“All Shall Be Well”: On Sin, Antinomies, and Transformation of Images in Julian of Norwich

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This paper presents mostly phenomenological reflections on spiritual experience of Julian of Norwich (1342-1416). I investigate mutual relations among immediate divine experience, conceptual understanding of sin and guilt, self-transcendence, and transformation of mental images. I first describe antinomical character of reality to depict a basic ontological situation in which phenomenon of sin may appear; for its better philosophical articulation, I implement Karl Jaspers’ philosophical observations. I point out the deep experiential discrepancy between essentially unlimited divine nature of a man and existential limitedness that he or she normally experiences. In this particular context, I elaborate the notion of sin from Julian’s revelations: I qualify it as pain, discordance, clash of intentions, isolation, delusion, and having no essence. Next, I show how (religious) images and correlated concepts must be transformed within the authentic process of spiritual transformation. In this way, Julian invites us to transcend the limited existential situation of antinomies and step toward unbound possibilities of divine goodness which may be found and activated in one’s own inmost being.

Keywords: spiritual experience, sin, antinomies, transformation, mental images, transcendence

Introduction

In this paper, I reflect the spiritual experience of a medieval English mystic Julian of Norwich (1342-1416). Her rich mystical life has found the outer expression in her famous treatise Revelations of Divine Love. I specifically target to treat mutual interconnections among mystical experiences, understand of sin and guilt, transformation of mental images of God, oneself, and reality, and the meaning of self-transcendence. First, I ponder over experiential qualifications of the phenomenon of sin as depicted by the mystic. Next, I outline antinomical character of experienced reality to sketch a basic ontological situation in which sin may appear; for its better philosophical articulation, I implement Karl Jaspers’ observations. Finally, I show how images (including the so called religious images) transform all together with the authentic spiritual transformation (mystical reborn).

My basic methodological and methodical perspective remains phenomenological. Being attentive to profound experiences of the mystic, I observe fundamental experiential structures of given spiritual phenomena, searching for evidentially demonstrated “how” of the given within the specific content of intentional consciousness. Thus, we remain in a safe valley of experience, describing the reality of consciousness experiencing the world in precisely such and such manner. Only then, it is reasonable to make also certain

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metaphysical or ontological claims.¹

The Queries of One Mystic

For Julian, question of sin and evil was the most pressing one. Historically, she went through three sieges of the Black Death (which killed over half of the population of Norwich—probably including her own family), and witnessed executions of heretics and the beginning of the Hundred Year’s war between France and England. Living within pessimistic moods of the “popular” medieval guilt and sin absorption (John-Julian, 2011, p. viii), Julian was taught that the drama of sin is closely related with pain and evil in every possible form. A man was said to be greatly responsible for this uneasy condition. One feels a burden of the doctrine of original sin and ideas of sin understood as disobedience to God’s law and Church authorities, as the broken relationship and animosity with God, or as misusing of human freedom. The mystic cannot reconcile profound discrepancies she experiences in the world and in herself. She finds the greatest discrepancy between the God she mystically experiences and the image of God (and the correlated image of a man) she hears about from authorities. How could God (our good Mother Christ [John-Julian, 2011; Warren, 2007]), for instance, bear the eternal suffering of any beloved creature, for example, an “unbeliever”, in hell?

As she struggles with these incongruities, a current attentive reader may note the rupture in sense between her divine showings and her own culturally conditioned emotions of guilt and remorse, her conditioned mindset of self-blaming and sinfulness. It is no coincidence that her God in Revelations teaches her to transcend even the so called “moral emotions” as quickly as it gets, especially guilt, shame, and remorse (Grange, 2003).² She often feels uneasy and begs God for the true understanding. And even though she always says that she obeys and accepts the teaching of the Church, in reality, she always prioritizes the insights of her mystical showings.³ Julian is too eager to know more about the divine and man’s reality to leave the obscure issues untreated. She goes far beyond orthodoxy, disregarding the threat of inquisition, transcending even her own cultural mindset. She knows that the truth is too important to keep it for herself; more precisely, she believes that it is God who constantly encourages her to spread the “good news” all around.

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¹ I hold the view that metaphysics and ontology are legitimate only if they arise out of an immediate experience and remain bound to and attested by it. This way, metaphysics, ontology, and even theology do not have to become mere deductive conceptual systems, but living teachings based on real experiential insights out of which they gain its evidential force, validity, and justification. My rethinking of the Julian’s teaching is freely philosophical, thus I do not feel to be owing to “canonic” theological interpretation of the mystic, but to sheer spiritual experience.

² Julian is famous for feminine qualities which she likes to ascribe to God, especially the motherhood. At some places, the terms she uses have even an androgynous guise and aim beyond gender. She disturbs reader’s habitual way of theological thinking with expressions, like “Our Mother Christ, He…” (Julian of Norwich, Revelations, p. 160). Fr. John-Julian nicely notices that Julian does not ascribe anthropomorphic attributes to God (e.g., “God is tender as our mother”), but she completely turns the perspective saying that all the motherhood, fatherhood, as well as all the humanity is preexisting perfectly in God. She divinizes the human reality, including genders. Cf. John-Julian (2011). Julian is also an important figure in the feminist study of Middle English religious writings. Cf. Warren (2007).

³ It is commonly known how psychologically and physiologically devastating these emotions can become when one gets neurotically trapped in them. In one passage from Revelations God speaks to Julian advising her to take everything lightly, there is already enough suffering in the world, so why should she multiply it in herself? “Accuse not thyself overly much, questioning if thy tribulation and thy woe are all because of thy sinfulness; for it is not my will that thou be gloomy or sorrowful undiscerningly” (Julian of Norwich, Revelations, p. 202). “Julian is remarkable for her very modern psychological insights. Thus, she sees the wrath of God as being a projection of our own anger on to God who, she states, never shows anger as he is fully satisfied with the integrity of his creation” (Grange, 2003, p. 7).

⁴ Julian of Norwich, Revelations, p. 105.

⁵ Is this the reason why she was never formally beatified in the Catholic Church?
As the mystic, she experientially knows the divine presence as the unconditioned goodness. The mystical teaching she has obtained through intimate mystical communion speaks the same loving language. God she knows never blames nor angers⁶, and remarkably, never responds to her plea to show her something of hell or purgatory (Frykholm, 2010).⁷ She sees “no wrath in God”⁸, but sheer life of goodness which constantly creates, nourishes, and permeates all the known and unknown being. For Julian’s God, it seems principally impossible to judge or damn a human creature so intimately bound with His own divinity. She gently argues that God judges us according to who we are in our deepest essence. This basically means that God treats us as His own living image, even more, as His own extended life. We are “the dwelling city of God” (Teresa of Avila, 2007)⁹, we are incarnations of His Son.¹⁰

Nevertheless, there is one important mystical lesson she cherishes the most among all others—the showing of the Parable of a good lord and a good servant. This image speaks metaphorically of a situation of sin and mirrors the existential experience of a man in the world.

### The Parable of the Innocent Fall

I saw two persons in bodily form, that is to say, a lord and a servant; and with this, God gave me spiritual understanding. The Lord sits solemnly in repose and in peace; the servant stands near, before his lord reverently, ready to do his lord’s will. The lord looks upon his servant most lovingly and sweetly, and humbly he sends him to a certain place to do his will. The servant not only goes, but he suddenly leaps up and runs in great haste because of his love to do his lord’s will. And immediately, he falls into a deep pit and receives very great injury. Then, he groans, moans, wails, and writhes, but he cannot rise up nor help himself in any way.

In all this, the greatest misfortune that I saw him in was the lack of reassurance, for he could not turn his face to look back upon his loving lord (who was very near to him and in whom there is complete comfort), but like a man who was feeble and witless for the moment, he was intent on his suffering, and waited in woe.

In this woe, he endured seven great pains. The first was the painful bruising that he received in his falling, which was very painful to him. The second was sluggishness of his body. The third was the weakness resulting from these two. The fourth was that he was deluded in his reason and stunned in his mind to such an extent that he had almost forgotten his own love to do his lord’s will. The fifth was that he could not rise up. The sixth was a most amazing pain to me and that was that he lay alone—I looked all about and watched, and neither far nor near, high nor low, did I see any help for him. The seventh was that the place in which he lay was a huge, hard, and painful one.

I wondered how this servant could humbly endure there all this woe. And I watched deliberately to see if I could discover any failure in him, or if the lord would allot him any blame, and truly there was none seen—for only his good will and his great desire were the cause of his falling, and he was as willing and as good inwardly as when he stood before his lord ready to do his will.

And in the same way, his loving lord constantly watched him most tenderly; and now with a two-fold attitude: One outward, most humbly and gently with great compassion and pity (and this was from the first level of the showing); another inward, more spiritual, and this was shown with a guiding of my understanding to the lord, and by this guiding, I saw him greatly rejoice, because of the honorable repose and nobility that he wills and shall bring his servant to by his plenteous grace (and this was from that other level of the showing) and now my understanding led back to the first part of

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⁶ “[But] these two things—blame and anger—I could not find in God” (Julian of Norwich, Revelations, p. 105). She even claims that God cannot forgive us our sins, simply because there is no negativity in the divine being, so it makes no sense to speak about forgiveness at all. “I saw no kind of wrath in God, neither for a short time nor for long (For truly, as I see it, if God were to be angry even a hint, we would never have life nor place nor being)” (Julian of Norwich, Revelations, p. 115).
⁷ Julian of Norwich, Revelations, pp. 75-76. Cf. also Frykholm (2010).
⁸ Julian of Norwich, Revelations, p. 115.
⁹ Julian of Norwich, Revelations, p. 180. This mystical image reminds also the interior castle of Teresa of Avila. Cf. Teresa of Avila (2007).
¹⁰ Julian of Norwich, Revelations, p. 129.
the showing, keeping both in mind.

Then, says this gracious lord in his meaning:

Behold, behold, my beloved servant! What harm and distress he has received in my service for my love, yea, and because of his good will! It is not reasonable that I reward him for his fright and his dread, his hurt and his wounds and all his woe? And not only this, but does it not fall to me to give a gift that is to him better and more honorable than his own health would have been? Otherwise it seems to me I would be doing him no favor.

In this an inward, spiritual showing of the lord’s meaning settled into my soul, in which I was that it was fitting and necessary—seeing his great goodness and his own honor—that his dear worthy servant whom he loved so much would be truly and blessedly rewarded without end beyond what he would have been if he had not fallen. Yea, and to such an extent that his falling and all the woe that he had received from it would be transformed into high and surpassing honor and endless bliss.

At this point, the showing of this illustration vanished, and our good Lord directed my understanding onward in vision and in showing the rest of the revelations to the end. But notwithstanding all this diversion, the wonder of the illustration never went from me; for it seemed to me it was given me as an answer to my desire, and yet I could not perceive in it a full interpretation for my comfort at that time. (Julian of Norwich, 2011, pp. 120-122)

There is really a lot to say about this imaginative divine teaching. First of all, the vision does not explain the fall and its reasons. Julian offers here no metaphysics. The vision is the simple description of the situation. We do not know why the servant falls and what the “pit” into which he falls exactly signifies. But we know for sure how the situation looks like. First of all, the whole event is fully exposed to peaceful, quiet, and tender presence of the lord. There is no hint of judgement or wrath whatsoever. Most importantly, it shows that the fall is innocent. The loving servant falls without any bad intention or deed. But once he falls, he is fully absorbed by the new reality of the fall. And how does reality of the sin look like?

Julian symbolically names the seven pains, suggesting the fullness of suffering. I loosely reflect the seven pains stressing several aspects related to our topic. It seems that the fall relates to somehow raw, misbalanced, or deformed ontological terrain (the “pit”). A human person—substantially owning the infinite and unlimited divine essence—suddenly got into limited, finite conditions. What a paradox! The new restricted ontological and metaphysical conditions seem to be the reason for various painful injuries and separation (Kutáš, 2018; Dispenza, 2014). We may picture the “terrain” or the domain of visible and invisible

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11 Julian of Norwich, Revelations, pp. 120-122.
12 Both, the metaphysical and the ontological is closely interrelated. With the former, I refer mainly to examining the main inherent principles of being, its conditions for possibility, including the highest Being and the so called natural theology. With the latter I rather mean identifying and interpreting the structure of being itself. Both philosophical disciplines may and should always correlate with experiential bases provided by careful phenomenological descriptions and always turn back for their recuperative corroboration provided by an experience.
13 Here, we could think about many determinants set upon a human mind since it first comes to the world. A new born human person is formed and deformed by unavoidable societal and individual mind programmings (learning). Learning itself, of course, is mostly important and should convey the best and the most effective humanistic information stored within and conveyed by the historical tradition (which is not always the case), see Kutáš (2018). However, let us look at the obvious deformations, the obvious destructive programmings. In cases of worst deformations, we may think of children intentionally brainwashed by various exploiting groups (children labor, children turned to coldblooded war killers)—here the “pain and injuries” seem to be unhealable, causing irretrievable damage, which can be today identified psychologically and neurologically. But we may think about less extreme deformations like domestic violence, psychological distress, abuse, ideological identifications, influence of propaganda and the public opinion, fear inducing herd mentality, or simply all the experiences which closes the human mind for its natural ability to perceive goodness and beauty. It is the environment which plays the decisive role in activating and supporting or deactivating various possibilities of our genetic potential (90%). Cf. Dispenza (2014). Originally rich and unbounded human potential is due to the restricted ontological conditions innocently formed or deformed within an individual human life.
misbalances, hardships, hardness, stagnancy, conflicts, and clashes which are causing servant’s injuries and pains. Again, reality appears as a limiting ontological structure where a man—essentially carrying the infinite essence and orientation—is dramatically stuck within various restrictions of the finite being, he himself sustaining even co-creating the very same limiting conditions. For the innocent and untransformed (self-absorbed) consciousness—let us call it sinful consciousness, this is necessarily the place of conflicts and violence.

Julian speaks of a sudden realization of the fragility of human flesh, or more broadly, of the imperfection of incarnation (“sluggishness of the body”). Let me note that the servant is later identified with Christ, Adam, a man, and generally with all humankind at the same time. As if the incarnation represented the oneness of a single incarnated person (Merton, 1961), the “sluggishness” is the characteristic suitable for the whole new ontological situation of this dynamic “person”. The fleshliness is significantly stigmatized by the fall and in the new post-fall context it is also experienced as limiting and restricting.

The servant is powerless, resigned, stagnant, all aching and moaning in pain. All he sees is his own unbearable pain and isolation. The pain has absorbed all the intentionality; there is no real transcendence WHATSOEVER. The servant loses the awareness about the wider picture of his situation, loses awareness of the whole, of the loving divine presence. The mind’s intentionality is self-referential: His sight is no longer the attentive loving look peering into his lord’s eyes. The servant cannot self-supportingly help himself, which speaks of the paradox of growth and self-transcendence (Frankl & Lapide, 2016; Slavkovský, 2006). He is left alone in his intentional blindness and isolation. And it is precisely the pain of separation which astonishes Julian the most. There is no one to help, no one to care, man feels completely alone, fully isolated in his painful condition. Also, the mind and reasoning are not able to work according to their divine potential.

The whole description nicely corresponds with the experience of man with himself or herself within the world. With existentialists we could loosely speak of thrownness into existence, of an involuntary gift of our being in the world with which we do not really know what to do. We are in the situation where sin as innocent non-intended falling (not a failure) defines the very ontological and metaphysical structure of reality (and thus human consciousness). The most suitable experiential description of this fundamental situation is simply pain—Julian claims that she cannot find the more fitting definition for sin. Pain in so many possible forms becomes the witnessing signifier of a sin. Sin is always experienced as pain, always manifests in terms of pain. For Julian, every life challenge is bearable, expect sin. Sin, sickness, pain, and hell are the close notions pointing to the same dysfunctional phenomenon. What does she mind with the pain of sin more concretely?

In the following, I qualify the phenomenon of sin in a more systematic manner. It is experientially given as a pain of isolation, as delusion and ignorance, and as conflicts of intentions. These three experiential aspects of sin are easy to recognize from everyday human experience and all bear the negative, painful connotations. However, Julian goes further because her own experience goes further, especially in her mystical and

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14 Julian of Norwich, Revelations, p. 120.
15 Julian of Norwich, Revelations, pp. 124, 129. The idea “we are one man” is also the title of a chapter in Thomas Merton’s book. Cf. Merton (1961).
16 We cannot willingly transcend ourselves; we cannot willingly grow into the human maturity. Frankl believes that any self-transcendence and human happiness is possible only as a “side effect” of de-centering of intentionality, which means ceasing the habit of our innocent self-centeredness and self-absorption. Cf. Frankl and Lapide (2016). Reginald Slavkovský analyzes the paradox of self-enhancement in Slavkovský (2006).
contemplative insights. She goes on to characterize sin with its possible positive value as having no essence, as inevitable, and mysteriously, as an “award”.

### Sin as Pain of Isolation

Inspired by the current spiritual author, Eckhart Tolle, first I would like to specify the way I (and Julian) use the term pain. Even though the term refers generally to every possible pain (physiological and mental), mostly it bears the more specific meaning, that is the mind created pain (anxiety, fears, expectations, and desires). The root of this suffering is the identification of human consciousness with mind and with its restricting personal narratives (Tolle, 2005). Simple pain as a simple biological fact of life can be, according to mystics and contemplatives, more bearably experienced without the mind-identification, i.e., without losing the deeper connection with the real—which is, in Julian’s case, metaphorical presence of the good lord. What Tolle calls the identification with one’s mind is at the same time the separation from the deeper flow of life or consciousness.

The first thing one notices reading the Julian’s parable is that the servant innocently gets into a position of suffering and a correlative manner of isolation. Thomas Merton and his Zen Buddhist discussion partner Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki linked the myth of original sin with the phenomenon of separation (Merton, 1968). In their view, the separation occurs as a result of certain acquired, culturally induced individual, societal, ideological mind identifications and programmings. Human consciousness (“soul”, “self”) gets alienated from its own divine source. This grave self-alienation, this separation from one’s true divine identity is accompanied with the birth of an illusory egoic identity and is nourished by fears and self-absorption.

We saw in the parable that similarly for Julian, the suffering of sin is the pain of separation. An isolated and self-restricted consciousness has lost awareness of the embracing unifying presence of the real. All absorbed in its pain, consciousness becomes self-referential in its intentional orientation. Such self-absorbed sinful consciousness is unable of the real transcendence toward anything other than itself. This illusion of autonomy implies losing the awareness of the broader context, which is the profound interconnectedness of all life and being. It is perhaps no coincidence that Julian so emphasizes the divine compassion since it teaches us to reconnect.

### Sin as Delusion and Ignorance

Linked to the former qualification, sin is an “optical” illusion related to lack of an important metaphysical knowledge. In different terms, we can speak of the lack of mystical or contemplative awareness. Going to a root of a problem, sin is an illusion caused by the lack of an important human experience, which is the experience of contemplative awakening into the true reality—into the presence of fundamental divine goodness. At this point, Julian is close to Gnosticism in its various forms. Her notion of sin really refers to innocent ignorance, to lack of spiritual knowledge. She writes:

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17 “Pain is inevitable as long as you are identified with your mind, which is to say as long as you are unconscious, spiritually speaking. I am talking here primarily of emotional pain, which is also the main cause of physical pain and physical diseases. Resentment, hatred, self-pity, guilt, anger, depression, jealousy, and so on, even the slightest irritation, are all the forms of pain. And every pleasure or emotional high contains within itself the seed of pain: its inseparable opposite, which will manifest in time”, (my emphasis).

18 Julian of Norwich, Revelations, pp. 67, 209.
Man is changeable in this life, and frailty and by simplicity and lack of cunning, being overcome, he falls into sin. He is impotent and unwise by himself, and also his will is overwhelmed during this time he is in temptation and in sorrow and woe. And the cause is blindness, for he sees not God—because if he saw God constantly, he would have no harmful experience, nor disturbance of any kind, nor the distress that is a servant to sin. (Adams, 2011)19

Illusion of sin is a distortion in perception. Thus, in principle, the negativity we experience is nothing but the deformation in perception given by our distorted illusion of reality and ourselves. Overcoming the illusion and healing our perception is precisely the point of the all contemplative praxis. Contemplation learns to “see” the real beyond the mental constructions, to hear the stillness beyond the mental noise, to transcend one’s own mind’s conditionings (Merton, 1968).20

Sin as the distortion of our perception remains innocent, “inherited” and self-preserving (Tolle, 2005).21 Who is then to blame? The sinful reality simply is as it is—our current ontological terrain is deformed. In this light, the notions like wrath, anger, blame, sin, damnation, as well as its sanitizers, like guilt, shame, remorse, and even forgiveness seem to be merely categories of human mind bound to the situation of the “pit”. They belong to antinomical illusory nature of our current reality, to its conflicts and discrepancies.22 What needs to be healed, first of all, is our perception of reality.

However, according to the parable, the sinful mind—confused and isolated mind experiencing the hell of various pains—ever remains in the loving divine presence.

**Sin as Clashes of Intentions**

The “fallen” consciousness perceives reality in very restricted and restricting manner. The “terrain” is hard, unfriendly, and fearful due to egoic blindness and isolation. Such circumstances inevitably give birth to visible and invisible clashes, pinches, conflicts, and other injuries. The reality turns into a battle field of multiple blind, confused intentions. Sin does not respect broader context and the limitations of the finite being (the “pit”). Particular intentions are isolated and mostly self-concerned. They do not coincide with the whole, do not tune or harmonize with each other, but they chaotically clash to each other, mutually competing and fighting, innocently multiplying pains and injuries. The fallen consciousness lost the ability to perceive the whole, to apprehend innumerous contextual interrelations, to respect the invisible network of mutually influencing ontological and metaphysical interconnections (Trajtelová, 2018).23 The injuries of sin from the parable are the pains of conflicting isolated intentions (conveyed by thoughts, aspirations, emotions, and deeds) within us and

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19 Julian of Norwich, *Revelations*, p. 110, my emphasis. See also an interesting discussion Adams (2011). The author argues that sin is not depreciated by Julian, but horrors and illusions of sin “in our present hell of seeming alienation”.

20 “Contemplation is the highest expression of man’s intellectual and spiritual life. It is that life itself, fully awake, fully active, fully aware that it is alive…. It is a vivid realization of the fact that life and being in us proceed from an invisible, transcendent and infinitely abundant Source. Contemplation is, above all, awareness of the reality of that Source”.

21 Eckhart Tolle speaks about a sin as about an inherited dysfunction of human mind. Sin is an inevitable result of human unconsciousness (read unenlightened, usual, normal, everyday “conscious” form of a human consciousness).

22 “[M]ercy of God and forgiveness is in order to abate and consume our wrath, not His” (Julian of Norwich, *Revelations*, p. 114).

23 Saints and contemplatives in every spiritual tradition are very sensitive toward the pain of the broken bonds and relations. That is why they emphasize compassion, which is the consciously and actively lived togetherness. Mystics show how every isolated and isolating movement hinders the vivifying divine flow. This phenomenon I treat elsewhere as idolatry.
among us (cf. Oxnam, 2016). 24

In all the great spiritual traditions, the moral principles, like the Decalogue, aim to harmonize our individual intentions and conciliate our aspirations, needs, and beliefs. Such culturally appropriated regulations should serve to open and mellow our intentional fields, i.e., tune up disharmonious conflicting melodies, integrate isolated intentions into the communal \textit{telos} of the underlying reality of essential divine goodness.

Collisions of intentions, ideas, needs, or images can one found, first of all, in oneself. We are disintegrated, confused, contradicted, and fragmented in ourselves—notes Julian. 25 She distinguishes between the savage will and the divine will. 26 The savage will is confused and ignorant, it may want wrongly, chaotically, and foolishly. However, the savage will is not the bad will—it is just truly blind, unconscious. Its original ignorance is the wail textured by pains, fears, and self-absorbed intentionality. Also, Julian stresses that it is not savage because it is sensible or fleshly, but precisely because it is not fully (consciously) in and with the senses. Instead of fully experiencing the sacredness of the natural (i.e., also sensible) reality, it lives out of its mental illusions. 27 In Julian’s \textit{Revelations}, natural and sacred, natural and divine, and natural and good can be seen as synonyms—they refer to each other. 28 The opposite of the blind (savage) will, the divine will, remains fully

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24 Mystics suggest that individual persons and the whole of humankind are profoundly interconnected, even mystically identical (given the same divine essence). However, both individual and collective human consciousness seem to bear the serious malfunctions. The situation resembles or parallels a dysfunctional situation of the multiple personality disorder (dissociative identity disorder, DID). It is a pathological condition of a human mind which experiences dramatic personality splitting. The splitting is caused by extreme traumas during the early childhood, especially by physical and psychological abuse and cruelty. In order to survive, it comes to multiple psychological dissociations and thus to creation two and more independent “persons” within a one biological body (in case of Robert Oxnam, there were eleven different personalities). Cf. Oxnam (2016). \textit{Isolated} “persons” of a DID patient do not know about each other and they are often incompatible regarding their characters, their needs and intentions. When these “persons” during the therapy get to know each other, they may fight, compete, and even hate each other. The treatment relies in recognizing all the dissociated “persons” and accepting them as they are (“good” or “bad”), in further mutual reconciliation among them and in a slow and difficult integration process. A patient needs to go through the suppressed pain and face it. Robert Oxnam, interestingly, had to \textit{lovingly} embrace all his “persons”, even the “evil” ones (representations of abusers), in order to find the deeper integration of his unified person. Noteworthy, the Oxnam’s worst evil personality, the Witch, exposed to conscious and loving integrative efforts, got transformed into a wise and enlightened “person” named Wanda. Analogy with the whole of the struggling humankind is easy to make. (I would like to thank for this insight and the related discussion to a great Slovak psychiatrist Hana Vojtová). Moreover, Robert Oxnam as well as his therapist Jeffery B. Smith, M.D. suggest that the situation of the DID patient is only an extreme form of the most common disorder of a human mind (generally called the “normal” or the “optimal”), which we all know very well. Cf. Oxnam (2016). As Julian writes, we are fragmented in ourselves, we experience various conflicting needs and intentions within ourselves, and we adopt different roles according to different situations, many times the mutually incompatible ones. Inspired by mystics, by various pathological conditions from psychiatry, and by our own mind experience we may claim: if any hell exists, it is the one right within our minds.

25 “And by Adam’s falling we are so fragmented in our feeling in differing ways (by sins and by various pains, in which we are made sad and blind as well) that scarcely do we know how to obtain any comfort…And thus we remain in this muddle all the days of our lives” 25 (Julian of Norwich, \textit{Revelations}, p. 135).

26 Julian of Norwich, \textit{Revelations}, p. 85.

27 Sensibility and fleshliness are natural parts of a human being, as well as his or her divine essence is natural. In Julian, the natural and the divine mutually intertwine so tightly that it is difficult to determine the distinguishing line. “God is natural in His very being—that is to say, that goodness which is of nature, it is God. He is the ground; He is the essence; He is the same thing as nature; and He is true Father and true Mother of human nature. All natures that He has caused to flow out of Him to accomplish His will shall be returned and brought again into Him by the salvation of man through the working of grace” (Julian of Norwich, \textit{Revelations}, pp. 167-168). “Thus are human nature and grace of one accord—for grace is God as human nature is God. He is double in His way of working but single in love and neither of these two works without the other, nor is either separated from the other” (Julian of Norwich, \textit{Revelations}, p. 169). “For I saw most certainly that our essence is in God, and also I saw that God is in our fleshliness, for at the self-same moment that our soul is made fleshly, at the same moment is the City of God established in our soul from without beginning” (Julian of Norwich, \textit{Revelations}, p. 146). At certain places Julian tries to make some more certain distinctions. She speaks of God as of “essential Nature Uncreated” or “supreme Love uncreated” (Julian of Norwich, \textit{Revelations}, pp. 141, 105). Human nature would bear the same “divine qualities except created” (Julian of Norwich, \textit{Revelations}, p. 105).

28 Julian of Norwich, \textit{Revelations}, p. 169.
present in the reality of the sacred because it is deeply connected with the very Source of the reality. Its intentionality is fully transcending. If we spoke in a more current terminology, we could speak of mindfulness (Nhat Hanh, 2008)²⁹, of the truly mindful will. And for mystics, using the Christian Trinitarian language, the underlying divine flow of the real is always experienced as fully present, alive, creative, friendly, relational, and profoundly interconnected within its own oneness. The human divine will simply flows with the divine flow, it is real. And since human being is ever already nourished by the source of all life and being, Julian insists: “[I]n every soul that shall be saved is a divine will that never consents to sin, nor ever will” (Julian of Norwich, 2011, p. 139).³⁰

**Sin as Having No Essence**

Julian insistently claims: “But I saw no sin; for I believe it has no manner of essence nor any portion of being, nor it can be known except by the pain that is caused by it”.³¹

The Julian’s pondering is simple. In Revelations, God persistently teaches her that all what is, is good. His infinite being perfectly permeates all that finitely exists. There is no exception for this truth. More importantly, Julian mystically experiences this truth within herself. Essentially, God is sheer existence of goodness. The mystic’s favorite and preferable name of God is also Goodness. All beings creatively arising out of God are equally good. Being and goodness are synonyms. The very presence of the divine life is the condition of possibility for being and living of anything what exists. In other words, all what exists, exists within and because of the overabundance of the infinite creative power, wisdom and love (anytime Julian uses this three words she refers to the unity of the trinity) (Meninger, 2010).

In the opening chapters of Revelation, Julian describes her famous vision of a “hazel nut”. She believes it is a simple teaching on “God’s simple loving”.³² She mystically observes how this loving is absolutely essential for human beings, how we are fully and truly clothed, enwrapped and enclosed in it,³³ and how everything that exists is soaked with and fully submerged in this unspeakable ocean of goodness. Then, she sees “a little thing, the size of a hazel nut…round as a ball”, in the palm of her hand. She wonders: “What can this be?” And the answer comes: “It is all that is made”.³⁴ What she sees is the whole of creation, the whole visible and invisible, known, and unknown universe—including the slightest atoms of proteins, viruses, bacteria, or humans, as well as cosmic galaxies or various massive energy fields of the universe. The mystic cannot comprehend how such a tiny thing in her hand, of which we are a very tiny part, may continue to exist. “I marveled how it could continue, because it seemed to me it could suddenly have sunk into nothingness because of its littleness”.³⁵ The simple divine answer follows: “It continueth and always shall, because God loveth it; and in this way everything hath its being by the love of God”. The “littleness” of the finite reality is emphasized precisely in comparison with the incomprehensibility and infinity of the divine being itself.³⁶ And

²⁹ For classical articulation of mindfulness, see Nhat Hanh (2008).
³⁰ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations*, p. 139. I firmly confident that with the expression “every soul that shall by saved” the mystic means every man and woman. Cf. also Walsh (2012).
³¹ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations*, p. 65.
³² Julian of Norwich, *Revelations*, p. 13.
³³ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations*, p. 13.
³⁴ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations*, p. 13.
³⁵ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations*, p. 13.
³⁶ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations*, p. 23.
still, the same infinite loving perfectly permeates its finite concrete manifestations: “He is in all things”.37

In Julian’s ontology and metaphysics, there is no place for evil and sin—and this is the place of the obvious discord with her and our everyday experience. “What is sin?”, Julian marvels, “for I saw truly that God does everything no matter how little, and I saw truly that nothing is done by luck of by chance but everything by the foreseeing wisdom of God”.38

Sin has no essence. It has no reality, it is fully unreal. It has no nature nor it arises out of the nature, it is unnatural.39 We saw that the illusion of perception is not the reality itself. Julian believes that sin is the only existing phenomenon which can be referred to as unreal and unnatural. Everything else in the creation is natural, which means divine. Nature and divinity, nature and mercy, and nature and goodness are the two sides of the same coin.40 In the perception of the mystic, everything is out of God and contains God; everything is naturally good, balanced, at its proper place—except sin. Sin is the only discrepancy, disharmony with both the divine and the human nature. The lack of true understanding of reality has no substance; it is mere deprivation. All the negativity is the absence of goodness in a similar way in which a shadow is an absence of light.

**Unexpected Turn? Sin as an Award**

There are several surprises waiting for Julian’s readers. One such surprise appears with an almost heretical shift in Julian’s thoughts.41 She speaks of sin as an award. Sin is an honor and bears its hidden positive value. Given the radical innocence and involuntary affliction of the servant (parable), God keeps telling Julian that we will see our wounds, caused by sin and fall, in a way He sees it Himself—as rewards and praises.42 Julian asserts great hidden benefits of our falling43 and adds that we will see it ourselves, comprehend and rejoice. “It is not reasonable that I reward him for his fright and his dread, his hurt and his wounds and all his woe?” asks the good lord in Julian’s parable. However, the notion of an award itself remains mostly obscure and seems to have the weakest experiential power. Perhaps here it comes to Julian’s faith—simply embracing this point as God’s promise and future reality to come.

**Sin as Inevitable and the Great Deed**

Julian acknowledges certain necessity, even positivity of sin. Sin is not only neutralized by the innocent situation in which humans involuntarily find themselves. It is a positive and necessary component of creative divine intentions.

One way of looking at this troublesome point in Julian’s teaching is to think about the role of suffering in the process of mystical or contemplative awakening. Mystics claim that the way to mystical union leads through pain of radical dispossession (“the dark night”) (Trajtelová, 2013, pp. 122-126). Spiritual teachings in all the traditions have always acknowledged the role of suffering in spiritual transformation (May, 2004) since

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37 Julian of Norwich, Revelations, p. 31.
38 Julian of Norwich, Revelations, p. 31.
39 Julian of Norwich, Revelations, p. 169.
40 Again, for Julian, human nature is natural, including the body and the sensibility. At the same time, the human nature is the essential part of the divine mystery. The mystic speaks loosely about the natural desire for God or natural love. She claims that the human nature and the God’s grace are perfectly concordant: grace is God, nature is God. Julian of Norwich, Revelations, p. 169. Grace and nature present the one and the same efficacy of the divine goodness within the creation.
41 However, in reality, not as heretical as it may seem. The expression “O felix culpa” (O happy guilt) is a traditional part of the Catholic Paschal Vigil Mass and refers to positive outcomes of an unfortunate event of the fall.
42 Julian of Norwich, Revelations, p. 89.
43 Julian of Norwich, Revelations, pp. 164-165.
abundance of suffering may serve as the vehicle for the spiritual surrender and awakening, which represents the breaking points when habitual egoic structures of human mind collapse. We can think of a more poetic example from the Gospels. Mary Magdalene experiences the divine liberation precisely thanks to her so called sinfulness. Mercy and goodness became suddenly the most visible reality, the only true reality that exists. And she meets this reality in flesh, as incarnated, as fully present and tangible, in person of Jesus. Sin may reveal the meaning of divine goodness.

The most famous refrain from Revelations is being repeated several times for Julian: “Sin is inevitable, but all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all the manner of things shall be well”.44 But what about the radical evil?—she insists. How can we ever keep calm and stay satisfied with its cruelties? How could even the notion of a reward lessen something of the atrocity of evil experienced in the world, especially caused by other humans? How can everything be well? Why God in all His great Wisdom did not prevent sin from the beginning?—obstinately ask Julian with philosophical precision45. “Ah! Good Lord, how can all be well considering the great damage that has come by sin to Thy creatures?”46

Julian as the experienced mystic admits that our reasoning is obviously too shortsighted for handling this metaphysical far beyond reaching question.47 However, she gets the mysterious answer saying to stay calm and trust the bare promise that everything shall be well. Sin is inevitable. What does it mean, inevitable? No response regarding this question.48 I will further grasp the inevitability of sin with the help of phenomenological insights of Karl Jaspers, especially using his notion of “antinomical structure of being”.

Later, the mystic finds some release in God’s promise that evil and all suffering will definitely vanish by the “great deed”.49 It remains unclear, what is meant by this expression. Perhaps the remedy of the great deed—regarding the distorted condition of human consciousness—is simply to follow Julian’s perspective of transformative divine goodness. The refrain “All shall be well” is too often the divine response. For Julian, this is much more than certain vague promise or hope; it is already becoming her new reality. Her eyes are getting used to a new undeluded perspective. The transformation of a sinful mind presupposes the shift in perception toward the awareness of the divine goodness. Julian’s attention is getting still more and more focused on the present goodness of the real, which is itself transformative and healing. Let me subjectively note that every transformation of human consciousness, every spiritual awakening is surely the biggest event in a life of an individual and humankind, a great deed. Can we ever imagine an overall, collective human awakening? Would this be the great deed? We do not know. Is sin inevitable within the broader picture of the creative divine intentions (the great deed)—as Julian presupposes? Let us leave the questions open, they would lead us too far away from our experience.

Antinomical Structure of the (Fallen) Reality

How to philosophically approach Julian’s experience? How to formulate Julian’s “ontology” as a

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44 Julian of Norwich, Revelations, p. 64.
45 Julian of Norwich, Revelations, p. 64.
46 Julian of Norwich, Revelations, p. 68.
47 Julian of Norwich, Revelations, p. 73.
48 If we went into metaphysics, we could speculate that in Julian’s current state of knowledge, she would simply not be able to understand the strange enterprise of “incarnation” and “kenosis”—both understood in the radical way as God incarnated within the creation, the Formless as self-restricted and manifested in concrete forms. These conclusions can be also glimpsed in Julian. However, at this place, let us stay with the phenomenological descriptions and existential analyzes.
49 Julian of Norwich, Revelations, pp. 73-74.
conceptual correlative of her specific experiential wisdom? Pondering about Julian’s insights, I was amazed by her simple trust to experience and by broader existential familiarity of her perspectives. I was also delighted by the mystic’s latent nearness to an excellent German thinker, psychiatrist, and existential philosopher Karl Jaspers (1883-1969). I believe his work may provide a solid structure for Julian’s insights.

Let me repeat that Julian presents the phenomenon of sin as some kind of innocent ontological delusion and misbalance, as pain and isolation, as having no essence, as unreal and unnatural, as intentional clashes and disrespect of broader contextual interconnections, as inevitable, and as having concealed positive value (reward, revelation of goodness). In addition, she presumes certain type of ongoing creative process with its telos referring to a perfect kind of ultimate reconciliation (great deed).

We experience our reality with its misbalances, competing aspirations, and irreconcilable opposites. Ever anew we try to glimpse some deeper unity and safety beyond the unstable dance of changing phenomenal forms and constellations. We, similarly to Julian, feel to be dramatically submerged in both: bliss and pain, holiness and sin, innocence and guilt, humanity and divinity, life and death, joy and sorrow, and positivity and evil. Antinomies, conflicts, and collisions create great part of our perceived world. Our mind recognizes reality as having evidently antinomical structure. We also presuppose that mystics own even subtler awareness of irreconcilable antinomic phenomena: On the one hand, recognizing the whole cosmos as the loving incarnation of divine goodness, on the other hand, witnessing decay, suffering, violence, and cruelty in nature and especially among humans.

Karl Jaspers, using his specific way of phenomenological thinking (1968), observed that our being is always situational, perspectivistic and as such antinomical (or in other words, finite). Situation is a reality endowed with a concrete meaning which is neither psychical nor physical, but both at the same time. Situation as a concrete and unique personal reality always carry advantages and losses, opportunities, and limitations. It is impossible to be outside a situation—as soon as I manage to leave one situation I find myself in another one. I do not know (“kennen”) the fullness of situation and all its possible consequences, situation remains to a great extent hidden to me as I live through it (Jaspers, 1973). The first and the foremost existential limit situation is situation itself, the situatedness of a human existence. I am restricted to a particular historical time and sociological relations (Jaspers, 1973). At the same time, the particular restrictions provide possibilities for my freedom to interfere the situation (Jaspers, 1973). Simply, Jaspers describes how we are painfully restricted by our situational contexts which we have not freely chosen, however as freedoms (as existences) we can accept and responsibly interfere it. Suffering is the dramatic limitation of our here-being, “its partial destruction; beyond all the suffering lies death” (Jaspers, 1973, p. 230). Suffering understood as an existential limitation itself means that it dwells right within the reality structure as its inevitable part—as well as its affined nuances death and guilt.

However, Jaspers acknowledges certain positive value to suffering and all the particular existential limit situations (“Grenzsituationen”). Firstly, it uncovers the deeper dimensions of our existence and identity. For a

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50 Here I am not referring only to Jaspers’ understanding of phenomenological method applied to psychopathology. Cf. Jaspers (1968). I also refer to his philosophical way of writing. His philosophical descriptions of the human existential situation are phenomenological – focusing on essential structures of experience, speaking from the point of view of individual consciousness as it experiences its world.

51 There are two ideal extreme poles in considering human freedom. First, the idea of freedom as an unrestricted will ruling over circumstances and others, second, the idea of freedom perfectly harmonious with other freedoms, where no clashes arise. Jaspers realistic suggestion, regarding our antinomical and perspectivistic reality, relies in an idea of loving communication (loving fight) among freedoms.
person, recognizing himself or herself as an *existence*, the basic situational limitedness as well as all the particular limit situations (like death, suffering, fight, or guilt) may become *revelatory*. It may open the deeper insights into one’s own existence. Let me explain in my own terms that for Jaspers an “existence” refers to a spiritually self-aware human being in contrast to a mere vital being, the term refers to a higher form of personal existential self-awareness. The experience of suffering and guilt makes us fully aware of antinomies, fully awake toward our current state of reality—and that may be a good starting point, since it leads us deeper into awareness about our existence. “To experience limit situation and to exist is the same” (Jaspers, 1973, p. 204).

Limit situations are constitutive for a human being. Secondly, given our finite existence, suffering and happiness seem inseparable, understanding of one requires understanding of the other. Jaspers writes: “If there were only happiness, a possible existence would remain in slumber” (Jaspers, 1973, p. 231). Suffering would not be suffering if man would not have glimpses of happiness. And to understand and appreciate happiness, happiness must be first questioned. “The truth of happiness stands on the ground of its breakdown” (Jaspers, 1973, p. 232). Jaspers also says, almost mystically, that it is easier to find one’s true existential depths in unhappiness, however, once the existence reconnects with its deeper transcendent origin, unhappiness backs up and the proper transcendently fulfilled positivity of (our) being arises instead (Jaspers, 1973, p. 232). In our antinomical situation, we cannot reach happiness and transcendence without suffering.

Now, we can better picture ontological and metaphysical conditions in which Julian’s sin may occur in the way it does. Jaspers offers this experiential qualification: “The mode, in which a human being reveals itself in its frailty, is his antinomical structure” (Jaspers, 1973, p. 249). The reality for a human consciousness necessarily appears as a play of contradictory forces, which includes multiple conflicting motivations, mutually contradicting possibilities to choose or competitions among images for their leadership in our lives. Jaspers speaks of the *profound irreconcilables* in our experience and calls them simply *antinomies*. We live them in a way of an irrevocable tension. The question remains for him as well for Julian: is there no way out? Is there no relief for a human being?

Formal, objective thinking process cannot reconcile antinomies cannot relieve the tension; quite the contrary, if the thinking is really profound and touches bare existence, it makes them even stronger (Jaspers, 1973, pp. 251-252). In reality, limit situation brings along “death of thinking” (Bornemark, 2006, p. 67). There are no definite solutions, only partial and relative. However, as freedoms we may acknowledge and accept the antinomical structure of our existence in order to glimpse the truth beyond. And the truth means liberation and transcendence. To experience liminal existential state of being means to be already in connection with *transcendence*. Existence and transcendence are for Jaspers closely bound and refer to each other (Jaspers, 1973, p. 249).

**Keeping the Tension: Violence or Innocence?**

It is impossible to remain in the desired state of peace and harmony, because human *intentions*—the rays of their freedom, the sprouts of their particular state of consciousness—are too various and too many. They may collide and fight, and most of the time they do. Jaspers asserts that it is impossible to avoid *fight* and *violence* and still remain alive since the fight and violence are unavoidable parts of the current structure of our conscious (and subconscious) reality.

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52 “Die Weise, wie das Dasein überall in den Grenzsituationen als in sich brüchig erscheint, ist seine antinomische Struktur”.
Jaspers claims that fight is one of the fundamental liminal situations (Jaspers, 1973). If I want to live, says Jaspers, I must both use violence and suffer violence myself; I must both provide help and receive it; I must accept consent and compromises (Jaspers, 1973, p. 241). In a related manner, Jaspers further interprets phenomenon of guilt in a somehow “karmic” style (Jaspers, 1973, p. 246). Guilt is the consequence of our acts (thoughts, attitudes, believes, emotions, and images). We mostly cannot foresee consequences of our actions; they are too various and too many; our perspective is too limited. Nevertheless, we are the source of our deeds, even though without our will or conscious consent. We are guilty: guilty of sin, innocent sin—speaking with Julian. But does the guilt for our ability to be guilty rely in ourselves?—asks Jaspers (Jaspers, 2011, pp. 26-27). In other words, in the current constellation of reality, we are unable not to cause suffering and suffer, not to fight, not to be guilty. The very survival of our vital lives, biologically and psychologically, depends on such non-intended violence—I eat other animals, get someone else’s job or husband, and so on. Also, my motivations are not pure and they are so diverse. I never avoid choices, and a choice of one direction means a betrayal of the other, a choice of one partner means to refuse or lose the other. A net of the mutual interdependence forms an enormous underlying reality structure within which our actions may contribute to both suffering and release of suffering (Kutáš, 2018). Guilt, violence, and fight inevitably belong to the structure of our experienced reality. In other words, sin is inevitable.

Furthermore, Jaspers claims paradoxically that one must keep striving for being pure and innocent. Julian would gladly approve this claim. The philosopher says that the purity is the primal truth of an existence which in the finite life must risk impurity in order to reveal itself. Human existence is thus called to accept the paradox of its never-ending task to realize the purity within the antinomical tension of the impure (finite) here-being (Jaspers, 1973). No acting is not the solution. Non-action is an action and has its consequences as well as acting. One can only reconcile oneself with what is done or left undone by him or her, even without directly willing it and its consequences. Responsibility, for Jaspers, means the “readiness to undertake the guilt on oneself” (Jaspers, 1973, p. 248). On this account, the existence stands under the irrevocable tension without the possibility to achieve an ease (Jaspers, 1973).

There is no escape, no way out from this kind of reality structure. For Jaspers, there is no way how to avoid responsibility and guilt. For Julian, peering from the other side of the same coin, there is absolutely no shade of blame on man, and still she maintains we cannot resign on responsibility. She says: “In the sight of God we do not fall; in the sight of self, we do not stand—and both of these are true as I see it, but the way our Lord God sees it is the highest truth”. Both suggest that our existential setup is simply the way it is; we are both innocent and guilty. The current antinomical being is being as a tension. A patient bearing and accepting the tension is according to Jaspers, Julian and mystics the most honest position which one can appropriate toward one’s own antinomical reality.

53 For Jaspers, the fight is inevitable. However, he is no negativist. There is another, welcome type of fight, which offers a positive constructive possibility how to live as an existence within the antinomical reality structure: authentic communication, loving exchange of freedoms (“Kampf in der Liebe um Existenz”, Jaspers, 1973). This kind of fight lacks negativity and destructivity of violence, and it perishes with a slightest movement of violence. There is no winner and loser. It consciously keeps and accepts the tensions of the different and the many. Cf. Jaspers (1973). “This fight as the radical questioning of the other and myself is possible only at the basis of solidarity, which doubtlessly presupposes the possibility of existence in the other as well as in myself” (Jaspers, 1973, p. 243). Loving communication presupposes a conscious mutuality of existence (“Gegenseitigkeit”; or we could loosely say compassion, Jaspers (1973) and also a constant process of self-critique, critique and renewal. Existential communication remains ever uncompleted and open, since it knows that within our structure of reality there are no final solutions or definite conclusions. It is impossible not to fight then, since without this kind of fight would remain only existential emptiness and isolation. Cf. Jaspers (1973).

54 Julian of Norwich, Revelations, p. 213.
Multiplicity of Images: Struggle for Identity and for the Guise of Reality

Karl Jaspers in *Ciphers of Transcendence* (2011) observed how an individual as well as all generations of humankind undergo *severe identity struggle* right within the antinomical structure of experienced reality, the struggle incited by the very same structure (Jaspers, 2011, pp. 45-47). More concretely, he refers to mutually competing (mind) images. The ceaseless contest of images is the very struggle for our identity. This fight represents our painful striving for self-understanding. Through various kinds of images we interpret our perceived world, others, ourselves, and even God, they to a great extent create our reality.

Let me make an important distinction. I speak here generally of mental images, but Karl Jaspers uses his own terminology. He distinguishes between a cipher and what is known in philosophy as an idol (Jaspers, 2011). These two speak of the two possible ways in which a human mind relates to its conceptual images which serve every thinking mind to apprehend its reality. Human being is usually not able to relate to its reality in a non-mediated manner (Cassirer, 1944; Tolle, 2005; Jaspers, 2011). The exceptions would be only peak contemplative and mystical experiences. As I showed elsewhere, the most problematic is the nature or kind of a relationship sustained toward this mediation, toward mental objectification of reality. In principle, this relation can be double—the iconic (contemplative) and the possessive (self-identifying) (Trajtelová, 2018). We can picture Jaspers’ cipher as a dynamic iconic pointer orienting a human existence toward profundity and truth of being. The cipher is revealed to an existence, that means, in order to approach reality through ciphers, a person needs to reach a certain level of personal and spiritual maturity, he or she needs to get in touch with the existential realm of his or her own being, i.e. also with transcendence. The transcendence’s “speech” is the speech of ciphers. The idol is a perversion of a cipher, its petrification, and absolutization. Cipher can be easily perverted to a mere rational concept deprived of its original elusive meaning. The dynamic meaning conveyed by a cipher bursts out of transcendence and points toward it. For our habitual analytical thinking and its inherent principles, the claim of ciphers—which is the claim of the transcendence—is almost unbearable. It is easier to see things as either black or white; it is easier to possess definite answers. And definite answers give birth to ideology, i.e., conceptual idolatry (Jaspers, 2011).

It is the very nature of a cipher that the meaning it conveys cannot be exhaustingly given or possessed. For

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55 Even though Jaspers refers explicitly to idolatry (Cf. Jaspers, 2011), he rather speaks of illegitimate *reification* of ciphers. The reification is an aspect of the “mass” mentality. He uses an example of the cipher “hell” which was reified into an image of a place of fire and pain, where one comes to suffer for his or her sins. The consequence of such understanding of “hell” is the removal of his or her freedom (i.e., closing of the dimension of existence). Such mental position is governed by fear and definite answers. Cf. Jaspers (2011). Another example of reification of a cipher (idolatry) is the perversion of the cipher “Oneness of God” into numerical, objective, exclusive oneness. Such perversion irrevocably leads to violence. Cf. Jaspers (2011).

56 Also, the neokantian philosopher Ernst Cassirer observes that humans always approach the world in a mediated manner—through symbolic forms, which are correlative with the function of conceptual abstract thinking. Between us and reality, there is always a thinking mind which symbolically “interprets” all what the senses perceive. Cf. Cassirer (1944). Eckhart Tolle, the current spiritual author, notices that animals are “below thinking”, mostly in a sheer perception and unmediated presence, whereas the contemplative mind goes “above” or “beyond thinking”. “Thinking and consciousness are not synonymous. Thinking is only a small aspect of consciousness…Enlightenment means rising above thought, not falling back to a level blow thought, the level of an animal or a plant” Tolle (2005). Thinking itself can be the great practical tool, but it must contain its conscious observer. In this way, we may even use thinking to transcend thinking without leaving it (and step into the spaciousness of contemplative mind). Unobserved thinking process involuntarily absorbs its thinker, closing him or her into the self-centered thoughtful and emotional immanence. In a more philosophical way, similar observations makes Karl Jaspers when he also suggests to use thinking to transcend thinking (as it is given in its antinomical manner). Cf. Jaspers (2011).

57 Jaspers says that very antinomical character of human being is the liminal state of being and as such it fully destroys absolutes as stable objects of possible objective knowledge. Since the [real] absolute never emerges as an object it the world, an existence must reach it, every time anew, out of its freedom and in a historical guise. Cf. Jaspers (1973; 2011). On the either—or, black—white character of rational thinking, see Jaspers (2011).
an attentive human existence, anything can become a cipher—a person, an event, a prayer, a religious image. Jaspers believes that even dogmatic religious doctrines, like the “Oneness of God”, “Incarnation”, or the “Trinity” may become powerful ciphers leading existence to fullness of freedom and transcendence; but this can happen only if these doctrinal images are appropriated as ciphers in their iconic (symbolic) character, respecting their elusiveness, inexhaustibility, and ungraspability. If we wish to remain faithful to truth and to our own true identity, according to Jaspers, we need to remain in mellowness, uncertainty, and inconsistency of reality perceived through ciphers. The (rational) consistency is always untrue, claims Jaspers (2011, p. 33).\textsuperscript{58} And indeed, sometimes, it seems that contests of ciphers in our lives are not reconcilable.

Thus, anytime we grasp the elusive life of a cipher of transcendence too possessively and too exhaustingly—like in images of “One God”, “Nirvana”, “myself”, or in any particular claim about reality—we absolutize an image, an idea, and a concept, and are willing to possess and control it. We go astray, creating a personal ideology. For Jaspers, the competition of (often) contradictory images and ideas, emerging within and due to the tension of our antinomical situation, remains to a great extent undecidable. Mystics experientially confirm this philosophical and psychological insight when they speak of the divine darkness (Dionysios Areopagita) or “cloud of unknowing”, “way of nothing” (John of the Cross) or we can think here of any mystical negative theology.

I elaborated the relation between idolatry (addiction) and identity in my other article (Trajtelová, 2018); let me only repeat that the principle of idol-less-ness must be also applied especially to the issue of identity. American psychiatrist Gerald G. May (2007) dedicated one of his books to this topic. Also, inspired by mystics, he concludes that the only way how to remain close to true reality (i.e., true identity) of things and ourselves is to loose the tight bonds of our addictions to our self-images, images of the world, others, and God. The main insight laying behind this claim (which is a well-known spiritual principle) is the recognition that all knowledge is a conditioned knowledge, i.e., socially, historically and individually conditioned informational “program”. Thus, such knowledge and its correlated ways of perception is necessarily formed (and deformed) by changing historical, cultural, and individual attitudes and believes. In other words, our images of the world, others and ourselves are necessarily conditioned, learned. The same holds for most of our perceptions and emotions, even moral emotions, like guilt, shame, blame, remorse, anger, and so forth. And if we are religious, the same holds for the image of God retained in our minds. It is no coincidence that spiritual traditions often speak about the necessity of unlearning. The unconditioned divine reality seems to be so different, so far beyond our mental representations of reality as we know it by the means of rational (objective, dualistic) (Jaspers, 2011, p. 97) thinking that many mystics rather speak of the darkness of God than about any particular divine character; it is called the negative theology approach.\textsuperscript{59} Karl Jaspers, without being a sceptic or a relativist, in his own way addresses this issue speaking of the ciphers and the transcendence. He also prefers safer and intellectually more honest negative approach, and the position of the undecidable (Jaspers, 2011).\textsuperscript{60} However, he also claims that one becomes what he sees in ciphers as his or her God (Jaspers, 2011). It does matter what images I create about God (Jaspers, 2011).

\textsuperscript{58} That is why he also speaks of what I call the principle of inconsistency.

\textsuperscript{59} A proponent of a negative theology approach believes that it is more suitable to claim what God is not than what He is.

\textsuperscript{60} Jaspers is not a relativist. Even though the absolute truth cannot be possessed, the claim of the ceaseless search for truth and truthfulness remains his main philosophical imperative. Also, there are many paths to divine transcendence, since there are multiple historically conditioned perspectives—they all have their inherent truthfulness and truthlessness.
Image Matters

However, Julian of Norwich is no iconoclast. Neither is she a proponent of a negative theology, even though she is familiar with the understanding that Divine Being ever remains the mystery. Her own mystical experience speaks for itself: She firmly believes that God wishes us to know certain facts about His divine nature and relatedly about the reality of the world and ourselves. Julian stresses that this information is not neutral or vague; it is highly positive and very concrete. Julian ascribes God concrete attributes and disclaims others. She does this very naturally relying on her mystical insights which has often stood in contrast with her culturally acquired images of man and God. We followed how she disclaimed God’s position of a just judge and his divine anger as well as the related concepts of wrath, guilt, self-refusal, sinfulness, revenge, and so forth. Julian suggests that all these belong to our distorted perception of the real, not the divine reality itself.

Julian herself undergoes the radical transformation of perception, the radical transformation of images—of God, herself, man, and the world. This process belongs to so a called mystical transformation (which I specified elsewhere [Trajtelová, 2013]). Any mystical or contemplative transformation involves radical shift in perception and co-related transformation of images. She believes, for example, that God encourages her to transcend her culturally conditioned emotions of guilt, remorse, or sadness as soon as possible toward newly appropriated trust, joy, and optimism arising out of the immediate contact with the Unconditioned.61 She offers psychologically and biologically much healthier “life strategy” than to be absorbed by guilty consciousness. From Revelations, it is clear that God invites her to carelessly even heedlessly transcend antinomies of the current antinomical reality—also of her emotional reality, to go, for example, beyond polarities of bliss and affliction, joy, and sadness. She is taught not to be dependent on any of these because divine presence is not bound to her perception of joy or sorrow.62 This kind of emotions still pertains to antinomical structure of reality. Accordingly, she steps out of the malfunctioning self-images (of the sinner, the penitential, and the guilty one).

Again, we see that she does not give up on all the images. She disclaims the antinomical images arbitrarily imposed on the divine reality, mirroring the antinomical structure of the conditioned finite reality of our consciousness.

Human mind needs images; it cannot apprehend reality completely imagelessly, formlessly, even in thinking of the transcendence. Experience as an intentional content of consciousness is always given in (as) forms and structures. The author of Revelations does not guide her reader toward the path of negation but toward the path of transformation, transformation of consciousness and its particular images.

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61 Julian of Norwich, Revelations, p. 202 and elsewhere.
62 The story I have in mind is even humorous. At the one moment, the mystic experiences the highest mystical bliss, at the next moment, the deepest pains and sorrows, and “now the one, and now the other, various times—I suppose about twenty times” (Julian of Norwich, Revelations, p. 40). She concludes that “it is not God’s will that we submit to the feeling of pains, in sorrow and mourning because of them, but quickly pass over them and keep ourselves in the endless delight with is God” (Julian of Norwich, Revelations, p. 41). Eckhart Tolle makes an important experiential distinction between emotions of negativity and desires which arise out of the egoic state of consciousness (mind) and “love, joy, and peace”, which are “deep states of Being, or rather three aspects of the state of inner connectedness with Being. As such, they have to opposite. This is because they arise from beyond the mind. Emotions, on the other hand, being part of the dualistic mind, are subject to the law of opposites. This means that you cannot have good without bad” (Tolle, 2005, p. 29). Julian’s lesson intuitively demonstrates this distinction, which is mirrors the fundamental difference between the self-absorbed (untransformed) and contemplative (transformed) human consciousness.
Julian’s path consists of both renunciation of deceptive images and appropriating new kind of reception, new images and ideas, which would more adequately and truthfully mediate the non-mediatable reality beyond the antinomical structure. Images of God and self-images do not undergo simple destruction, leaving the mind blank and fully free to decide about its further perceptions. The mystic speaks about the most significant transformation of human consciousness which may ever occur and as such it has very concrete discernible features, which we can easily recognize by recalling mystical transformation in the most of the spiritual traditions. If we looked closer at Meister Eckhart or John of the Cross, even here we could not speak of negative approach—divine reality is qualified by truly positive terms as sheer goodness, unconditioned loving, freedom, peace, playful communitarian/compassionate life (Trajtelová, 2011). Even in Buddhism, one can find similar positive attributes ascribed to an enlightened reality of the Enlightened. Mystical “nothing” has in reality strongly positive charge and clearly discernible features.

Images which emerge out of the transformed mind lost its “sinful” conditionings and deformations. They are not arbitrary nor accidental. The message of transcendence is not deformed by the deformed way of perception. Julian of Norwich is not creating new idols, new arbitrary projections of her “newest” (most current) mindset. We do not deal with the projections of her romantic spiritual desires. As the mystic, she does not create at all; she is a co-creator and the witness of the unconditioned—the source of the free flow of images (or rather ciphers) spontaneously flooding the mystics’ liberated consciousness. Mystical identifications are born out of the profound experience of the immediate divine reality, and they carry specific traits which cannot be mistaken. So once again: not the destruction in the name of the formless, but the transformation toward the divine reality of goodness is what matters for Julian. Her only condition is to leave the stagnant idolatrous images of God and ourselves behind.

The mystical transformation cannot go without the overall cognitive and emotional transformation of images (image always bears also its corresponding emotional charge). She advocates the image of God as she experiences it herself, unconditionally: Divine being is sheer unconditioned goodness and as such it is the very fundament of reality which permeates all that exists. Julian intuits that her fight for the truer image of God is the fight for the true identity of a man and humankind. We saw that identifications with mental images from our own self-image, our identity. The mystical transformation of images (the liberation of the authentic divine ciphers) means the mystical transformation of identity (the liberation of the unconditioned, divine sense of self).

The Claim of Transcendence

Both Lady Julian and Karl Jaspers believe that accepting the tension of inevitable antinomies is the most honest position and the most effective way how to live through it. As existences, we remain in the unending

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63 As the mystic, Julian knows that the mystery of one’s identity is closely bound with the mystery of God. In Revelations, she emphasizes that the true knowledge of God and the true knowledge of oneself are close, even identical. She mystically senses that image of God and self-image of man is the two sides of the same coin. “And when we know and see truly and clearly what our self is, then shall we truly and clearly see and know our Lord God in fullness of joy” (Julian of Norwich, Revelations, p. 107). “Thus I saw most surely that it is easier for us to come to the knowledge of God than to know our own soul, for our soul is so profoundly based in God, and so endlessly treasured, that we may not come to the knowledge of it until we first have knowledge of God, who is the Creator to whom it is one-ed” (Julian of Norwich, Revelations, p. 148). “I saw no difference between God and our essence, but just as if it were all God…” (Julian of Norwich, Revelations, p. 143).
struggle for our identity and for the guise of our reality—at the face of transcendence.\textsuperscript{64} Regarding the ciphers, Jaspers advises to alertly keep the tension of the undecidable. Our interpretation of the speech of transcendence remains ambiguous (Jaspers, 2011). Here, Julian does not need more ambiguities and she explicitly decides for the cipher of goodness.

Julian senses that the true acceptance of the tension presupposes its deeper transcendence. She suggests transcending the whole antinomical structure, focusing simply on goodness beyond the antinomies, or platonically, “beyond ontology”. She does it in many different ways—contemplating divine goodness, expecting it, creating it, mediating it to and inciting it within others, and thus bringing it right into the problematic human reality. But of course, the true acceptance also requires the true transformative knowledge about the overall situation, which already evokes the transcendence. Julian had to radically rethink the question of sin which had led her to new liberated ways of perceptions, thoughts, and emotions. But the transformative knowledge does not merely include the knowledge about the nature of the fallen reality, but, most importantly, it involves the knowledge of the nature of the divine reality beyond—the latter is the decisive transformative insight. Without the liberating divine optimism, the recognition of the mere antinomical structure of reality can easily lead one into despair. Once she has got to see the whole of reality as divine, the antinomical structure of the innocently “fallen” consciousness can be recognized as not the only and ultimate reality.

I believe that Julian as the mystic simply carries more spontaneous courage to traverse the strict boundaries of our immanent worldly experience which Jaspers articulated with philosophical precision and honesty. Jaspers advises to accept the situation as it is, with all its tensions, and never give up to strive for innocence, transcendence and reconciliation (for example, through loving communication which is also a form of a struggle, though loving struggle). However, where Julian is light and relieving, Jaspers remains more serious and heavy; where Julian is nourishing our optimism, joy, and hope, Jaspers emphasizes the burden of responsibility and existential gravity of our situation. As if Julian peered further beyond the antinomical structure of our immanent reality, at times even laughing at it\textsuperscript{65}, encouraging us to remain calm and carelessly innocent as newly born children. She advises not to take the tensions of our contradictory existence overly seriously—as a matter of fact, sin is rather an illusion, antinomies are illusory, and the change in perception could lead to remedy. Her certitude arises from the mystical unity with the transcendent ever shining through and within the contradictory and fragmented immanent reality of consciousness and its corresponding world.

Julian’s way of transcendence merges with the mystical transformation of the consciousness. And for her, this includes new and positive images which have aroused out of her mystical life—her fundamental mindset are more than hopeful; it is optimistic and fully sure about God’s promises. This means, most importantly, that the orientation of the transcendence is not arbitrary, it is mystically (experientially) given: The direction of mystical transcendence is always guided by the leading divine images of the integrating unity and the unconditioned goodness which dwells in the heart of reality (even if antinomical at the surface), and it is guided toward the fuller actualization of these images in reality. It is the same divine unity and goodness which is experientially found and activated in mystic’s own inmost being. Again, the authentic spiritual transformation is not merely

\textsuperscript{64} Similarly to Julian, Jaspers in his own philosophical terms suggests that divine being (or his Transcendence in a strong sense) is not separated from the currently perceived world, but reveals itself inherently (though inadequately) right within the antinomical structure. In other words, right within the restricted antinomical conditions, human being as freedom (existence) may arise and come to its sharper spiritual awareness. Julian’s focus on divine goodness as already perfectly present within the creation is helpful to perceive transcendence within immanence, the infinite within the finite.

\textsuperscript{65} She carelessly laughs when she visions how lightly God eliminates evil. Julian of Norwich, \textit{Revelations}, pp. 37-38.
about abandoning malfunctioning images and remaining “empty”. For mystics and contemplatives, it is about replacing the old stagnant idols with fluid and elusive images or rather ciphers which mirror the ultimate reality of man and God in a more adequate manner. So in case of Julian, we have to stress that the effective images are not arbitrary. Julian advises to wisely select among them, and to keep the once which are experimentally approved as constructive, opening, and positive. Those stagnant images of God which Julian abandons are closely linked with specific understanding of the term sin. The profound revision of this problematic concept helped her to formulate the new and more proper image of the divine reality and the reality of a man.

Julian asks us to make certain metaphysical choice—to choose radical unifying, integrating goodness as the guiding image, even in rethinking of the concept of sin. I believe that Jaspers would agree with her (Jaspers, 2011). However, this fundamentally decisive choice is not an intellectual task. The elusive and vivid meaning of this image must be nourished from the very Source of Goodness; otherwise, it becomes just another stagnant conceptual idol for our thinking mind. Living goodness and compassion found beyond thought in contemplation lead Julian beyond the whole antinomical structure. She transcends it not for abandoning it in a certain unrealistic psychological denial, but for bringing the very same transformation and innocence right into the painful antinomical reality structure.

Closing Lines

I have examined interconnections among immediate spiritual experiences, understanding of sin and guilt, transformation of spiritual images, and the meaning of the leading image of goodness in Julian of Norwich. After all, let me sum up my previous analyses in several points.

Phenomenon of sin is qualified as pain and isolation, as having no essence, as delusion and ignorance, as clashes of intentions and disregard of the context, as bearing positive value (reveals divine goodness, sin as an award), and as inevitable. Sin, pain, sickness, and dying are synonyms. The cause of the pain is the lack of knowledge, lack of correct perception, missing of one’s own divine identity, and inability to recognize and enjoy the presence of goodness as the fundament of every reality.

Phenomenon of sin is bound to antinomical character of commonly experienced reality. The sinful consciousness is fragmented, isolated, perspectivistic, and variously conditioned. It experiences multiple contradictory intentions incited by multiple contradictory images—within itself and in relations with others. It found itself within a context of an unavoidable violence.

The sinful consciousness and the co-related antinomical structure of its experienced reality are principally innocent and guiltless.

There is a constant conceptual struggle among images arising and operating within the antinomical structure. For Jaspers, philosophically (intellectually), the struggle is undecidable. The fixity on stagnant idols leads to ideology and obscures the true identity as an existence. The competition of elusive ciphers may reveal the glimpses of transcendence in a manner of authentic communication of existences. Generally, multiple images are to a great extend culturally and individually conditioned—that is why the negative mystical approach could be a part of the solution.

Julian questions and reviews the contemporary catholic notion of sin and the co-related mind images. She refuses stagnant, isolating images of guilt, wrath, self-loath, or fear as ineffective and counterproductive and ascribes them to our distorted perception of reality.
For Julian, there are images, the vivid and creative images, which do not belong to the immanent antinomical structure of the sinful consciousness, but are coming out of the realm of transcendence. The guiding image is the idea of all permeating, all integrating, and all unifying divine goodness.

The creative images are not arbitrary and they form the new human reality of the transformed consciousness. The image of God and self-image of a man are profoundly united, even mystically identical. Hence, it does matter what kind of images one appropriates as forming, shaping, and structuring his or her own identity. In terms of mysticism, man carries the divine essence and as such he or she is the very image of God.

The transcendence for mystics requires the fundamental self-transcendence of intentionality. But it is not the matter of will or intellect, but of self-knowledge, attention, and profound sensitivity which are found in and thought ongoing state of contemplation. Julian’s main advises acceptance—contemplation—optimism seem to be transformational themselves.

Through the basic intentional orientation toward goodness, through the focus on acceptance, presence, and optimism, Julian non-violently leads human consciousness toward the profound transformation. The transformation necessary includes the transformation of leading mental images. This seems to be the most effective way how to transcend the conditioned and limited existential horizon of the antinomical human reality toward the unbound possibilities of the divine essence which may be found and activated in one’s own inmost being.

Julian understood that it is simply the disabling pain which absorbs all the attention of the innocent servant in the parable. She also comprehended that the remedy must rely in restoring of the ability to see the lord’s loving face and it requires the transformation on our side. In other words, if pain of isolation and distress absorbs intentionality into itself, the experience of unity and goodness relieves, heals, and liberates it. Contemplative experience is, in principle, this simple. Why then to focus on the painful images of sinners and judges’ when it is obvious that it even deepens the pain and isolation, thus self-absorption? The Norwich mystic decided to offer the healing perspective which lays beyond the sinful structure of the “pit”. She directs our attention toward the sheer contemplative presence, leading the mind non-violently out of its own violence. Like the platonic “goodness” lies beyond ontology, so Julian’s divine reality shines from beyond the sinful veil of consciousness, out of where the dynamic life-bringing ciphers are arising and wish to interplay with human mind.

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