# 9. Conclusions

The previous chapter focusing on *agapeic transcendence* was the completion of the journey we started with Taylor's moral realism to study his approach to the motivation towards *agape*-based neighbor-love. In the last pages, we aim to gather the main answers to the questions with which we started this research. In this sense, we positively value Taylor's recovery of *agape* as a way of articulating moral motivation towards altruism, despite the lack of a systematic phenomenology of selfless action motivated by the vision of the other. On the other hand, we will synthesize the insights about Taylor's approach to *agape* throughout our research to show that he provides answers to the dilemmas and criteria we established in the introduction for evaluating an ethic built from Christian love. As we will see, Taylor offers a consistent vision of *agape*. However, with a series of ambivalences and lack of clarity in some points, he resolves with what we have called a *catholic attitude*. Finally, we will address three areas in which *agape* can play a role: the motivation of third-sector workers and volunteers, the profiling of Christian faith-based organizations committed to humanitarianism, and the resolution of conflicts in the political sphere.

## 9.1. Agape as a motivational source for loving the neighbor: Strengths and weaknesses

Since the beginning of our research, we have observed that *agape's* distinctive characteristic as a moral source is openness to transcendence. In Chapter 2, we already found some elements that made us distinguish *agape* from the rest of the constitutive goods. Among these elements that marked a distinctive characteristic of the articulation of *agape* were the responsibility and concern towards the other that went as far as the capacity to renounce life goods for their own sake and not for ours; the appearance of charismatic characters

who are motivated by *agape*, capable of eliciting admiration and political transformations; and, finally, the distinctive way of motivating *agape* as a moral source, for, as we have best expressed when referring to the Good Samaritan, "it is both path and destination" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 604), making it challenging to separate the source of motivation from the very act of expressing love towards one's neighbor.

As we saw in Chapter 2, Taylor criticizes the excessive focus on right action and obligation in current moral theory and the neglect of the moral sources that can motivate action for justice or benevolence. Moreover, the effects of such interest and neglect are seen in the dilemma of modernity that appears in history in the form of moral exceptionalism and higher moral demands for solidarity and, at the same time, the lack of sufficient strength to achieve the commitments to which our ideals or *hypergoods*, in Taylor's terms, commit us. In Chapter 4, we visited the Best Account argument to justify his moral realism as a better description of moral life and human agency and his variant of *agape* theism as a better way of resolving the above tension.

In that sense, we have missed a systematic proposal of the phenomenology of motivation from *agape,* in the sense that he does not offer a prescriptive model of the action that follows the motivation of *agape*. We tried to solve this lack by turning to the reconstruction of the parable of the Good Samaritan in the same chapter. However, we did so in Taylor's terms, that is, around the frameworks of understanding that allow us to explain the moral predicament within the space where we ask ourselves about what is good, right, and what is really worth doing. We believe that such a description reinforces Taylor's *Best Account* argument.

Although Taylor aims to surface the ontology behind our moral commitments to solidarity, which is a determinant for motivation, we have missed a clarification of whether *agape* as a moral source leads to a distinctive type of action, a way of helping one's neighbor that engages more or less than selfless solidarity actions stemming from other types of moral sources. Taylor only focuses on the robustness of the motivation support of *agape* for our moral commitments, focusing in a hermeneutic-interpretative level of human agency. In short, we miss a greater interest in the etiology of *agape* toward charitable action. Such interest would place the debate in

the same terrain in which some of the authors we have mentioned throughout this work move: the theoretical explanation to be able to base our charitable action on some normative aspect but with interest in knowing what kind of action is justified and demandable.

But in this debate, the genuine contribution of Taylor's theory of motivation is to recover the ontology behind our moral commitments and the motivational power of *agape* as an aid for us to satisfy such demands. Of course, such an enterprise, which places the good as an ontological category at the center of practical philosophy, leads him to posit a moral theory from anthropological and epistemological foundations differing from many of those we allude to in this research, including utilitarianism, Kantian formalism, Dussel's liberation philosophy, Rosa's resonance, and even, as discussed in chapter 8, Nussbaum's exclusive humanism or Nietzsche's anti-humanism. Taylor's common interest in the discussions with all of them is to warn of the consequences of the mutilation of an integral vision of human agency, forgetting the ontology behind the question of the good life and transcendence.

In a way, the lack of attention to the phenomenology of moral action shows us that Taylor does not resolve the inner tension of practical philosophy, especially accentuated in modernity, between the seeking of the normative criterion of moral obligation and the interest in the good life, focusing on the former. Nevertheless, this fact does not encourage us to discard his model of articulation of constitutive goods and *agape* in particular for the motivation towards love of neighbor. We believe that his recovery of ontology with the range of arguments he offers is plausible. Moreover, his influence is apparent in new models for normatively assessing the social consequences of the dynamics of modernity from the concern for the good life, as we have seen with Hartmut Rosa. Although we believe that his moral realism does not commit itself to a concrete vision of the good and remains at the level of the construction of human meanings, we believe that his recovery of ontology is a line of thought to follow due to its potential to unite the interest in the good life with the social transformation from an integral vision of the human being.

## 9.2. Evaluating the presence of agape in Taylor's philosophy: Consistencies and ambivalences

With Taylor's assessment of the motivation for altruism based on *agape*, we do not exhaust our interest in his approach to this moral source. As we saw in the introduction, *agape* is the focus of attention in debates about the meaning of neighbor love from a Christian perspective. As we already advanced, Taylor does not present a systematic thought on *agape*, albeit it plays a distinctive role in several places in his thought. Specifically, we already argued that *agape* functions as a distinctive motivation towards the neighbor—above all, at the level of the moral background—and in the construction of a more just society. For this reason, we established a series of criteria to evaluate his conception of *agape* in light of the tensions around its definition.

The first tension concerns the dynamism of grace and the relationship between the supernatural love of God and the use of human freedom in moral discernment. Specifically, we refer to the tension between emphasizing *agape* as external ecstatic love in a dialectical relationship with the nature of human love or as an incarnate love that already dwells in human interiority. Thus, we have elements in Taylor's thought that underline both sides of the dilemma. On the one hand, in *Sources of the Self*, we saw that *agape* was clearly defined as grace (cf. Taylor, 1989a, p. 410) so that we could reconstruct a first narrative of its secularization from the *slippages* that would lead to the occlusion of the supernatural in our current times. Such stress on grace could have led us to think of *agape* from a strong variant of its ontology as an exception to its peculiar form of moral realism. However, on the other hand, we find a multiplicity of accounts of *agape* insisting on an incarnational accent starting from the conference *A Catholic Modernity?* in 1996, which marks the beginning of his increased attention to the phenomenon of secularization and the conditions of belief.

Since then, Taylor has presented in various works the peculiarity of *agape* as a source of motivation that functions simultaneously as a constitutive good with origin in transcendence and a phenomenology of motivation based on the bodily movement of *splangnizesthai*, the call to transformation and relationality, finding in the other the very image of God. Thus, relationality and transformation are

united, especially in Taylor. Moreover, relationality is the basis of *agape networks*, pre-legal tacit bonds of direct relationships and gift exchange not based on categorical grouping but as "a skein of relations which link particular, unique, enfleshed people to each other" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 739).

The second tension refers to the relationship between responsibility towards distant strangers and care for those who are closer. In other words, the tension between the universality of love, that is, its non-limitation, and the need arising from human nature to be specific or ordered in the scope and obligation of neighborly love. In Taylor's case, although he pays attention to civic, social, or political solidarity, he always tends to stress the universality as a non-limitation of the scope of *agape*. (cf. Taylor, 1994c, 1999f, 2010a; see also Browne & Lynch, 2018; Taylor, 1995e). Within this universality, Taylor tends to every human being in need, always from the spontaneity, gratuitousness, and proximity that characterizes *agape*, as we saw in the example of the Good Samaritan. We could even claim that, from the perspective of *agape* in Taylor, global solidarity is the origin of any human solidarity, including civic or social solidarity (contra Scholz, 2012, p. 232ff). On the other hand, the universality of love, as moral universalism or *agapeic space*, is the origin and culmination of the history of ethical growth, which begins in the axial age and culminates again in *agape* as a result of the slow growth of ethical vision and repertoires of effective historical action that raises ethical standards (cf. Taylor, 2021a).

However, this approach's weakness lies in explaining the link between the universal scope of *agape* and the narrower space of relationality in Taylor. Taylor hints by referring to *agape networks* and the new relationality that arises from the encounter between the Good Samaritan and the wounded. He also mentions the elevation to new horizontal orders of understanding by the vertical elevation and motivational conversion of the whole society through reconciliation and forgiveness, mediated by charismatic characters, such as Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, or MLK. But, ultimately, the only resource for seeing the union of universality and particularity and the foundation of all solidarity in *agape* is faith, albeit quasi-sacramentally present in these figures and in the eschatological confidence that God drives history into a more *agapeic* humanity.

Nevertheless, such ultimate dependence on faith, although it is its *proprium*, comprises part of the fragility of *agape*, for in the last instance, as grace, it is uncontrollable (*unverfügbar*), in Rosa's terms (cf. Taylor, 2007, p. 703). God's love, even theoretically speaking, undoubtedly represents the best moral source for Taylor, but at first glance, it is not available to everyone. Despite the motivational power of *agape*, it is restricted to those who already move within the moral map oriented towards divine love. Even though a non-believer may be convinced that *agape* is the *Best Account* for sustaining a robust commitment to the good of the other, one cannot force him or her to embrace it; one can only suggest it through dialogue and encounter. Of course, Taylor's conviction is that there is a common level of understanding, a universal anthropological trait, that of the search for fullness, which eventually allows him to find a ground of understanding with no believers.

However, even if a Christian sees in other subjects with different moral frameworks the imprint of *agape* sustaining their human nature, it is easy to understand that a non-believer cannot see it.[252] A non-believer may applaud the behavior of the Good Samaritan and even want to imitate him or may be inspired by and support the leadership of the charismatic characters we have pointed out. However, it is easy to imagine that she or he will fail to be motivated by a moral source that is beyond her or his reach, at least at this moment. Taylor strives to give rational credibility to religious discourse in ethics and public dialogue (cf. Taylor, 2011l, p. 323ff; Taylor & Habermas, 2011), but without faith, it is difficult for a non-believer to take advantage of religious motivational power personally.

In any case, regarding the criteria of the discussion on *agape* that we established in the introduction, all of them have been mentioned during this research. However, we have pointed out in some chapters Taylor's ambivalence regarding the renunciation involved in the transformation of *agape*. In that sense, the renunciation of life goods by virtue of a *hypergood* or in the horizon of a constitutive good is part of the usual moral discernment of the human being, and it seems to be praised by Taylor when it is a matter of renouncing a life-good for the sake of someone else. However, when we come to religiously based motivation, Taylor shows a shifting position. Thus,

252 A similar argument can be found in (Gaita, 2000; Crittenden, 2021, p. 195).

in contrast to Nussbaum and Nietzsche, he defends heroism or the renunciation of one's interests in order to achieve something higher and more worthy of admiration. The admiration for people committed to hopeless situations bringing help, and a vision of how to overcome circumstances puts us in front of figures who have renounced many goods related to human flourishing. However, we have read Taylor as critical of the excesses of renouncing vocations, something we also saw when we placed *agape* on the axis of the ordained closer to equilibrium than maximum openness to transcendence and what he called *purity stance*. This is one of the reasons some find a lack of clear commitment either on the side of transcendence or on the side of immanence in his position (cf. Gregory & Hunt-Hendrix, 2014, p. 237).

## 9.3. Taylor and the catholic attitude: an integral and undamaged account of humanity

In the introduction, we alluded to the *catholic attitude* as a perspective from which to understand the tensions inherent in the concept of *agape* and, in particular, to understand Charles Taylor's sometimes ambivalent position. Although Taylor's work is eminently philosophical, Taylor's approach to *agape* shows a fragile and paradoxical balance that is understandable from the *catholic attitude* that we describe from the 'both/and' principle and a deep concern for unity. Such attitude explains both the lack of a synthetic vision of *agape* from the incarnational-dialectical tension and the ambivalence regarding self-renunciation.

Indeed, the almost antinomic and contradictory tension between grace as radical openness to transcendence and its dialectical pair of Nature already full of sacred meanings to the very "dogmatic paradox" (Lubac, 1988, p. 328) present in theological thought. It is precisely in these tensions that this paradoxical character manifests itself. Hence, for instance, if, on the one hand, it is difficult to understand *agape* as a distinct moral source if grace is removed from it—either manifested in an experience of God's free gift or as an illumination of natural reason—unless we wish only to give an external description of it, it is also true that the unity of grace and

human freedom in its quality as a moral source is unintelligible from the point of view of reason.

Taylor resolves the tension by alluding to faith, as we have said, yet also by linking the transcendent element to the human quest for the moral good and thus finding common ground from which to dialogue with the dominantly secular culture. In a certain sense, this is nothing less than a return to the roots of the critical discourse that gave rise to both theological reflection and moral philosophy, the beginning of which we can trace in the well-known dialogue between Adeimantus and Socrates in Book II of *The Republic*: "well, isn't god in fact good? Shouldn't be represented as such?" (Plato, 2000, 379a). To talk about God and his role in morality, Taylor chooses the path of ontology anthropologically based on the search for goodness and fullness through the meaning of our actions, through the use of backgrounds and indirect hermeneutics. Thus, the end of this tension is embraced from the background of *agape*, which is anthropologically grounded. From this realistic perspective, there is the immediacy of God's grace and openness to the other out of love freely received and given.

We can find the same horizon of understanding when it comes to resolving the ambivalence and lack of coherence that we find in the role of self-renunciation. Ultimately, without closing himself to a healthy mysticism, Taylor has the proper *catholic attitude* of not wanting to allow excessive mystical rapture, moralistic zeal, atomistic individualism, or an emphasis on identity that separates the soul from the body, the world, or society, because such prospects compromise his integral understanding of the human condition. At the same time, he recognizes that charity, without renunciation, has nothing to give. For Taylor, the balance of gratuitous giving is linked to relationality and transformation. This is seen as a positive possibility in the Good Samaritan and also in reconciliation processes developed by Truth Commissions. In these examples, we see how the articulation of *agape* has one foot in transcendence and another foot in the creation of new networks of communion. And at the same time, *agape* manifests itself without separation: just as *agape* cannot be understood without grace, neither can it be understood without the mediation of others, given the social nature of the human person and the unity between grace and nature as expressed in moral discernment and action of moral exemplars.

On the other hand, we have been mentioning those places where positive determinations of the *catholic attitude* appear throughout the research. We speak specifically of the Christian dialectic in Taylor's historical reconstruction and its use as an argument, its eschatological accent, the quasi-sacramental role of some historical personages who raise the ethical level and instill hope in broad strata of the population, and the equilibrium between the transcendent and the immanent in the *agapeic transcendence*. In a way, these places respond to the Catholic theological and philosophical accents we pointed out at the beginning: sacramentality, mediation, communion, the sense of history, and Christian realism. This interpretation, which, as we have argued, seems to us more adequate than other influences that can be found in his philosophy—especially since we have made references to Hegelian philosophy at various points -is explained not so much by advocating a "clear line of demarcation (...) of Catholic identity" (Taylor, 2020a, p. 91), but by giving a complete sense of human agency within a framework in which all aspects of what it means to be human fit. It is from this "integral, that is, undamaged" (cf. Taylor, 1989a, p. 27) perspective of Self-identity that we understand Taylor's understanding of the "both/and" of the Catholic attitude.

## 9.4. Taylor's contribution to the debate on the motivation towards altruism and the reinforcement of the call to love one's neighbor

To conclude, we would like to offer a few contributions of Taylor's vision of *agape* both to the debate on the justification of the ethics of altruism from a vision open to transcendence and to gather some places where we consider that the presence of *agape* can help the commitment to dignity and justice.

Firstly, Taylor responds to one of the questions of most significant concern in current practical philosophy—the need to give solid substantive foundations to the commitment to justice and dignity—by reactivating the ontological bases of moral motivation by focusing on human moral and spiritual experience. In a way, Taylor's question is to return to the issue of *why to be moral* (cf. Taylor, 1991, pp. 30–31), and all his work involves rethinking the forms

and categories that have marked moral reflection since modernity, rescuing the questions that have been sidelined. He answers that any ethical justification, including that of altruism if it aspires to be a universal principle, must be something with which people really identify (cf. Taylor, 2007, p. 692).

Secondly, understanding *agape* from Taylor's moral realism as possible outcome updates and qualifies the virtue of Christian love as a moral motivator towards altruism within the conditions of a pluralistic society and in dialogue with modern and postmodern outlooks. One of the virtues of Taylor's moral philosophy is that it attempts to give "orientation in contingency" at a time of "contingency of orientations" (cf. Höhn, 2006, p. 135). Moreover, he does so while respecting pluralism as a premise of his whole philosophy. His perspective on personal ethical growth needs the contrast with the plurality of goods in order to challenge one's own moral topography and arrive at another vision of the good. In the same way, the search for the moral source that best responds to the challenge of providing motivational support to the high demands of solidarity makes him advance *agape* in conditions that facilitate dialogue with other moral perspectives.

Thus, thirdly, we hold that, put into practice, Taylor's moral realism can help all those actively engaged in charitable and humanitarian engagement. In a way, Taylor asks the person who allows himself to be affected by the pain of the other what lies behind his indignation, his compassion, his critical thinking in the face of reality, his notion of justice, whatever goal he recognizes as worthy of achievement in his life, thus challenging one's sense of who he or she is and what he or she is doing for the sake of the neighbor. Thus, the question of the vision of the good behind our moral commitments accompanies the question of the correct or most effective action to alleviate the pain of the other—although Taylor does not give us many answers to the latter -reinforcing the motivational basis of action and of the vocation to lead one's own life. But the question of the vision of the good in Taylor's version also includes the possibility of proposing *agape*, as an option open to transcendence, as a way of supporting good intentions, especially in the face of the ambivalence of the world, the reality of violence, the poverty of many institutional responses or the agent's own weakness.

Fourth, a further area in which the insights of this research can help is reinforcing the identity profile of faith-based organizations engaged in social action in an age when secularization manifests itself as rationalization and excarnation, as we have described. Although we have refused to identify these organizations as *agape networks* in Taylor's terms because of their eschatological terms, these organizations are indeed called to show the distinctiveness of their action flowing from the fountain of *agape*. The model of such activity should be that of the Good Samaritan: undoubtedly, the response to an immediate need in certain situations, frequently faced by chance, but from a cordial attention, coming from the heart and from the bowels of compassion, as a call that engages the whole person in fostering the Other (Benedict XVI, 2006, §31, see also §15 and §25; Francis, 2020, §56-§86). In addition to technical and professional competence, programming and foresight, and strategic advocacy, an *agape*-based organization needs not to forget that it remains a "part of God's response to the skewed serve the robbers have lobbed into history" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 277). Like the Good Samaritan, a willing heart to relieve suffering with comfort goes far beyond protocols and codes to embrace the promised space of relationality. Like the Good Samaritan, the action of these organizations should show the genuine *catholic attitude*, understood this time as universality, as God's love that wants to reach out to all in their real need, without distinction of race, gender, age, nationality, religion or ideology, to rebuild "a skein of human relations animated by *agape*" (ibid.). Even if an effective action for the neighbor is unthinkable today outside the institutional organization, the relationality of *agape* and its discovery of God in the face of the other is the true transforming force of the action of these organizations.

Fifth, our research also focuses on *agape's* role in achieving reconciliation and recognition after periods of conflict, structural injustice, and social violence. In the face of dynamics that focus on the defense of one's own personal or family interests, discourses that emphasize a depersonalized and exclusionary collectivity or dynamics of forgetting or historical revenge, *agape* recovers the other and the perspective of the Thou (cf. Zoll, 2023, pp. 329–330). The motivational foundations of the leaders studied by Taylor show such perspective in listening to the normative points that are not theirs and in the search for collective goods to protect or to achieve.

They show the presence of *agape* in recognizing the other and the welcoming of pain in their zeal to feel the world, to discern injustices and structures that deserve to be transformed. They show that love united with justice is the only combination capable of elevating a conflict to reach forgiveness and reconciliation. Thus, we believe that this space of transcendence opened in politics provides the basis for understanding the work for truth and reconciliation that has been done in other places, such as Chile (*Informe de la Comisión Nacional sobre Prisión Política y Tortura*, 2005) or Colombia (*Hay futuro si hay verdad*, 2022), and shows a path of commitment to justice in which a Christian perspective has much to contribute.

Finally, and perhaps most fundamentally, Taylor offers an answer to Habermas' concern with which we began this research, about the need for a strong foundation of solidarity with those who suffer: the "awareness of what is missing, of what cries out to heaven" (Habermas, 2008a, pp. 30–31). For Taylor, what we are missing, in short, is to ask ourselves about what unites us with the human being who suffers, in short, about our true human integral beingness. In a time that tends to overlook substantive backgrounds, what we lack to sustain altruism, in short, is to ask ourselves about the vision of the good that sustains our ethical commitments and even to allow ourselves to be surprised by love.

The love we have discussed at length with Taylor, with its strengths and weaknesses, its consistencies and ambivalences, is nothing less than a believer's response to the question of our responsibility for the pain suffered by others and to the need felt by many people of goodwill, to respond to injustice in the world. If Taylor is correct, there is nothing so strong as *agape* for accepting human beings in their vulnerability and working strenuously for the transformation of the conditions under which human beings suffer today, despite the advances of modernity. This love involves the love with which God loves the world and which Jesus embodied and continues to be present even in a secular time of eclipsed presence of the divinity through many witnesses who continue to extend that love to the world. Taylor looks to the present and the future but is fearless in going back to the past to remind modernity that its original impulse was to foster human flourishing and reduce human suffering. But he goes further back in history and deeper within ourselves to remind

us that the original impulse that unites us, even with those who weep and struggle today, is an urge to love.

A.M.D.G.