European Philosophy and Original Sin in Stephen Mulhall

Abstract

Stephen Mulhall has distinguished himself as one of the most rigorous and constructive contemporary thinkers on European philosophy and its complicated relationship to Christian theology. A prominent locus of that relationship in his work is the Christian doctrine of original sin, and its criticism but also structural recapitulation in the work of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre and others. This article begins with an overview of relevant themes and their development in Mulhall's writings. I then offer an account of the internal tensions Mulhall identifies in Heidegger et al's ambivalent contestation of original sin, and of his own response. The centre of this response is a reconfiguration of the character of the divine, and of human participation in that divine, as radical self-abnegation. I conclude with an appreciative critique of Mulhall's proposal as insufficiently responsive to the eschatological framework within which original sin has its doctrinal and ontological place in Thomist thought.

I. Overview of Mulhall's writings on Christianity

Stephen Mulhall has engaged with Christian faith and theology throughout his career. His earliest book, *Faith & Reason* (Duckworth, 1994), sets the tone of his understanding of Christianity by setting against a rationalist engagement with religion a reading of faith building on Kierkegaard and D.Z. Phillips. Like them, Mulhall queries the central aim of rationalist theism, namely to provide rational proof for the (probable) existence of God. This critique arises not from a scepticism about the efficacy of reason, but from a criticism of the rationalist demand for an 'objective' standpoint from which to achieve certainty about God's existence. On a Kierkegaardian (and, one might add, Cavellian) view, the attempt to discuss the existence or attributes of God from an independent, objective standpoint denies from the outset one of the primary implications of divine existence, namely that there is no such standpoint: that if there is a God, the questioner is claimed in his or her entirety by that God. Thus, Mulhall suggests, from a Christian perspective, to be 'objective' vis-à-vis the claims of faith is precisely to refuse to face them, and so, from the perspective of faith, to fall short of their claim.

This approach to faith is indebted to Kierkegaard and Phillips, as read by Mulhall, as well as to Stanley Cavell's Wittgensteinian reflections on acknowledgement, which serve Mulhall as a lens to examine the phenomenon of faith in several works. However, Mulhall is also aware that Cavell's understanding of human acknowledgement, particularly as embedded in his later perfectionist humanism, is also in significant tension with Christianity's demand of an acknowledgment of the

claims of God.[1] This tension is crystallized in the Christian doctrine of original sin, which, as Mulhall argues in both *Stanley Cavell: Philosophy's Recounting of the Ordinary* and *Inheritance and Originality*, stands as both an intellectual and a spiritual challenge to post-Enlightenment philosophy's framing of the human as a fundamentally autonomous agent.[2] This challenge is more fully articulated in Mulhall's lecture series *Philosophical Myths of the Fall* (published 2005), in which he deals with some of the classic European philosophers who oppose the Christian doctrine of original sin as a repudiation of full human selfhood: Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein. Mulhall argues provocatively that these thinkers, while criticizing that doctrine, yet produce accounts of the human condition that reiterate the structure of the Christian 'myth of the Fall'. Mulhall's own sense of the *constructive* place of the Christian idea of original sin in and vis-à-vis modern European philosophy – particularly Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sartre and Weil – is then developed in papers between 2007 and 2011.[3]

In his most recent work, particularly the 2014 Stanton Lectures, Mulhall turns from Christianity's talk about humans to the form of religious language itself, developing a constructive account of religious language after Aquinas and Wittgenstein in conversation with Grammatical Thomism.[4] These lectures, especially the final one, are among many other things a rebuttal of Heidegger's lecture 'Phenomenology and Theology'.[5] Mulhall, though of course in a very different philosophical register and vocabulary, fundamentally questions the independence of philosophy from theology that is at the core of Heidegger's conception. Following Cora Diamond's constructive interpretation of Wittgenstein on nonsense, Mulhall argues in the Stanton Lectures that not every instance of the 'sheer nonsense and bruises' incurred by 'running up against the border of language' is reducible to 'language idling' and failing to do any 'work' (PI §119). Nonsense may be something more specific, which is true to the inadequacy of language in the face of that with which religious language deals: its (or rather, God's) claim on us. As Karl Barth put it: 'As theologians, we ought to speak of God. But we are humans and as such cannot speak of God.

[1] See also Judith Wolfe, 'Acknowledging a Hidden God: A Theological Critique of Stanley Cavell on Scepticism', *The Heythrop Journal* 48, no. 3 (2007), 384-405.

[2] See especially *Stanley Cavell: Philosophy's Recounting of the Ordinary* (OUP 1994), ch. 12, and *Inheritance and Originality* (OUP 2001), 415-438.

[3] 'Absolutely Paradoxical Finitude: Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sartre' (unpublished paper, given in Oxford in 2007); '"The Presentation of the Infinite in the Finite": The Place of God in Post-Kantian Philosophy' (*Oxford Handbook of Continental Philosophy*, 2007); 'Theology and narrative: the self, the novel, the Bible' (*International Journal of the Philosophy of Religion* 69, no. 1 [2011], 29-43).

[4] 'Wittgenstein on Religious Belief', in *Oxford Handbook of Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); *The Great Riddle: Wittgenstein and Nonsense, Theology and Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[5] Delivered in 1927; published in 1970 (Freiburg: Klostermann).

We ought to do both, to know the "ought" and the "not able to," and precisely in this way give God the glory.[6] Or in the words of Mulhall's final paragraph:

> Suppose philosophy acknowledged theology as bearing witness to reality's capacity to outrun our modes of reflective appraisal. Then it would necessarily either be claimed in fidelity to that testimony or bound to dismiss it; and it would know that if it chooses rejection, it would be in the name of its own defining wager that sense can be always be made of the diverse unity of our practices of sense-making. It would, in short, be forced to acknowledge that this rejection is no more, and of course no less, than an expression of faith in itself.[7]

Throughout Mulhall's work, theology stands as a challenge to philosophy's basic sense of autonomy, both as a human endeavour and as a way of speaking about (and in) the world. His shifting areas of concern create two points of possible theological intervention, one of which Mulhall investigates in his early writings, and the other of which he cautiously begins to explore in his recent work. The critical argument of my chapter is that he cannot drive the first very far without the second, but that pursuing the second seriously will force him to revise his deployment of the first.

The first entry point for theological intervention is the proximity of what might be called 'philosophies of the ordinary' to the Christian story of human fallenness. If Mulhall's *Philosophical Myths of the Fall* detects a functional parallel between the Christian idea of original sin and certain aspects of Nietzsche, Heidegger and Wittgenstein's descriptions of human existence, his *Stanley Cavell* and *Inheritance and Originality* argue that Christianity has better resources than these philosophers for describing what the philosophers intuit. Mulhall's starting point here is the shared claim by 'philosophers of the ordinary' such as Heidegger, Cavell, and others, that humans naturally but deleteriously strive for a transcendence that is both enduringly alluring and constitutively impossible. What is more, these philosophers regard this striving not merely as erroneous but also as morally ruinous: a self- and other-destructive denial of what it is to be human. The Christian concept of original sin, thinks Mulhall, succeeds better than Cavell, Heidegger, and others in capturing *both* the universality *and* the moral valence of such human egomania: the fact that it is both 'natural' or universal and morally significant.

Before returning to Mulhall's arguments in this regard, I want to note the possible theological intervention that Mulhall does *not* pursue, or begins to consider only cautiously in his new work, as of yet without direct reference to his earlier writings. We have already said that Heidegger, Sartre, Cavell et al identify the temptation to transcend finitude as an enduring characteristic of finite

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[6] Karl Barth, 'The Word of God as the Task of Theology', in *idem, The Word of God and Theology*, trans. Amy Marga (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 171-198; p. 177.
[7] 'Authority and Revelation: Philosophy and Theology', being lecture 6 of the 2013-14 Stanton Lectures [manuscript].

human existence. However, Christianity not only (as Mulhall stresses) identifies this predicament by the concept of original sin, but also grounds it in a particular anthropology, namely the creation of humanity for the purpose of participation in the life of God (traditionally called *theosis* or deification). Mulhall understandably ignores this larger framework. But by doing so, he introduces distortions into his own account of original sin, making it – even on its own terms – both a less useful diagnostic and a less useful remedy. A less useful diagnostic, because it ends up seeming merely an alternative, not a more explanatory way of describing a condition that the philosophers also intuit; a less useful remedy, because Mulhall has no criteria for establishing the limits of self-denial. The call for self-denial consequently becomes endless, endangering the intuition that motivated the adduction of the concept of original sin in the first place, namely that the desire for transcendence is ineradicable. We will return to this at the end.

II. The Problem of Transcendence in Philosophies of the Ordinary

Throughout his work, Mulhall is sensitive to the manifold ways in which Christian theology and European philosophy are intertwined – the ways in which their concerns are constitutive of but also fundamentally challenging to each other. A nodal point of these concerns is the problem of metaphysics. European philosophy since Kant has tended to see Christianity as the self-serving rationalisation of an unbridled but ultimately incoherent desire for transcendence: a wish-fulfilment fantasy that humans can overcome their inherent epistemic and ontological finitude, or at least that such transcendence is vicariously realized in the God whose images and viceroys they are.

Post-Kantian European philosophers have engaged this problem of metaphysics in many different ways. Some, including Kant, Wittgenstein, and Derrida, diagnose the metaphysical impulse primarily as a structural epiphenomenon: an unwarranted extension (whether avoidable or not) of the structure of the human mind, human language, or signs in general. Others, including Heidegger, Sartre, and Cavell, identify the temptation to transcend finitude as a meta-ethical phenomenon attendant upon the conditions of finite human existence. For Heidegger, for example, this is a function of the constitutive importance of *possibility* for human self-realization: the human ability to shape his or her own essence rather than be pre-determined by it. Humans strive for 'authenticity' in the sense of realizing a certain 'wholeness' of personhood: both to be themselves and to know themselves fully. At the same time, they are never fully defined or realized in the present moment, but depend for this personhood or wholeness on a future that they can neither fully foresee nor fully control. What is more, the 'wholeness' to which they aspire is not only contingently elusive but structurally impossible, not only because there are always unrealized

possibilities, but also because the ultimate and inavertible possibility of human existence is death. If death marks the completion of one's life, and thus the point at which one might at last gain a full view of it, it also marks one's own cessation: at the very point when one might achieve wholeness, one no longer exists. For Heidegger, this leads to the realization that a realistically authentic life must, in an irreducible paradox, consist precisely in accepting the impossibility of wholeness and with it of authenticity in its full sense: human life, within the conditions that obtain, is most truly lived in conscious orientation towards one's own death – an attitude that Heidegger labels, after Luther and Kierkegaard, 'being unto death'.

With Heidegger, Cavell and Sartre, Mulhall sees the temptation to transcend finitude as an enduring characteristic of finite human existence, not merely reducible (as for Wittgenstein) to the tendency of language, when removed from its native context, to idle. To some extent, to be a free but finite human being that can desire to shape its own destiny (rather than being wholly determined by a prescribed 'nature') *just is* to desire to transcend that desire and that finitude. Heidegger, Cavell, and Mulhall's projects can thus be described as ethical inflections of the (Kantian) problem of metaphysics, centring on a morally charged description of 'the human' as most vitally defined by the tension between ineluctable finitude and the equally persistent desire to transcend it. The aim of both speculative and moral philosophy is here no longer to aspire to a transcendent ideal, but to sustain an 'authentic' human existence by refusing to collapse this constitutive tension into either a metaphysical meta-narrative or an (apathetic or 'sceptical') denial of its allure.

III. Christianity, Transcendence, and Original Sin

The relationship between this philosophical approach and that of theology is complex and shifting. 'Metaphysical philosophies of the ordinary' such as Heidegger's and Cavell's tend to caricature Christianity as paradigmatic of the metaphysical presumptuousness that it is the human task to resist. Heidegger, for example, locates this hubris in Christianity's approach both to origins and to ends – its doctrines of creation and eschatology. In his early work, the philosopher accuses Christianity (especially Paul and Augustine) of distorting the proper orientation of humans towards death by superimposing on it the assurance of a life after death which is free from uncertainty and vulnerability, and characterised by the static contemplation of God as the *summum bonum*.[8] In his later, post-metaphysical work, Heidegger identifies the Christian doctrine of a Creator God as the origin or at least archetype of the modern impulse to 'enframe' humanity and the world as a whole

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[8] See Heidegger, 'Augustine and Neoplatonism', in *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, trans. Matthias Fritsch and Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); see also Judith Wolfe, *Heidegger's Eschatology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), esp. chapters 3, 4 and 8.

within a scaffold of pre-determined natures, set and surveilled by an omniscient creator. On this view, Christianity simply reinforces the problem of mortal longings, by metaphysically validating an ambition for transcendence which should in fact be acknowledged as problematic. The Christian concept of sin, Heidegger thinks, is merely an extension of this, vilifying the human failure to achieve perfection. For the philosopher, by contrast, it is the assumption of the *possibility* of perfection or wholeness, rather than inadequacy to it, that is indicative of a spiritual blindness.

Mulhall (like Husserl before him) contests Heidegger's declared emancipation from the Christian doctrine of original sin. In reality, he argues, Heidegger takes from that doctrine both the basic sense that the human condition is one of self-alienation and deleterious desire rather than of internal harmony and potential fulfilment, and the claim that this predicament is propelled and perpetuated by a pursuit of perfection that is at once incoherent and ineradicable. This complex dynamic is already present in the biblical story of the Fall (Genesis 3), where it is with the suggestion that she might be 'like God' that the snake tempts Eve into eating the forbidden fruit of knowledge. The aspiration to be God-like, in other words, is within the Christian story both an enduring ideal (humans are, after all, 'created in his image') and a practical temptation: the hubristic ambition to aspire to the status of God, whose mere creatures they are.

It is the appeal to God as a foil to human finitude, who embodies the ideals to which humans vainly aspire, that really distinguishes the Christian doctrine of original sin from Heidegger's *Verfall*, Cavell's scepticism, and Sartre's lure of the in-itself. From the perspective of philosophy, this appeal betrays Christianity's failure to accept human finitude in its radicality. Mulhall, by contrast, repeatedly argues that the relation of the human agent to an absolute may turn out to be not extraneous but necessary to the philosophers' own basic intuition that our desire to transcend finitude is *both* universal *and* morally problematic. 'Secular ethics', he argues, must 'conceive…of the individual's ethical failings as essentially accidental modifications of a nature capable of guiltless integrity.'[9] This commitment, however, is incommensurate with these philosophers' own basic intuition that the failures they identify are universal. It also causes them to posit as outwith moral questioning basic dispositions such as being-unto-death (Heidegger) and acknowledgement (Cavell), while in reality these *should* be further questioned.[10]

As Mulhall observes, the Christian contextualization of human fantasies of totality within a relationship to the divine, by contrast, problematizes not merely certain dispositions but the subject's entire moral autonomy.

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[9] Mulhall, 'The Presentation of the Infinite in the Finite', 509.
[10] Cf. e.g. Mulhall, *Stanley Cavell*, 311.

For in the context of such a relation [to a perfect God], the most minimal particle of guilt distances us absolutely from the goodness to which we are striving to relate ourselves, revealing a possibility in us that is absolutely absent from God, and thus signifying a difference of essence between us. Furthermore this absolute standard is meant to apply to every moment of our lives, to our lives taken as a whole; and as essentially temporal beings, even the most immediate and thoroughgoing attempt on our part to realize that standard in our lives will necessarily fail to reach back beyond its own point of origin. To become aware of the demands of the good is not to enact them, but it is to become aware that one is not at present enacting them; and that failure of enactment will always be irredeemable. The temporal structure of human existence thus makes us essentially guilty, essentially incapable of bringing our lives as a whole into relation to the good; guilt is not an occasional, aberrant state that leaves the attainability of moral perfection unquestioned, but an essential (dis)qualification of our nature.[11]

This yields something that is difficult to frame in Cavellian or Heideggerian terms: not merely a renunciation of certain desires for the sake of the integrity of the self, but the recognition of that self as itself problematic. The characteristic Christian ethic is one of self-abnegation, classically expressed in Christ's words in the New Testament: 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.'[12]

Mulhall, of course, is keenly aware of the Nietzschean critique of the classic Christian posture of self-abnegation. On this critique, the Christian imposition of a morality of self-abnegation on oneself and others is merely an underhanded bid to attain, as the *reward* of self-denial in the next life, the self-realization that is explicitly condemned in this. Mulhall's response to this Nietzschean threat is to insist that Christian faith be lived as a radical self-abnegation that does not feed a clandestine ambition for self-gratification after death. This self-abnegation includes a radically apophatic ascesis: a resolute rejection of any notion of God as an 'object' of loving faith or eschatological hope which would provide a surrogate or *Sicherung* within the attempt to detach ourselves from our hubristic desires.

The model for this more radical self-abnegation, for Mulhall, is Kierkegaard read through Heidegger. Mulhall argues that when Kierkegaard describes the Christian's relation to God as an absolute attachment to the absolute, which finds its correlate in a merely relative attachment (or relation) to anything relative, then this is phenomenologically indistinguishable from Heidegger's description of Dasein's authentic relation to itself as being-unto-death. There is, for Kierkegaard, no *object* (however remote or rarefied) that can be labelled 'God', and to which the Christian relates herself absolutely, concomitantly loosening her attachment to anything within the world, including

[11] Mulhall, 'The Presentation of the Infinite in the Finite', 510.
[12] Matthew 16.24-25 (NRSV).

her own desire for gratification or fulfilment. Rather, 'God' shows up in Kierkegaard's faith world (as Mulhall understands it) *only* as a negation: as a refusal, on the part of the Christian, to attach herself absolutely to anything relative, i.e. innerworldly. This is exactly equivalent to Heidegger's emphasis that to live authentically, Dasein must recognize its own and the world's radical contingency – in Heidegger's terminology, recognize itself as the null basis of a nullity –, and refuse to attach itself to anything, even its own continued existence and identity, as if they were in any sense absolute.

But this apophatic ascesis leaves or creates a number of unresolved difficulties as a philosophical adduction of the doctrine of original sin. Mulhall has appealed to that doctrine as capable of accounting for both the universality (or 'naturalness') and the moral significance (or 'unnaturalness') of our misplaced claims to absoluteness. Yet his own treatment does not always preserve that double insight. As for Heidegger, so for Mulhall after Kierkegaard, 'fallenness' just is the wrong comportment towards one's finitude. Consequently, to acknowledge that one's absolute claims to knowledge, resources, and other people are misplaced is already, in some sense, to have overcome them. Self-abnegation, for Mulhall, is at once the acknowledgement and the cure of original sin.

But if – as traditional Christianity suggests in contradistinction to Heidegger's and Cavell's humanism – it is impossible to abnegate oneself by one's own power, then Stanley Cavell's criticism stands that the imputation of 'original sin' perversely makes human nature out to be a dysfunctional encumbrance that both has to be overcome and is ultimately insuperable.[13] Conversely, if it *is* possible, then it is necessary to ask what the motivation for such self-abnegation – such wilful abrogation of one's own will – might be; and the likeliest answer is a Nietzschean bid for reward, in which case we haven't really overcome our desires but only concealed them.

Mulhall addresses this conundrum by an elegant twist: The self-denial first encountered as apophaticism turns out, in Mulhall's treatment of the Incarnation, also to be the inmost human mode of participating in God. The Incarnation, as well as the act of Creation read through the Incarnation, teaches us that such a stance is not unrelated to God, but that on the contrary, it is God's own mode of existence. Creation, Mulhall thinks (in line with twentieth-century trends for ideas of *kenosis*), is an act not of divine power but of divine self-abnegation: God empties himself to make room for something apart from himself. The Incarnation reiterates this pattern, as described in Paul's famous kenotic hymn in the Letter to the Philippians:

> Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself,

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[13] Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 352.

taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.[14]

Self-abnegation, for Mulhall (after Heidegger after Kierkegaard), is thus at once the acknowledgement of finitude and a participation in the self-abnegating divine. This metaphysic, he suggests, pulls up the root of any residual desire for self-sufficiency or ultimate gratification by removing the vision of God as *ens realissimum* as its anchoring point.

But this raises a second problem with Mulhall's account. Ingenious as his *volta* is, it is true, I believe, neither to the Christian texts it adduces nor to the existential problem for which it seeks to account. Regarding the first, though the Christian tradition certainly portrays God as selfless, even self-emptying, in his love, this selflessness is always in the service of ultimate plenitude; specifically, the inclusion of created beings in the plenitude of the creator (see for example 1 Corinthians 15.28; Ephesians 2.4-7; Hebrews 12.2). Regarding the second, Mulhall's solution seems to me to rely on an unwarranted connotative transfer of the *desirability* of participation in a God of plenitude to participation in a God of poverty. But self-abnegation cannot be made into a good by a mere act of theological will. Participation in divinity may be a motivating power, but not participation in *such* a divinity in *such* a way. By following the Christian tradition in framing the human desire for transcendence as a desire to participate in the divine, but departing from that tradition in re-presenting transcendence as at its deepest self-abnegation, Mulhall risks defining the problem of 'mortal longings' out of existence without actually addressing it.

IV. Conclusion: Christianity and Self-Transcendence

Mulhall's account contains deep insights, not least in its rejection of any reduction of God to an object, and in its call to renewed attention to the unique nature of the Christian God as a self-emptying creator rather than a traditional *ens realissimum*. Nevertheless, his use of original sin as an explanatory framework for the problem of mortal longings as described by 'metaphysical' philosophies of the ordinary such as Heidegger's and Cavell's truncates the Christian framework to whose specificity it appeals. In order to preserve the original contribution of the Christian doctrine – whether or not that contribution is ultimately of use to philosophy – it is necessary to recall the anthropological and metaphysical framework within which the doctrine of original sin finds its place there.

This is first and foremost the framework of deification or *theosis*. According to Christian tradition, humans are created from the first for the purpose of participating, at the last, in the

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[14] Philippians 2.5-8 (NRSV).

triune life of God – the love between Father, Son, and Spirit which for Christianity defines the divine nature or life and overflows into the creation of a non-divine world. The ineradicable longing for transcendence, on the Christian account, is ontologically rooted in this human calling. However, this teleology is not a simply linear one. Deification is not only practically but also in principle unachievable by human capacities, because it consists not in achieving ultimate autonomy but in being drawn into participation in a reality greater than the self, namely the active love that God himself is. As Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* has it, 'man by his nature is ordained to beatitude [that is, deification] as his end'; but he cannot attain this end 'by his own strength', but only by the 'help of grace' which draws him into the love of God.[15] This grace is the 'special love' whereby God 'wishes the eternal good, which is Himself, for the creature', and thus 'draws the rational creature above the condition of its nature to a participation of the Divine good'.[16]

The original sin ascribed in Genesis to Adam and Eve, on this account, is not so much the wish to be 'like God' itself (Gen 3.5) – for that is indeed their vocation – but the separation of that wish, and of the concept of knowledge associated with it, from the only context in which it can be realised, namely continual reliance on, openness to, and orientation towards God in whom they have their beginning and end. Adam and Eve construe divinised knowledge and life as an autonomous power that they can somehow possess. In this way, their sin resembles that of Cavell's sceptic, who wilfully reinterprets his 'metaphysical finitude' as an 'intellectual lack' in order to avoid the full impact of human inadequacy and dependence.[17] It is 'original' sin, however – shared by all humans – because the desire is not merely spurious or incoherent.

It is worth noting, at the end, that the wish to overcome finitude, though it sometimes takes the form of megalomania, more often perhaps takes the form of the wish for unbroken and unending communion with those we love. Our wish for transcendence, in other words, is often not so much a wish for self-sufficiency, but a wish to 'bind unto ourselves' those we love and need. But this wish is, in practice, self-undermining: for the only way to secure our bonds is by *controlling* those we love; and to control them is to lose what we desire, namely their freely given love, their ability to affirm us *as others*. We can only see ourselves aright in the love of another, but we have a tendency to reject that otherness for fear that it will not give us what we need.

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[15] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1-2.114.2. The identification of beatitude and deification is most explicitly made in *ST* 1.12.2 and 3.9.3 ad 3.

[16] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1-2.110.1.

[17] For more on the ways in which an account of original sin rooted in this explicitly theological ontology queries Heidegger's and Cavell's versions of 'fallenness', see Wolfe, 'Acknowledging a Hidden God', 400-2, and Wolfe, *Heidegger's Eschatology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), Conclusion.

The needful response, however, cannot be a mere 'relative attachment' or denial of our need for each other, as Mulhall sometimes seems to counsel. Simone Weil's (somewhat uncharacteristic) meditation on love in *Waiting for God* comes closer to the mark:

> Lovers or friends desire two things. The one is to love each other so much that they enter into each other and only make one being. The other is to love each other so much that, with half the globe between them, their union will not be diminished in the slightest degree. All that man vainly desires here below is perfectly realized in God. We have all those impossible desires within us as a mark of our destination, and they are good for us when we no longer hope to accomplish them.[18]

Here, the demand for self-renunciation is softened from an apophatic paradox to an eschatological suspension: We need to relinquish a claim in practice without denying it in principle.

This seems to me the more authentically theological comportment vis-à-vis our 'mortal longings'. Mulhall feels that it is necessary to reject eschatology in order to ensure an authentically Christian attitude of self-denial that is not surreptitiously self-gratifying. I think, rather, that a properly eschatological attitude – relinquishing a claim without repudiating a hope – is the only way to confess both the truth and the temptation of the human desire for transcendent knowledge and communion. According to St Paul, both are ultimately one: 'For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.'[19]

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[18] Simone Weil, *Waiting for God* (London: Harper, 2009), 74.
[19] 1 Corinthians 13.12-13 (NRSV).