and when this number is used to refer to them the core meaning of number found a conceptual use. The core meaning of number is given in a *discrete multiplicity*. Merely using this core meaning may also support our awareness that everything is *individually unique*, in the sense of *being distinct*. This awareness embraces much more than merely the numerical aspect. In fact it refers to something individual in its totality, pointing at *all* its aspects and not just to its arithmetical aspect. In other words, number words may either be used to refer to whatever functions within the boundaries of the numerical aspect of reality or they may be used to refer to realities exceeding or transcending the boundaries of this aspect. This latter kind of use may be designated as a *concept transcending use* of numerical terms. Likewise, the spatial awareness of wholeness (totality) first of all refers to spatial figures – if the three sides of a triangle are not *present at once* (as a whole) then we do not have a triangle. Next to this conceptual use of the spatial term whole (totality) we can also employ it in a concept transcending manner – for example when we refer to something in its totality, once again entailing *all* facets of such an entity and not merely its spatial aspect.

This equally applies to the moral aspect, with *love* as its core meaning. A conceptual use of the term love is found when we use it to refer to individuals or societal collectivities functioning within this aspect. However, when we speak of the *central commandment of love* the term love is employed in a concept transcending way – pointing beyond the ethical meaning of love to the radical, central and total religious dimension of creation – where the ultimate commitments of human beings find their seat and from whence the issues of life emerge (see Proverbs 4:23). When the Bible says *God is love* another instance of using the term love in a concept transcending way is encountered – but in this case its referential meaning does not merely exceed the boundaries of the moral aspect of creation, but indeed also creation itself.²⁰

19 The word ‘typical’ actually refers to the *typonomic* specification of entitary functions (*typos* = type and *nomos* = law). Therefore typical functions can also be designated as *typonomic functions*.

20 This remark applies to all the metaphors and aspectual terms used by the Bible in a concept transcending way. Think about expressions concerning *God as Father*, *God as King* as well as affirmations such as *God*

Although we are used to associate God almighty with God's sovereignty and God the Father with God's love, these two key metaphors, which are employed in a concept-transcending way by the Bible, do not exclude the apparent opposite features, because the sovereign God is loving and the loving father is just.

Many theologians hold that God's *transcendence* is decisive for our acknowledgment of God as God.

Sometimes one referential, concept transcending, mode of speech is privileged, without recognizing the creational location of the terms employed. Brunner, for example, states: "The omnipresence of God is his elevation above space whereas his eternity and immutability constitute his elevation above time" (Brunner 1972:272). What he does not realize is that he had to use *spatial terms* in order to assert that God is 'above' space! Likewise the idea of God's immutability employs the core kinematical meaning of time, manifested in a *uniformly moving* body (also designated by using synonymous terms such as *endurance, persistence and constancy*) in a concept transcending manner.²¹

It simply seems to be unavoidable that the difference between God and creation can only be explained while inevitably using certain creational terms – and for that purpose we have accounted for this inevitability by introducing a (philosophical) epistemological distinction within knowledge, namely that between *conceptual knowledge* and (the limits of concepts transcending) *idea-knowledge*. The theological significance of this distinction could be illustrated with reference to the classical theological idea that one must distinguish between God "in Himself" and God as "He revealed Himself to us."

This distinction is informed by another one – one in which essence and appearance are opposed to each other. This distinction is derived from the Greek substance concept. Since it exceeds the cope of this article to explain this legacy in more detail, it will suffice merely to briefly mention what it entails. The substance concept informed the theological tradition and inspired it to distinguish between God's self-knowledge (*theologia archetypa* directed towards God as He is "in Himself") and the knowledge through which He revealed Himself to us (accommodated to creation – *theologia ectypa*). All of this flows from the substance concept. In addition this distinction is also closely connected to what is called *communicable* and *incommunicable* properties of God. Bavinck explains that the *theologia archetypa* concerns the knowledge with which God knows himself and that the *theologia ectypa* is the knowledge of God as accommodated and 'anthropomorphised' to be suitable for the finite human consciousness.²²

Alternatively, when it is said that God is love there is not anything "unknown" involved, *hidden* behind this revelation. After all, if it were the case God would have turned into an unknown God, a *Deus absconditum*. However, in terms of the distinction between conceptual knowledge and concept-transcending knowledge we take God on His Word and accept that He is the love He claims He is. We can trust the Word of God. God is indeed what He reveals to us, behind this revelation there is not an unknowable, unrevealed "essence." By contrast we only have to realize that *in His love* God transcends whatever we can conceptually know of God. True knowledge of God is therefore always *concept transcending* in nature.

Reflecting on the nature of love in a biblical context and positioned against the

is Almighty, God is life, God is Omnipresent, and so on.

21 Once again, when we refer to God as *causa sui*, we first have to realize that it is only within the physical aspect of reality that we discover the primitive meaning of energy-operation, causing certain effects.

22 "Desniettemin ligt er de ware gedachte in, dat de *theologia ectypa*, welke door de openbaring aan schepselen geschonken wordt, niet is de absolute zelfkennis Gods, maar die kennis Gods, gelijk ze geaccommodeerd is naar en geschikt gemaakt is voor het eindig bewustzijn, dus geanthropomorphiseerd" (Bavinck H. 1918. Gereformeerde Dogmatiek, I. 6, 4, p.144).

background of the preceding distinction has to say something about *eros* and *agape* as well. Of course the possible meanings of the Greek words *eros*, *philia* and *agape* are relatively dependent upon the context.²³ Plato and other thinkers from antiquity used the word *agape* for marital love and family love, whereas within the New Testament it is used for love in the sense of the (central religious) RCT dimension of creation.

12. CONCLUDING REMARK

The aim of the analysis presented in this article aimed at demonstrating that reflections within the domain of the philosophy of theology involves general philosophical distinctions while at the same time requiring that their significance for theology is elucidated. The outcome of the dissected different meaning nuances of the term love is captured in the sketch found at the beginning of this article. Right from the beginning the distinctions that were introduced anticipated the account of the difference between conceptual and concept-transcending knowledge present at the end of the article. For that matter, in referring to the religious dimension of creation the terms *radical*, *central* and *total* were used. But they were not employed in a conceptual sense, but in a concept-transcending sense. However, the full picture only emerged on the basis of systematically unpacking and highlighting the indispensable structural elements of the moral aspect with *love* as its core meaning.

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²³ Jüngel mentions that the opposition of *eros* and *agape*, in the confrontation of self-love and God-love, could be traced to the *Civitas Dei* of Augustine. He does have a positive appreciation for the fact that in spite of the difference between *eros* and *agape* they could be traced back to the structure of love shared by both: "Was man als Eros und Agape zu unterscheiden pflegt, läßt sich zunächst durchaus auf die beiden gemeinsamen Struktur der Liebe zurückführen" (Jüngel 1978:436, note 15). However, in addition our argument is that the acknowledgement of the general structure of the moral aspect makes possible both conceptual and the concept transcending usages of the term *love*.

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KEY WORDS

Love (moral aspect)
 Indefinability (primitive terms)
 Uniqueness and coherence
 Analogy and metaphor
 Concept and idea

TREFWOORDE

Liefde (morele aspek)
 Ondefinieerbaarheid (primitiewe terme)
 Uniekheid en samehang
 Analogie en metafoor
 Begrip en idee

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