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The Ascetic Measure: A New Category for the Philosophical Analysis of Self-Inflicted Pain as an Expression of Love for God

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Abstract: The paper identifies the measure of pain monastic Christian ascetics in medieval central Europe inflicted on themselves to express the right measure of love for God. I ask whether the measure of pain had significance; whether a ratio existed between the measure of pain ascetics experienced and the measure of love they expressed; how self-inflicted painful acts enabled the epistemic achievement of expressing the right measure of love for God; what made the right measure such; and what was the difference between ascetics and martyrs regarding the measures of pain and love respectively. Providing answers to these questions, unaddressed in existing studies, is the main contribution of this paper. While addressing them, I present a new category, the category of measure, for philosophical analysis of the old religious phenomenon under discussion. This category allows me to demonstrate that the measure of pain had significance and that there was an adequacy ratio between the measure of pain monastic ascetics experienced and the measure of love they expressed. It also lets me argue that the right measure of pain for expressing their love for God, following His example, was the exposure of blood, regardless of its quantity.

Keywords: philosophy of religion; pain; love for God; monastic ascetics; category of measure; blood

1. Introduction

Since the beginning of mankind, humans have done everything in their power to avoid pain. The phenomenon of self-inflicted pain contradicts this basic human tendency. It is a multicultural, universal phenomenon, manifested in different contexts, including religious contexts, where adherents of different religions practice self-inflicted pain for various purposes. One such purpose is expressing love for God. The phenomenon of self-inflicted pain as an expression of love for God in Christianity, the subject of this paper, was at its peak among monastic ascetics in medieval central Europe (Largier 2007).¹ One key question respecting this phenomenon is identifying the right measure of pain one should inflict on oneself to express love for God. In the literature one finds theories and arguments dealing with pain in Christianity, with self-inflicted pain in general and self-inflicted pain among monastic ascetics in particular,² with the expression of love for God, with blood, its meanings, and representations.³ I did not, however, find in the existing literature a complete philosophical, phenomenological analysis explaining the ratio between pain

¹ “Middle Ages, the period in which we find the greatest number of flagellants” (Largier 2007, p. 47). “This sect first made its appearance in Italy in the year 1210, and the following account of it is given in the “Chronicon Ursitius Basiliensis” of the monk St. Justin of Padua: “When all Italy was sullied with crimes of every kind, a certain sudden superstition, hitherto unknown to the world, first seized the inhabitants of Padua, afterwards the Romans and then almost all the nations of Italy . . . nobles as well as ignoble persons, young and old, even children five years of age . . . Every one of them held in his hands a scourge, made of leather thongs, and with tears and groans they lashed themselves on their backs till the blood ran; all the while weeping” (Cooper 1970, p. 102). See also (Aberth 2018; Logan 2012, pp. 266–67).

² “Perhaps the most striking feature of medieval monastic history is the proliferation of new religious groups and orders in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries. These were the product of a search for the purest, indeed the perfect, form of monasticism, and are characterized by two main features: the desire to return to primitive monastic observances, either to the eremitism of the Desert Fathers or to a stricter interpretation of the text of the Rule of St. Benedict; and the appeal of apostolic poverty” (Burton 1994, p. 63).

³ See int. al. (Anidjar 2014; Bynum 2007; Constable 1982; Dickson 1989; Howe 2012; Jones 2018; Kay and Rubin 1996; Rubin 1991; Merback 2007; Muessig 2020; Shea 2010; Tinsley 2010).

and love or, more precisely, between the measure of pain that monastic ascetics inflicted on themselves and the measure of love for God they sought to express. Nowhere in the literature did I find a reference to the category of measure.

Existing studies do not ask whether the measure of pain has significance; whether a ratio exists between the measure of pain and the measure of love; what is the right measure of pain one should inflict on oneself in order to express the right measure of love for God; how self-inflicted painful actions enabled, to some extent, the epistemic achievement of expressing the right measure of love for God, stopping at just the right moment; what makes the right measure such; why ascetics, unlike martyrs, did not mimic the exact measure of pain Christ experienced; and what is the difference between ascetics and martyrs in terms of the measure of pain experienced and the measure of love expressed. The purpose of this paper is to answer these questions and complete the aforementioned gaps in the literature. While addressing them, I introduce the category of measure, one of the contributions of this paper. I also show that blood is the measure of pain one should inflict on oneself as an expression for the right measure of love for God.

I do not address the quantity of bloodshed, the number of blood drops or their shape and color, noted in many studies discussing the preoccupation of medieval Christians with quantification. I also do not address the various purposes of the acts under discussion analyzed in many studies outside philosophy, such as in the historical,⁴ medical,⁵ psychological, psychoanalytical,⁶ anthropological⁷, and sociological⁸ disciplines, as well as in the cultural studies literature. Constable noted that the religious purposes of self-inflicted pain varied and often overlapped in individual cases.⁹ These purposes included competition with official representatives of religious orders, drawing close to God, making penance, imitatio Christi, expressing love for God, as well as non-religious purposes such as sexual arousal.¹⁰

2. Pain: Measure for Measure

Most of the many case studies I analyzed document self-inflicted painful acts performed by monastic flagellant ascetics during the monastic orders era in medieval central Europe (~1000 to ~1500), namely the Kingdom of France, the Kingdom of Hungary, the Kingdoms of Spain, and the Holy Roman Empire.¹¹ In speaking of ascetics below, I refer to such ascetics exclusively. Among these case studies are Francis of Assisi, founder of the order of monks named after him, and his successor, St. Clare of Assisi, founder of the Franciscan Order of Poor Clares named after her, who would meet, pray together, and whip themselves and each other to inflict pain;¹² Isabelle, the daughter of King Louis VIII of France, who turned her palace into a convent in memory of St. Clare, and would fast and

⁴ See, int. al., (Cohen 2009; Crislip 2012; Constable 1988; Cooper 1970; Dougherty 2017; Largier 2007; Lyman 2017; Hughes-Edwards 2012).

⁵ Glucklich applied contemporary medical knowledge in discussing the instrumental value of pain in the religious experience. He argues, by way of a physiological, neurochemical discussion, that pain facilitates the achievement of spiritual ecstasy: "After all, affect must surely emerge from the activation of specific brain regions (like the limbic system) and production of specific neurochemicals (dopamine, endorphins, etc.)". (Glucklich 2015), p. 8. See also, int. al., (Cervero 2012; Graham 2018; Melzack and Wall 1965; Melzack 1973; Mordeniz 2016; Price 1988; Salim 2020; Wall 1999).

⁶ See, int. al., (Farber 2002; Favazza 2011; Glucklich 2001, 2017; Grahek 2011; Plante 2007).

⁷ See, int. al., (Glucklich 2001, 2017); (Valentine 1991, esp. pp. 135–53).

⁸ See, int. al. (Mellor and Shilling 2010).

⁹ (Constable 1982, p. 8).

¹⁰ See, int. al., (Deleuze and Sacher-Masoch 1971; Deleuze 2016; Foucault 1985, 1986; Freud 2000; Largier 2007).

¹¹ See, int. al. (Boileau 1700; Bolland et al. 1865; Cooper 1970; Damian 1990; Engelbert 1951; Julian of Norwich 1978; Mechthild of Magdeburg 1998; Rev. Placido Fabrini 1900; Suso 1989; Tauler 1910; Watkins 2002).

¹² Saint Franciscus Assisiensis, born Giovanni di Pietro di Bernardone, 1182–1226; Santa Clara of Assisi, born Chiara Offreduccio, 1194–1253. "[H]e made acquaintance of Miss Clara Seiffo [Saint Clare of Assisi, born Chiara Offreduccio, R.N.], who was possessed of a kindred spirit, that he did so ... she was in consequence very early in life initiated into the mysteries of the birch; but flagellation only increased her mystic inspiration, and she was thus admirably fitted to be companion of Saint Francis. Their intercourse mostly consisted of praying together, scourging each other, and such like spiritual exercises" (Cooper 1970, pp. 70–71).

whip herself until she bled;¹³ nuns who lived, during the 13th century, at the Dominican convent of Colmar, France;¹⁴ St. Dominic, the founder of the Dominican order, to which these nuns belonged;¹⁵ Margaret of Hungary;¹⁶ female saints documented by Thomas de Cantimpre,¹⁷ such as Christina Mirabilis,¹⁸ who had her wounds and representations of the pain she inflicted on herself appear and disappear, or Margaret of Ypres,¹⁹ who practiced self-inflicted pain from the age of seven; Catherine of Siena;²⁰ Maria Magdalena de Pazzi;²¹ Charles Chateau of Blois, the Duke of Brittany, nephew of the King of France, Philip V;²² and many more.²³ My main case study in this paper, however, is Henry Suso, a German ascetic and mystic.²⁴ Suso was among those ascetics who left us texts documenting in detail their lifestyle, their faith, their experiences of self-inflicted pain, self-flagellations, visions, mystical events they experienced, as well as their immense love for God. His book *The Exemplar*²⁵ describes the spiritual development of Suso, a successor of the father of German mysticism, Meister Eckhart.²⁶ Reading Suso's writings and about them, as well as many scholars having described him as an "athlete of pain", makes clear that his case is an ideal example for corroborating my hypothesis. A phenomenological analysis of Suso's case and other cases documenting acts of self-inflicted pain allowed me to extract the pattern of these acts.

¹³ Isabelle of France, 1225–1269. "Isabella, daughter of Louis XIII. This young lady, in opposition to the wishes of her friends, had determined to pass her days in a convent. She preferred fasting and chastisement to courtly gaiety, and her palace was like a convent where little else but penance went on. She scourged herself, and received such scourging from others as to cause the blood to flow freely" (Cooper 1970, pp. 71–72).

¹⁴ "[T]hey began the most rapturous forms of worship . . . they abused their bodies in the most acute fashion with all manner of scourging instruments until their blood flowed" (Largier 2007, p. 36).

¹⁵ Dominic of Guzman, also known as Dominic of Osma, 1170–1221: "Dominic . . . the founder of the Dominican order . . . [practiced, R. N.] self-flagellation with iron chains three-times daily. The signs of the discipline 'remained in his virginal flesh' and his self-mortification was so severe that a piece of the metal chain became embedded in his body until it was removed and left a 'singular' scar" (Muessig 2020, p. 150); "Dominic used to take the discipline with a triple chain, particularly at night, either giving it to himself or getting someone else to give it to him, and there are many brethren who can assert this, who beat him at his request" (Tinsley 2010, p. 35); "[H]e used to take the discipline with an iron chain, saying, 'Your discipline has set me straight towards my goal'" (Tinsley 2010, p. 36); "Saint Dominic, founder of the order that bears his name, submitted himself each night to long and bloody flagellations with a whip affixed with three iron chains" (Largier 2007, p. 45).

¹⁶ Margaret of Hungary, 1242–1270: "After whipping herself along with her fellow nuns, she would whip herself still further after they had left, including with rods and thorn-covered branches. She would strike herself until the blood flowed. These acts . . . which ran through the year, would intensify during the last three days of the Holy Week. At all hours of the day and night, she tormented her body with blows that led to great loss of blood" (Largier 2007, p. 45).

¹⁷ (Thomas de Cantimpre 2008).

¹⁸ Christina the Astonishing/Christina Mirabilis, 1150–1224: "On another occasion she rose up in the middle of the night and, provoking the dogs of the whole city of Sint-Truiden to bark, ran before them like a fleeing beast. The dogs pursued her and chased her through woods so thick with thorns that her whole body was covered in bloody wounds. Nevertheless, when she had washed off the blood, no trace of the wounds remained" (Thomas de Cantimpre 2008, p. 135); "[S]he, R. N.] used to torment herself . . . with thorns and brambles so it seemed that her whole body was entirely covered in blood. The many people who had frequently seen this happen were astonished that there could be so much blood in a single body. In addition to this bloodletting, on many occasions she bled a great quantity of blood from one of her veins" (Thomas de Cantimpre 2008, pp. 135–36).

¹⁹ Margaret of Ypres, 1216–1237: "[S]he, R. N.] used to press nettles and the stinging barbs of flax seeds into the flesh of her bosom . . . at the age of ten, she . . . scourged herself with yew branches and thorns even to the shedding of blood" (Thomas de Cantimpre 2008, p. 166).

²⁰ Catherine of Siena, 1347–1380: see (Catherine St. of Siena 1980, pp. 29–30); (Gardner 1907, p. 13); (Glucklich 2001, p. 100).

²¹ (Rev. Placido Fabirini 1900, pp. 72–73, 191, 339–437). See also (Puccini 1970).

²² (Sanders 2002, p. 57); see also (Livingstone and Witzel 2018).

²³ Int. al., Adelheid Langmann, Adelheid Zirger, Angelina of Korbain, Beli von Winthertur, Christina Ebner, Catherine of Siena, Charles Chatillon of Blois, Charles Borromaeus, Christina Ebner, Christina of Spoleto, Clare Seiffo of Assisi, Clare of Montefalco, Clare of Rimini, Dodo of Hascha, Elsbeth Stigel, Dominic Loricatus, Dominic of Osma, Elizabeth von Oye, Elsbeth Schefflin, Francis of Assisi, Francis Xavier, Hedwig of Silesia, Heinrich Seuse, Ignatius of Loyola, Margareta Ebner, Margaret of Hungary, Maria Laurentia Longa, Maria Vittoria Fornari, Mary Magdalen de' Pazzi, Marie of Oignies, Mechthild von Stans, Peter the Hermit, Philip Berruyer, Rodolph of Gubbio, Stephen of Obazine, Teresa of Avila, etc.

²⁴ Heinrich Seuse, 1295–1366.

²⁵ (Suso 1989).

²⁶ Meister Eckhart, 1260–1328: "[I]f you suffer for the love of God and for God alone, that suffering does not hurt and is not hard to bear, for it is God who carries the burden. In all truth! If there were a man who liked to suffer for God and purely for God alone, and if on this man fell in a single blow all the suffering that all men have never even suffered, and all the suffering the entire world bears. It would not hurt him and would not weigh him down, for it is God who would carry the burden" (Eckhart 2001, p. 39); "[W]e suffer for God and not for love of self. As we take a closer look, this remark is equally to be put in parallel with a remark on the intellect just as the science that is granted to detached man proceeds no longer through abstractions and representations, but through possession of ideas and essences, so he who suffers without being attached to his suffering has God bear his burden, making it light and gentle for him. To detach oneself from one's pain means to consider it not as one's own but as assumed by God himself" (Eckhart 2001, p. 40).

Among these cases is the well-known case of the 11th century Italian monk, Dominic Loricatus, who developed a mathematical method for spiritual training and self-flagellation.²⁷ He believed that the greater the measure of pain, the more love it expresses. The mathematical method Loricatus developed led me to formulate the adequacy ratio argument. According to him, reading ten chapters of Psalms and flogging himself a thousand times express four months' worth of atonement; thirty chapters and 3000 lashes express a year's worth of atonement; and reading the entire book of Psalms, consisting of 150 chapters, and 15,000 lashes, express five years' worth of the same.²⁸ His method quantifies pain and teaches that the measure of pain has significance. The case of Loricatus is particularly apt as an exemplification of the adequacy ratio between each specific measure of pain experienced and the corresponding measure of love expressed.

Many studies concerned with the phenomenon of self-inflicted pain among devout Christians include lists of medieval European monks and nuns who practiced self-inflicted pain, mainly through self-flagellation, and radically abused their bodies. Many such studies include detailed descriptions of saints who severely and repetitively tortured themselves as part of their daily routines, who chose a life of abstinence and poverty, limited diets, little sleep, extended prayers, and vows of silence. Largier, for example, noted in his fascinating book how widespread a phenomenon flagellation was, mentioning some late medieval sources on the topic containing names of innumerable saints who beat themselves and were dedicated to the scourge.²⁹ He showed how monks and nuns, including Dominic Loricatus, held a concept focused on imitatio Christi and the transformation of their bodies into models of Christ's tormented body. Imitation served as an important component in the process of turning back to God and drawing close to Him. As Constable also noted, the model of Christ showed that one can please God and draw close to Him by experiencing pain.³⁰ Whipping, mimicking Christ's suffering for the redemption of humanity, allowed believers in general, and ascetics in particular, to express the increasing love they felt for God. Largier mentioned the withdrawal of flagellants to private monastic orders, where they could practice their distinctive way of life, including inflicting pain on themselves.³¹ The formation of the monastic ascetic orders resonated with social criticism, distinguishing the ascetics' way of life from that of the community and from other religious orders. Monks and nuns manifested this love in daily rituals, responding to their desire to express love for God, to whom they submitted themselves.

Unlike Glucklich, who argued that self-inflicted pain served as a means for achieving religious goals such as atonement (2001), Largier believed that the ideology of atonement could not explain the phenomenon of self-inflicted pain among ascetics, presenting a collection of arguments, some formulated in the late Middle Ages, explaining the phenomenon.³² I could only, however, identify the relationship between self-inflicted pain and the expression of love through a hermeneutical analysis of arguments and descriptions he presented. Largier's accounts of flagellants' motives lead, in one way or another, to the imitation of Christ, who embodies within him, among other things, the expression of love. Such imitation helped flagellants draw closer to God. In Largier's work, however,

²⁷ Dominic Loricatus, 995–1060: see (Damian 1990, pp. 231–32; Watkins 2002, p. 154; Constable 1982, p. 20; Fichtenau 1998, p. 118; Kroll and Bachrach 2005, p. 24; Largier 2007, p. 42; Muessig 2020, p. 38).

²⁸ "Et hoc remissiori quidem tempore. Nam quadragesimalibus circulis, sive cum poenitentiam peragendam habet (crebro enim cantum annorum poenitentiam suscipit) tunc per dies singulos, dum se scoparum tusionibus afficit, ut minus, tria psalteria meditando persolvit. Centum autem annorum poenitentia, sicut ipso auctore didicimus, sic expletur. Porro cum tria scoparum millia unum poenitentiae annum apud nos regulariter expleant, decem autem psalmodum modulation, ut saepe probatum est, mille scopas admittat, dum centum quinquaginta psalmis constare psalterium non ambigitur, quinque annorum poenitentia in unius psalterii disciplina recte supputantibus invenitur. Sed sive quinque vices ducas, sive viginti quinquies, centum faciunt. Consequitur ergo, ut qui viginti psalteria cum disciplina decantat, centum annorum poenitentiam se peregrisse confidant" (Damiani 1867, p. 1015 BC). See also (Largier 2007, pp. 42–43; Constable 1982, p. 15).

²⁹ (Largier 2007, p. 44).

³⁰ (Constable 1982, pp. 11, 14).

³¹ (Largier 2007, p. 162; Johnson 2014).

³² (Largier 2007, p. 47).

no mention is made of the category of measure, the measure of pain and its significance (2007).³³

McGinn's book also lacks reference to the measure of pain, despite his necessary search for descriptions marking the boundaries of ascetics' self-inflicted painful acts, undertaken to imitate Christ, and for the maximal extent of pain ascetics inflicted on themselves for this purpose (2005). As part of his search, he referred to Suso's *The Exemplar*. In one case described therein, Suso removed his clothes and cruelly beat himself until his whip broke. When he looked at himself, he saw his entire body bleeding and immediately recollected the bleeding body of Christ and the pain of his Passion. In this manner, Suso strove to resemble Christ, in order to draw close to God.³⁴ According to McGinn, the said case clearly outlines the boundaries of self-inflicted painful acts ascetics undertook to imitate Christ, setting them out on the painful and bleeding body and reflecting the literal significance of Christ's Passion.³⁵ This argument illustrates that pain has significance, but is still devoid of reference to the category of measure.

According to Tinsley, for the ascetics, anguish and pain were also a sign of God's love for them; therefore, they practiced self-inflicted pain while comparing their experiences to the crucifixion. Their concept of pain originated in the fact that God loved His son Christ more than the whole world yet subjected him to pain and suffering. They believed that Christ experienced only tribulation and anguish from birth to burial, and even when he had the opportunity to choose, he chose pain.³⁶ The object of imitation, at the heart of practices of *imitatio Christi*, is the choice of pain. Ascetics' actions illustrate how they saw suffering and pain in a positive light. Even Tinsley's important study, however, lacks a clear reference to the measure of self-inflicted pain. Nor does he discuss ascetics' love for God. He mentions a 14th century concept of the connection between human suffering on earth and Christ's suffering on the cross. This concept compares and contrasts the righteous, who choose to suffer willingly, and sinners, who suffer against their will, modeled respectively on Christ on the one hand and the two thieves on the other.³⁷ This comparison, part of the *imitatio Christi* model, emphasizes the importance of acts of self-inflicted pain. From analyzing this argument of Tinsley's, one can learn that those who voluntarily inflict pain on themselves do so to resemble Christ. Tinsley's argument lacks, however, the element of love. Christ chose pain, though he never sinned and did not have to atone; he chose pain as an expression of love. This is in contrast to those who experienced pain because they sinned, as a punishment that is supposed to atone for the sin. Adding the element of love to Tinsley's aforementioned comparison, this reformulation emphasizes the distinction between bearing pain as divine retribution and bearing pain to express love.

Bynum pointed out the medieval obsession with quantification, expressed in enthusiasm for counting and measurement as a sociocultural characteristic, and analyzed the representations of wounds and blood droplets, as well as those representations' significance (2007). This obsession fits well with my position regarding the importance of the measure of self-inflicted pain.³⁸ In her comprehensive and interesting research, Bynum focused on blood and examined its role and significance among medieval Christians. Her work, while tangential to this paper, is at times reminiscent of some of my main arguments and serves as a basis for the hypotheses I examine concerning the right measure of pain. The examples she presented focus mainly on the obsession with counting blood drops and wounds, as part of the Christian desire for divine retribution and redemption.³⁹ Despite her interesting

³³ Imitating Christ and drawing close to God were not, according to Largier, the only reasons medieval ascetics inflicted pain on themselves. In his book he discussed various further reasons, including psychological, mental, physiological and medical factors, as well as some associated with erotic and sexual satisfaction.

³⁴ (Suso 1989, p. 91).

³⁵ (McGinn 2005, p. 215).

³⁶ (Tinsley 2010, p. 30).

³⁷ (Tinsley 2010, pp. 25–26).

³⁸ (Bynum 2007, p. 176).

³⁹ Among these examples were a monk who sought to drink drops of Christ's blood to ensure his redemption after death; and Clement VI's 1343 bull, according to which one drop of Christ's blood can save the whole world (Bynum 2007, p. 176).

discussion of the 12th and 13th century Christian tendency to quantify wounds and blood drops, Bynum, like other scholars I have mentioned, did not clearly link the measure of pain experienced to the measure of love expressed. She referred neither to the significance of the measure of pain, self-inflicted as an expression of love for God, nor to the adequacy ratio.

According to a common argument,⁴⁰ recurrent in many texts, including by Largier, McGinn, and Tinsley, in self-inflicted pain, believers sought to draw closer to God and expand their knowledge of him.⁴¹ At this point it is impossible not to ask why believers wanted to draw close to God if not out of intense love for Him; and they are indeed described as having hurt themselves out of love.⁴² According to chapter 31 of Suso's *The Exemplar*, one of the consequences of self-inflicted painful acts is that those who practice them become more similar to Christ. Imitation of Christ's love for God is practiced in the same manner that Christ expressed his love: devotion to pain.⁴³ The medieval Church agreed that self-inflicted pain in intense measure must be practiced solely as an expression of devotion to God,⁴⁴ out of love of course. The existence of this inner emotion was, from ascetics' point of view, necessary as a motive for action; an action that not only expresses love but also creates it.⁴⁵ Although descriptions such as Suso's are found in medieval sources, studies on the subject have not analyzed the relationship between the experience of pain and the expression of love as manifested in said practices.

Phenomenological analysis of descriptions of self-inflicted pain documented in the sources leaves no doubt as to the end motivating these experiences. The analysis indicates that Loricatus and other ascetics felt a strong love for God and sought to draw closer to Him through imitation of Christ. They sought to imitate Christ not only in the physical sense, as Largier, McGinn, and Tinsley had argued, but in every sense; they also tried to emulate his spiritual virtues and the measure of love he felt when he sacrificed himself on the cross. This diagnosis explains how the measure of pain ascetics inflicted on themselves was, among other things, an expression of their desire to trace the measure of love that they believed Christ felt. Hence, again, we find that the measure of pain has significance.

Tinsley and others have pointed out that, for believers, the greater the suffering, the closer they become to God and the deeper is a believer engraved in God's memory.⁴⁶ The source of the idea that a desire to draw close to something indicates an emotion of love for it can be found as early as the second century BCE, in peripatetic and stoic texts on emotions and movements of the soul.⁴⁷ This idea is known to have influenced the early

⁴⁰ "[S]uffering was a means of progressing towards the vision of God" (Constable 1982, p. 20).

⁴¹ "Since love (caritas) controls the measure of abstraction, the greater it is, the better it unites the intellect with God and abstracts it from phantasms" (Even-Ezra 2019, p. 47); "[A]ccording to the principle 'the more I love the more I see' (quo magis amo tamto plus inspicio)" or "[T]he more I love the more I know" (Even-Ezra 2019, p. 158). See, int. al., (Constable 1998; Glücklich 2001; Hood 2013, esp. pp. 193–208; Jones 2018; Thomas a Kempis 2005).

⁴² (Largier 2007, p. 59).

⁴³ (Suso 1989, p. 128).

⁴⁴ (Constable 1982, p. 23).

⁴⁵ (Suso 1989, pp. 126–28).

⁴⁶ "[T]he more severe the suffering, the nearer God comes to us" (Tinsley 2010, pp. 24, 29).

⁴⁷ Socrates (Plato), peripatetic philosophers, starting with Aristotle, as well as the Stoics, thought emotions to be movements of the soul in relation to a particular object. According to the Stoics, impressions received in the soul stir it to a movement that leads to action. They argued that the soul's movements are translations of emotional states. A movement reflecting a negative opinion about the present is a constriction and will cause an emotion of sadness; a movement reflecting a negative opinion concerning the future is a drawing away and will cause an emotion of fear. Movements reflecting a positive opinion about the present are directed upwards and will cause an emotion of pleasure or joy, while movements reflecting a positive opinion about the future are a drawing close or forward, and will cause an emotion of love or passion. An emotion of love for a particular object causes the soul to strive to move forward, closer to that object; an emotion of fear of a particular object causes the soul to strive to move away from that object (Plato 2000, 434a–445e, pp. 128–43; esp. 435d–442b, pp. 129–39; Aristotle 2018, book 2, Chs. 1–11, pp. 55–80; Cicero and Tullius 2002). The above concept of emotions as movements of the soul provides an explanation for the desire to draw closer to God that is at the heart of this paper. At the foundation of this desire was a belief that the measure of one's love for God was expressed in the measure of one's desire to draw closer to Him. For ascetics, inflicting pain on themselves was the means for drawing close to God. On this view, the greater the measure of pain, the closer one became with God. The aforementioned stoic idea resembles these ideas of Christian asceticism, as well as similar themes in ancient ascetic philosophy. These resemblances date back to the days of the apostles and fathers of the church, who were influenced by Philo, who himself was influenced by Plato and the Stoics. Stoic thought thereby influenced the deep beliefs of a later period. For few of the numerous studies dealing with this subject see (Colish 1990, esp. pp. 221–39; Ebbesen 2004, pp. 108–31; Wohlman 2005, esp. pp. 50–66).

Fathers of the Church and is also reflected in Christian philosophy of the late Middle Ages, including in Aquinas. According to Aquinas, voluntary actions originate in the emotion of love, volition being driven by the premise of the existence of two concepts: the subject/the lover and the object/the beloved.⁴⁸ The measure of desire for closeness to the beloved God expresses the measure of love the lover feels towards Him. The greater the measure of pain, the closer one becomes to God. Hence, the measure of pain expresses the measure of one's desire to draw closer to God; and self-inflicted pain in a certain measure is an expression of love in a similar measure.

Expressions of this adequacy ratio emerge from hermeneutic analysis of cases of self-inflicted pain, such as those of Suso, Loricatus, and their like.⁴⁹ The method of self-flogging developed by Loricatus, for example, indicates the existence of the adequacy ratio and clarifies it, by the very quantification of the measure of pain; whipping in a certain measure express love in the same measure. On one occasion described in *The Exemplar*, as part of Suso's attempts to express his love for God, he went into the chapter room to his secret and secluded place, prostrated himself a hundred times, and then genuflected a hundred times. The movements he performed caused him great pain, because of the cross he fastened tightly to his body, to which he attached nails that stuck into his flesh. At each stage of the session, Suso stood up and pulled the nails out of his flesh so that when he next prostrated himself or genuflected they would stick in other places in his body.⁵⁰

The aforementioned session occurred in three stages, at each of which Suso amplified the measure of pain he inflicted on himself, creating a new set of wounds. The stages differed in the number of wounds created at each stage, representing different measures of pain. With the increase in the number of wounds, the measure of pain Suso experienced increased proportionately. Analysis of this case requires an account of Suso's purpose in increasing the measure of pain at each stage. To identify this purpose, I rely on the argument that the measure of pain has significance and, in the spirit of Bynum's arguments, that pain is expressed in physical representations. If Suso had found the representations of pain he created on his body at the first stage sufficient, he would have stopped then and not increased the measure of pain. Increasing the measure of pain, by turning to further self-inflicted painful acts, indicates Suso's need to produce increasingly severe representations of pain or experience a greater measure of pain. The cause that motivated Suso towards the ontological component of his actions, self-inflicted pain and creating representations thereof, was epistemic: love. Suso's increasing of his self-inflicted painful acts signifies that these actions were an expression of love and that the greater the measure of pain experienced, the greater the measure of love expressed. The premise underlying this epistemic component motivating Suso's actions, that love is expressed by pain, leads to my conclusion regarding the adequacy ratio. Suso stopped inflicting pain on himself only after reaching a certain measure of pain he sought to experience. His choice to keep going until he reached that point indicates that the purpose motivating his actions was a need to express love in a certain, specific measure, and that a certain measure of pain was adequate to the measure of love he sought to express. Hence, the greater the measure of pain, the greater the measure of love. At one moment, self-inflicted pain expresses a certain measure of love; at another, a greater measure of pain expresses a greater measure of love. There is an adequacy ratio, a direct and constant proportion between the two measures.

The existence of an adequacy ratio also provides an explanation for the fact that ascetics, from Francis of Assisi and his successor, St. Clare, through St. Dominic, Charles Chatillon of Blois, Christina Ebner, Elsbeth Stagel, to Mary Magdalene de Pazzi,⁵¹ were not content to express love for God with a single experience of self-inflicted pain. They all used to flog themselves as a regular routine. In their doing so, one can see that the religious phenomenon under discussion was characterized by repeated acts of self-inflicted pain,

⁴⁸ (Wohlman 2005, p. 57).

⁴⁹ See footnote 23.

⁵⁰ (Suso 1989, p. 90).

⁵¹ Mary Magdalen De-Pazzi/Maria Maddalena de Patsi, 1566–1607: see (Rev. Placido Fabrini 1900, p. 72; Puccini 1970).

as well as prolonged, continuous experiences of pain. These characteristics reinforce my arguments, that the measure of pain has significance and that an adequacy ratio exists between the measure of pain experienced and the measure of love expressed. The more moments of self-inflicted pain one experiences, the more love one expresses, in direct and constant proportion to the number of such moments.

On his return from voluntary exile, Stefan decided to settle in Obazine, in the district of Limousin.⁵² There he lived in severe poverty, carried out hard manual labor while enduring self-mortification, wore metal plates on his skin, maintained vows of silence, and prayed while repeatedly moving in a painful manner. Stefan and his male companion used to whip each other whenever they felt tired, and to wear thin clothes that froze on their bodies in the winter cold.⁵³ An analysis of Stefan's case confirms my hypothesis that ascetics sought to experience a large and prolonged measure of pain. Stefan combined self-inflicted pain in his daily activities. This habit let him experience a daily routine of continuous pain, alongside sessions of more focused self-inflicted painful acts. The experience of continuous pain throughout the day allowed Stefan to express love in a similar measure, i.e., continuously throughout the day.

The case of Dodo of Hascha similarly features a combination of self-inflicted painful acts experienced on a daily basis. He used to wear seven iron plates to imprison his flesh, while on the iron plates he wore a hairshirt and on top of that, a kind of an armor or lorica.⁵⁴ He slept on a hard bed and used a convex stone as a pillow. Dodo's case is an example of a sequence of self-inflicted painful acts, continuing not only throughout the day but also as he slept.

In a book documenting Maria de Pazzi's life, we can find passages describing her repetitive practice of self-inflicted painful acts. One of these passages details her different manners of inflicting pain. De Pazzi wore clothes that were painful to wear; fastened an iron belt tight to her flesh, and sometimes also a belt of nails she made herself; and whipped herself cruelly by various means, namely with an iron chain weighing about three pounds. Each time she lit a candle she dripped the boiling wax on her hands and feet and injured her skin until it peeled off so that it made her limp for days afterwards. She pinched her flesh with iron pincers until her blood was shed; struck her chest with a stone; rubbed her body with itchy nettles; put cypress berries in her shoes and walked while suffering great pain; and performed arduous physical labor to exhaust her body. By the end of reading this passage, no doubt remains regarding de Pazzi's purpose in repeatedly inflicting pain on herself: she sought to experience pain in a certain measure to express the same measure of love, which she felt for God.⁵⁵

In one of the cases described in *The Exemplar*, Suso made himself a long wooden cross, into which he hammered thirty iron nails, symbolizing the wounds and signs of his beloved, God. He fastened the cross to his bare back, between his shoulders, and carried it day and night for eight years. In the seventh year, Suso set the cross with seven additional iron nails so that their points extended out and wounded his body.⁵⁶ The case demonstrates another experience of continuous, self-inflicted pain, lasting for years. Analysis of this case, once again, points out ascetics' need to increase the measure of pain; a need indicating that the measure of pain has significance and that there is an adequacy ratio between the measure

⁵² Stephen of Obazine, 1085–1159.

⁵³ (Constable 1982, p. 16).

⁵⁴ Dodo of Hascha, in Frisia, died in 1231: "Asperam vitam ducebat ibi in victu et vestitu et in lecto duro: carnem suam domabat jejunando vigilando, scopando, in genuflexionibus et tusionibus, in fletu et planctu irremissibili, gemendo et orando pro se et universa sancta Ecclesia Dei. Singulis diebus uno contentus cibo, alternis in piscibus et cerevisia, alternis in pane et aqua . . . Vestitus ejus fait talis: primo cingebant carnem circuli septem ferrei circa latera sua, duo circa brachia, desuper erat cilicium, postmodum lorica ferrea induebatur, ad ultimum laneas duas habuit tunicas et desuper scapulare, et sic de die et nocte sine mutatoris permanebat. Lectus durus fuit sine mollitie pulvinaris: nam videlicet mattam pro strato habuit, ad caput lignum concavum, et in illa concavitate, vestem suppositam capiti suo cum cussino, exemplo Domini nostri Jesu Christi, qui pannis involutus positus est in presepio . . . Quinque centenas genuflexiones singulis diebus e noctibus et saepius plures faciebat" (Bolland et al. 1865, p. 848; Muessig 2020, p. 65; Constable 1982, p. 18).

⁵⁵ (Rev. Placido Fabrini 1900, pp. 191–92; Puccini 1970).

⁵⁶ (Suso 1989, p. 89).

of pain experienced and the measure of love expressed. For six years, Suso experienced the measure of pain caused by thirty nails and expressed love in a similar measure. In the seventh year, Suso increased the measure of pain by seven nails, as an expression of love in a greater measure, greater by seven. This intensification in the measure of pain, through adding nails to create additional wounds on the body, indicates, again, the need to experience a certain, specific measure of pain proportionate to the measure of love Suso sought to express.

Suso's not curing incisions he caused himself is another example of his penchant for long lasting self-inflicted painful acts. For a long time, he went about "wounded by love".⁵⁷ This description leaves no place for doubt as to the role of wounds, the representations of pain; they are made by love and express it. Suso chose to bear the painful wounds he inflicted on himself for a long time, so they would serve as an expression of love for as long as possible. For 16 years, Suso wore an iron chain with rings and nails that stabbed and injured him, piercing his flesh and making him bleed. To this item of clothing, Suso attached 150 pointed nails, always turned towards his body, and tightened the garment so that the nails penetrated into his flesh. He would sleep at night while wearing such painful attire.⁵⁸ An analysis of actions performed by Suso, as well as of other cases documenting painful acts self-inflicted in order to express love for God, indicates ascetics' need for a continuous and prolonged experience of pain. Believers inflicted intense pain on themselves relentlessly, in various manners, such as wearing painful clothes and repeated flogging. They did so in an attempt to produce, in a kind of relentless, non-stop, continuous sequence, a certain measure of pain that expressed love in a similar measure.⁵⁹

The above analysis shows that mere self-inflicted pain is not enough to express love for God. The measure of pain also has significance for expressing such love and forms the basis for the existence of the adequacy ratio, as well as for identifying the right measure of pain expressing the right measure of love for God, laid out in the next section.

3. Blood: The Right Measure

Given that ascetics practiced repetitive self-inflicted pain and were not satisfied with a single act of inflicting pain, the next question to be discussed is identifying the right measure of pain for expressing the right measure of love for God. The right measure of pain, I find, was necessarily the measure of blood. Again, I found evidence for this conclusion by analyzing medieval textual passages documenting cases of self-inflicted pain among ascetics. In analyzing relevant cases, I looked for the moment ascetics stopped inflicting pain on themselves, assuming that the moment they stopped was the moment they achieved the right measure of pain, expressing the right measure of love for God. Every case I analyzed reinforced my argument regarding the right measure. In all cases, self-inflicted painful acts ceased when blood was exposed. Hence, blood is the right measure of pain for expressing the right measure of love for God. Exposing blood and shedding it expresses the right measure of love for God. Many sources document ascetic saints experiencing revelations, during which they received knowledge about the pleasure God draws from bloodshed as an expression of love. Mechthild of Magdeburg was told by Christ that God was not pleased by him experiencing pain so long as no blood was shed from his heart.⁶⁰ Adelheid Langmann, who asked God how to honor him, received a

⁵⁷ (Suso 1989, p. 71).

⁵⁸ (Suso 1989, p. 87).

⁵⁹ "For a long time he wore a hairshirt and an iron chain until he bled like a fountain and had to give it up", (Suso 1989, p. 87); "The blessed father wore an iron chain next to the skin" (Tinsley 2010, p. 36); "[B]lessed Dominicus Loricatus, known as "The Armored". He took this name from the iron armor that he wore on his naked body for many years" (Largier 2007, p. 42).

⁶⁰ "Alas, Lord, why did you suffer such distress? From that time when so much of your pure blood was shed from your pure heart . . . ". "No", he said, "that did not satisfy my father . . . when my heart's blood poured onto this earth . . . then was heaven opened" (Mechthild of Magdeburg 1998, p. 251).

similar message,⁶¹ as did nuns in the convent of Colmar.⁶² Similar messages were received in many more cases.

The fact that Goswin of Bossut,⁶³ a monk at Villers Abbey, in Brabant, was a poet is manifested in his writings and distinguishes them from other texts I came across. His use of various poetic styles and motifs influenced the figurative and dramatic nature of his descriptions of the lives of some of the monks in the monastery. Analysis of a description by Goswin of Arnulf of Villers gives us an idea of the great importance self-inflicted pain and the measure of blood had in the monk's life.⁶⁴

According to Goswin, Arnulf inflicted pain on himself by piercing and stabbing his body in a repetitive and ruthless manner. He stopped only once his blood was shed. One of the motifs Goswin used to achieve a vivid and dramatic depiction of pain and blood was a chiasmic repetition of three acts depicted. His use of this motif indicates that he sought to give his scripts and those described in them a sacred status in the eyes of devout readers, accustomed to associating texts in this style with the Bible. Goswin's text shows that when detailed descriptions of self-inflicted painful acts are phrased in a chiasmic formulation, the purpose of these acts is emphasized and amplified. Expression of that purpose is intensified by representations of pain and its measure, as well as by multiplying them in the following style: it was his own hands that did the striking—his own hands that heaped torment; merciless perforating—multiple jabbing; making each gash bleed—coating it all blood-red.⁶⁵ After describing the bloodshed, Goswin chose to stop using the chiasmic formulation.

The points in his text where Goswin focused the chiasmic repetitions and the point where he abandoned them show what elements of the description he sought to emphasize. The description falls into three stages. First, Goswin emphasized self-inflicted painful acts, as opposed to pain inflicted by others. Next, he emphasized the large measure of pain and, finally, Goswin emphasized the shedding of blood. In describing the bloodshed, Goswin did not settle for chiasmic repetitions, adding the word "red".⁶⁶ This created an additional, third repetition, which emphasized and intensified the presence of blood. Being a representation of pain, Goswin's emphasis on blood intensifies his description of the experience of pain. Goswin abandoned chiasmic repetitions when Arnulf stopped inflicting pain on himself, at the moment blood was spilled. The phenomenological aspect of Goswin's description is embodied in motifs that emphasize the moment of bloodshed as a sort of climax, by way of triple repetition; motifs that disappear from the text with the appearance of blood. This demonstrates the great importance of bloodshed and that it is the right measure of pain, for bloodshed, again, is when self-inflicted pain stops.

At this point, a need is apparent for an account of ascetics who sought to express love for God in ways that did not involve self-inflicted pain, as well as to those who sought to do so by self-inflicted pain without bloodshed. We can find such an account in arguments such as Constable's, according to which ascetics practiced self-inflicted pain and suffering much like athletes training in sports.⁶⁷ Despite their training, not all athletes are able to excel and achieve the desired results. Similarly, not all ascetics were able to excel and achieve the results they desired; not all ascetics were able to imitate God, incarnate in his son Christ, and bear the right measure of pain as an expression of the right measure of love

⁶¹ Adelheid Langmann, 1306–1375: "Lord, what honor should I now bring you?" He then replied: In honor of my divine power, you should pray . . . you should punish yourself three times with a scourge studded with thorns so that it bleed, and you should weep with sweet tears" (Largier 2007, pp. 38–39).

⁶² "There they abused their bodies in the most acute fashion with all manner of scourging instruments until their blood flowed . . . For God takes pleasure in these exercises of humility and worship and does not fail to hear the groaning of those who are filled with penance" (Largier 2007, p. 36).

⁶³ Goswin of Bossut, 1190–1230.

⁶⁴ Arnulf of Aeuuan, abbey of Villers, 1200–1250, Brabant, Belgium. "[I]t was his own hands that did the striking, his own hands that heaped torment after torment upon him. Such merciless perforating of his body, such multiple jabbing, made each gash bleed enough to splash his entire hand and to coat it all blood-red" (Goswin of Bossut 2003, pp. 135–36).

⁶⁵ (Goswin of Bossut 2003, pp. 135–36).

⁶⁶ The term 'blood' includes the attribute 'red', as one of the most essential and prominent features of blood is its red color.

⁶⁷ "Askesis for them was a process of training and exercise, not unlike that of the athlete, and led to a higher end" (Constable 1982, p. 12).

for Him. While Glucklich argued, for example, that there were ascetics who managed to develop resistance to pain,⁶⁸ it can also be argued that there were ascetics who were unable to bear pain at all and turned to other ways of expressing love for God.

On the basis of arguments such as those by Constable and Glucklich and my above-mentioned arguments regarding the adequacy ratio, I suggest it is possible to treat various measures of pain and suffering as an expression of corresponding measures of love for God. In other words, it is possible to refer to various measures of self-inflicted pain as corresponding to a ranking of capacity for expressing love for God, where the right measure achieved by excellent ascetics being the measure of blood. The idea of such a ranking clarifies why, for example, many scholars referred to Suso as an “athlete of pain”. Such a ranking explains more clearly what motivated ascetics to repetitive self-inflicted painful acts; why many of them did not settle with inflicting pain on themselves just once; and why many of them did not stop until their blood was exposed. If at the top of such ranking one can find the measure of blood, as the right measure of pain for expressing the right measure of love for God, then the ranking reinforces the importance of the right measure. Simultaneously, it reinforces the importance of the category of measure as a constituent part of the model of self-inflicted pain as an expression of love for God.

The measure of pain experienced by ascetics was, however, small compared to what God experienced. He was incarnated in flesh as his son Christ, chose to experience pain in the measure of blood, and then sacrificed his own life and the life most precious to him, that of his son. Ascetics did not inflict on themselves the precise measure of pain originating in the divine archetype, God. According to the measure He dictated, one must sacrifice life itself and not just experience wounds and bloodshed. Even so, we find, as I have shown, evidence for ascetics’ striving to apply self-inflicted painful acts in the measure of blood, to express their love for God. This distinction leads to the question, why those ascetics did not sacrifice their lives as an expression of love?⁶⁹ A key answer to this question, discussed by several scholars, including Bynum, points out the initial outcome of sacrificing one’s life, i.e., martyrdom. The point of view offered in this paper highlights, however, that choosing martyrdom stops bloodshed and pain. Stopping self-inflicted pain is inconsistent with the model by which ascetics operated. They sought to inflict pain on themselves repetitively, shedding blood each time, in order to express, time and again, not once, love in the right measure:⁷⁰ not too little, not too much.

I found another answer to the same question in Thomas Aquinas’s philosophy, based on his interpretation of Aristotle, according to whom one of the attributes of the good or of God is existence. Therefore, the love of the good or the love of God means the love of existence and of preservation, reminiscent of the creator’s love for his work.⁷¹ Thus, when ascetics sought to express love for God, they inflicted pain on themselves in the measure of blood but maintained their existence. That is why, even according to God’s own model, the right measure of pain, expressing love for God, is the measure of blood. Once again, however, what about sacrificing life as an expression of love? Why did ascetics not imitate Christ in this respect too? Why did they stop inflicting pain on themselves at the point of bloodshed? Why did they take care to choose actions that would not harm their lives, as Easterling argued?⁷² And further, if blood is the right measure, what makes it so?

I found answers to these questions in studies of blood in Christianity,⁷³ and especially in studies analyzing the concept of divalent blood, which was prevalent in Christianity in

⁶⁸ “[T]he ascetic regard[s] pain as the phenomenal face of a divine mechanism—retributive and just . . . their certainty produces a strange insensitivity to pain” (Glucklich 2001, p. 17).

⁶⁹ There are significant differences between martyrs and ascetics, about which many studies have been written. This paper is focused on the infliction of pain rather than on its permanent termination in death. Accordingly, I focus on ascetics rather than martyrs.

⁷⁰ “At a practical level, such limits were meant . . . against striking harder than is necessary to produce a flow of blood” (Merback 2007, p. 162).

⁷¹ (Wohlman 2005, pp. 166–68).

⁷² (Easterling 2015, p. 369).

⁷³ See, int. al. (Biale 2008; Bildhauer 2010, 2013; Bynum 2002, pp. 685–714; Camporesi 1995; Kay and Rubin 1996; Merback 2007; Murray 2001; Olson 2006, pp. 63–129; Sloyan 1995; Taylor et al. 2012).

general⁷⁴ and in medieval Christianity in particular.⁷⁵ According to this concept, blood is divalent because it contains a fundamental distinctive contrast. According to Anidjar, we can divide the concept of blood into spheres or realms, such as literal, real, and figurative or symbolic blood (2014). Anidjar discussed two moments in the history of Christianity, arguing that these moments play an important role in the perception and construction of Christian blood: the Last Supper and the Inquisition. His argument regarding the representation of the Christian blood community, constructed by each of these moments, clarifies the idea of divalent blood. For him, that representation symbolizes, simultaneously, “unity and division, communion and persecution, inwardness and outwardness, continuity and rapture, transformation and revolution”.⁷⁶

Each representation of Christian blood contained, according to Bynum, a positive value and a negative value simultaneously. Blood represented both pain and redemption; sin and purification; guilt, due to sin, and love, which allows forgiveness and absolution; impurity and purity;⁷⁷ destruction of the private and social self, and construction of one. Bloodshed also expresses violence and death, but at the same time signifies birth and life.⁷⁸ Blood was perceived as distinct from the living body, but simultaneously as a representation of the living. Even when shed in cases of violence, blood served as a means of access to continuation of the community. The same is true of the blood of Christ as savior. The moment his blood was shed, he became alive.

It seems that both Anidjar and Bynum would agree that Christian blood represented the blood of Christ, from which the apostles drank at the Last Supper, but at the same time it represented something separated from Christ as a means to deliverance, saving and bringing about redemption. Blood was perceived as representing a change of the living

⁷⁴ (Anidjar 2014, pp. 31, 43–44).

⁷⁵ (Bynum 2007, pp. 186–88).

⁷⁶ (Anidjar 2014, p. 43).

⁷⁷ “At that time, the access to Christ’s blood was a privilege reserved only to the priests. Lay people and especially women, who were felt to be impure because of menstrual blood, dreamed to be washed by the fresh, pure and saving blood of Jesus” (Dalarun 2006, p. 212).

⁷⁸ Another point of view regarding the concept of divalent blood is found in the laws of purity in Leviticus: blood represents impurity, but also purity. “[...] A woman who becomes pregnant and gives birth to a son will be ceremonially unclean for seven days, just as she is unclean during her monthly period. On the eighth day the boy is to be circumcised. Then the woman must wait thirty-three days to be purified from her bleeding. She must not touch anything sacred or go to the sanctuary until the days of her purification are over. If she gives birth to a daughter, for two weeks the woman will be unclean, as during her period. Then she must wait sixty-six days to be purified from her bleeding. When the days of her purification for a son or daughter are over, she is to bring to the priest at the entrance to the tent of meeting a year-old lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or a dove for a sin offering. He shall offer them before the Lord to make atonement for her, and then she will be ceremonially clean from her flow of blood” (Leviticus, 12:2–7). According to Leviticus, the blood of childbirth represents impurity, from which the mother must be purified. It is similar to the impure, contaminated blood of the Niddah: “If a woman has a discharge, her flesh discharging blood, she shall remain in her state of menstrual separation for seven days, and whoever touches her shall become unclean [...] And if she becomes clean of her discharge, she shall count for herself seven days, and after this, she may be cleansed. And on the eighth day, she shall take for herself two turtle doves or two young doves, and bring them to the kohen, to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. And the kohen shall make one into a sin offering and one into a burnt offering, and the kohen shall effect atonement for her, before the Lord, from the uncleanness of her discharge” (ibid, 15:19–30). “Birthing blood is blood joyous in pain: it torments and separates, yet enables life and survival. In medieval physiological theory, the human child is in some sense the mother’s blood, formed from the bloody stuff in her womb [...] Blood poured out is then a risk of death, but it is also future generations” (Bynum 2007, p. 189; Douglas 1996, p. 66). Menstrual blood is impure because it represents life unfulfilled. To cleanse impurity another sort of blood is needed, the pure blood of a sacrifice. In Leviticus, sacrificial blood manifests in a lamb or two young doves. In the New Testament the sacrifice is Christ: “[T]he origin of Christ’s perfect body entirely in the pure menstrual blood of Mary [...] surely disproves any simple equation of female or menstrual blood with impurity” (Bynum 2007, p. 18); “Christ came into the world *de sanguine* (i.e., from his mother’s womb) and left also in the blood of the cross. [...] The blood of the passion is the blood of birthing. Hence the fertile, separated blood from Christ’s side is female blood”, (ibid), p. 159. The pure blood of Christ was sacrificed to purify believers of an unclean blood. Marie Douglas, an anthropologist, is one of many scholars who wrote about rituals and symbols. She argued that symbols, including language, that make up rituals, have power to give meaning to everyday life experiences and integrate them into a framework. One of the functions of that framework is marking time, place and the boundaries of the community and thus giving its members a sense of control. Control is achieved through the approval of certain symbols and the prohibition of others. The symbols evoke emotions and passions. By approving or forbidding certain symbols within the framework of a ritual, it is possible to define which emotions, feelings and desires are permitted, and which remain outside the framework as prohibited, (Douglas 1996, pp. 35–73). The ritual of the blood sacrifice is necessary, in Leviticus as well as in the New Testament, for bringing those infected with unclean blood back into community territory. In the case of the ascetics, self-inflicted pain in the measure of blood served as an imitation of Christ also in this purifying sense.

body into annihilation and death and thus represented the earthly redeemed.⁷⁹ Above all, both during the Middle Ages and at other times, blood simultaneously represents life and death; life and the sacrifice of life; God, whose essence is existence and life, and God who died on the cross. To my understanding, it was this divalent quality of blood and its capacity for connecting opposite poles, positive values with negative ones, that gave blood the power and status to serve as connector between human and divine.

Many studies have discussed this connecting role of blood, the representations and symbolic values it carries.⁸⁰ The present paper proposes to enrich this discussion by granting blood another role, as the right measure of pain expressing the right measure of love for God. In God's original model, actualized when He was embodied in the flesh of His son on the cross, blood represents pain in general, and the right measure of pain as an expression of love in particular. It seems, however, that the model's divine origin does not suffice as proof that blood is the right measure. Fully imitating God would include sacrifice of life; it may undermine the very existence of the Christian community, potentially eliminating it. Had it not been for its divalent character, blood would not have represented both life and sacrifice, both pain and redemption; that character made blood the right measure of pain. The measure of blood served as a solution, enabling the expression of love for God, as well as love for the body of the church; love for those who are loved by God, for whose sake He experienced pain and sacrificed his own life. This highlights the importance of the category of measure from yet another perspective. It ascribes a new meaning to blood's divalent nature, which has hitherto gone unmentioned in the literature: blood as the right measure of pain, which mimics, among its other meanings, both life and the sacrifice of life, in order to express love for God.

Considering blood's divalent nature, one can understand why ascetics inflicted pain on themselves, and then stopped when their blood was shed, without actually sacrificing their lives. Among the many distinct divalent representations blood carried, it bore a full imitation of the divalent experience of God incarnated in His son Christ, which included pain and sacrifice of life, but also an achievement of redemption and continuity of the Christian community's existence. In carrying this representation, self-inflicted painful acts in the measure of blood achieved the ends of pain alongside an imitation of the sacrifice of life, but also the ends of redemption and the continuity of life. These ends were achieved by the very fact that ascetics did not sacrifice their lives. The measure of blood provided a complete ontological imitation of the measure of pain according to the model originating in the archetype, God. This enabled the epistemic achievement of expressing love for God in the right measure.

4. Conclusions

This paper presents a new tool, the category of measure, for the philosophical analysis of an old and often studied religious phenomenon. Using this category, I found that

⁷⁹ Suso described a man who bathed in his own blood in order to purge his sins. The man inflicted pain on himself and, according to Suso's description, acted like a laundress. He did not stop inflicting pain on himself until his blood was shed to an extent that allowed him to bathe in a bath of blood. In this way he sought to feel the blood of Christ flowing upon him, in order to be cleansed from his sins. In analyzing this description, it is impossible not to notice the divalence of blood: it represents the blood of Christ and purifies from sin, while also symbolizing sin. According to Suso, the man bathed in blood like a baby bathing in hot water. The infant represents continuity of life and a human who has not yet sinned; it also represents the infant Christ, son of God. The man in Suso's description bathed in blood, which simultaneously represents life and the sacrifice thereof; it represents the sins from which the man sought to be cleansed, but also the purging itself; it represents violence and pain, but also the redemption of others; redemption for which the blood of Christ was sacrificed, as an expression of love. "Whenever out of human weakness he had committed some fault that required penance, he did what a good washerwoman does who, after wringing out her laundry and letting it soak, takes it to pure water and there, by washing it, gets everything clean and spotless that was previously dirty. Thus, he would not give up before he had received the innocent flowing blood of Christ, which had been poured out in indescribable love for all sinners, so that in a spiritual manner he might have this blood pouring over himself. In this warm blood, he would wash himself and remove spots. He bathed in the salutary bath of blood, just as one bathes a baby in warm water, and he did this with such heartfelt devotion and with such trusting Christian faith that it was supposed to and actually did wash away all his sins and cleanse him of all guilt with its almighty power" (Suso 1989, p. 160–61).

⁸⁰ See also Bynum's work, where she refers to theological sources from which we can learn that access to God is made possible through blood. Her examples turn to the sacrifice of lamb, repeated many times in the Old Testament; the lamb's blood was shed, splashed on the altar and ascended to God (Bynum 2007, p. 189).

for those who inflicted pain on themselves, the greater the measure of pain the more love it expressed. On the basis of this finding, I concluded that the measure of pain has significance and that there is an adequacy ratio between the measure of pain experienced and the measure of love expressed. It can, therefore, be argued that pain is indeed an expression of love and that it serves as an index of its measure. This makes clear the importance of the category of measure in the context of self-inflicted pain as an expression of love for God, the focus of this paper. I analyzed self-inflicted painful acts among ascetics, finding that they stopped inflicting pain when blood was exposed. I further concluded that the exposure of blood was the right measure of pain that one should inflict on oneself in order to express the right measure of love for God.

The category of measure was nowhere discussed in existing studies on the subject. No reference was made to the measure of pain or the adequacy ratio between that measure and the measure of love expressed. I therefore highlighted the measure of pain as a central component of this paper, focusing on an analysis of self-inflicted painful acts as an expression of believers' desire to draw closer to God. The presence of such desire indicates the existence of love for God. At the bottom of the religious phenomenon in question is the Christian concept that drawing close to God allows one's knowledge about Him to expand. Drawing close to God becomes possible by imitating the pain He experienced while incarnate in the flesh of His son Christ. Along with other religious purposes, such as competition with official representatives of religious orders and making penance, as well as non-religious purposes such as sexual arousal, self-inflicted painful acts served ascetics by allowing them to imitate God. The painful nature of these acts has significance, as it is an expression of love and there is an adequacy ratio between the measure of pain and the measure of love. Self-inflicted painful acts were an important component of attempts to imitate the character and measure of God's love, embodied in the flesh of His son Christ; painful, violent, bloody love.

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