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Membership dues for 2012 are now payable: 50 USD regular, 20 USD student. Please print out or tear off the last page and send your check to: Professor Frederick J. Parrella, Religious Studies Dept./ Santa Clara University/ 500 East El Camino Real/ Santa Clara, California 95053. Thank you!

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NEW PUBLICATIONS

Wipf and Stock has recently re-issued three of Paul Tillich's important works. This is a great service to Tillich scholars and new students of Tillich. Those members of the NAPTS who teach undergraduates and graduates students will have new editions available for reading and classroom discussion. The new volumes are:

- Tillich, Paul. *The Shaking of the Foundations*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2011. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948.

- Tillich, Paul. *On the Boundary. An Autobiographical Sketch*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2011. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966. This work, with some revisions, first appeared as the first chapter of *The Interpretation of History*, 3-73. Translated by N. A. Rasetzki and Elsa L. Talmey. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936.

- Tillich, Paul. *The Socialist Decision*. Translated by Franklin Sherman. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2012. English: New York: Harper and Row, 1977. The German edition, *Die sozialistische*

Entscheidung, was published in Potsdam by Alfred Protte in 1933. This work also appears in *Gesammelte Werke. Frühe Schriften zum Religiösen Sozialismus. Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. II. Edited by Renate Albrecht. Stuttgart: Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1962; in *Main Works/ Hauptwerke*, vol. 3, *Writings in Social Philosophy and Ethics*, ed. by Carl Heinz Ratschow. Berlin and New York: De Gruyter—Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1998.

• McAnnally-Linz, Ryan. “The Multivalence of Participation in Paul Tillich’s *Systematic Theology*.” *The Journal of Religion* 92, 3 (July 2012): 373-391.

PLEASE SEND INFORMATION ABOUT NEW PUBLICATIONS ON TILlich OR BY MEMBERS OF THE NAPTS, DPTG, AND APTEF TO THE EDITOR AT FPARRELLA@SCU.EDU. THANK YOU.

CORRIGENDUM

The first line of Ron Stone’s article, “Scenes from Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr,” in the Spring *Bulletin*, volume 38, number 2, page 13, erroneously lists Paul Tillich’s date of birth as 1892. Of course, the correct date is 1886.

DIFFERENTIAL THINKING AND THE POSSIBILITY OF FAITH-KNOWLEDGE: TILlich AND KIERKEGAARD BETWEEN NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE PHILOSOPHY

JARI RISTINIEMI

“God is a life, not a mere being. All life has a destiny and is subject to suffering and development.”¹

“The concept of neighbour really means a duplicating of one’s own self...And what, then, is it to be a self? It is to be a redoubling [*Fordoblelse*].”²

In Schelling’s early philosophy of Nature, the + and the – belonged together like activity and receptivity as the constitutive parts of an organism’s duplicity. Schelling termed this duplicity “identity in duplicity and duplicity in identity.”³ On the individual, organic level, the duplicity is between the activity of the organism, or its outward movement, and the receptivity, or the inward movement. The + and the –, as antithetical poles of the motion of the or-

ganism, mark the actual duplicity. In human beings “intuition and reflection are opposed to each other,” Schelling wrote.⁴ Nature as a whole is the “identity of the product and the productivity”; being itself in Schelling’s view is the always on-going productivity of Nature.⁵ Intuition gives access to the productivity of Nature, into the continuous stream and becoming of Nature. Reflection blocks the intuition; it gives only “mechanics” and “the atoms of time,” the products, which are secondary in relation to productivity. Signs of differential thinking were already found in early philosophy of Nature.

The differential relation between the negative and the positive becomes crucial in Schelling’s negative and positive philosophy. In human beings, thinking and sensing or intuition belong together like the + and the –. If thinking is the positive pole, sensing is the negative. By starting from thinking, and by defining thinking as the positive, the negative or the sensed is posited in an excluding relation: the + and the – do not belong together! By allowing the sensed, the two join and build the differential relation. What comes first, when we start from thinking, is the position of negative philosophy, of rationalism, and second, that of positive philosophy, or of higher empiricism.⁶ In Schelling, thinking is not discursive, argumentative thinking only. Thinking is instead a thought-event comprising heteronymous, conscious and unconscious elements leading to ever-higher levels of synthesis, differentiation, and potentialization.⁷ The process of thinking is a never-ending event; the more one is able to bear of the opposition, the higher the possibility of synthesis. The interaction between the positive and the negative leads to revolutionary evolution, even in God, as we humans are co-workers of the unfinished evolution. In Tillich’s concept of essentialization, the negative or non-being, which threatens to undermine the meaning of life, is negated and the positive created through existence is brought up to the level of universal life, enriching the life of God. Tillich finds the overcoming of the negative even in God; God is a living God. In Kierkegaard, the differential relation between the positive and the negative is discernible in what he called the “spiritual reduplication,” a conception, which can be directly derived from Schelling’s “duplicity.” Even in Kierkegaard, a human being is “God’s co-labourer.”⁸ There is an immanent transcendence in Schelling, Kierkegaard, and Tillich; Mark C. Taylor finds it in “altarity.”⁹ In order to express something of the differential thinking in Schelling, Kierkegaard, and Tillich, I will try

to bring out the differential relation in them. Schelling has influenced both Kierkegaard and Tillich, perhaps more than is obvious at first glance. I will begin with an interpretation of Schelling's negative and positive philosophy, and after this, I discuss the differential relation in Kierkegaard and in Tillich.

The Negative and the Positive Philosophy

The negative and the positive philosophy are not different philosophies, but parts of the same philosophical event: the negative philosophy is the preparatory work that makes the positive philosophy possible. The preparatory work is a critique: the mind tests its possibilities and limits.¹⁰ Metaphysics before Descartes and Kant, according to Schelling, dealt with the "first and general determinations of being"; it dealt with the ontological infinite being or being-itself.¹¹ Kant had shown that there is no access to such being or being-itself: all experience is finite experience, and the possibility of knowing being or the thing-itself falls outside the frameworks and possibilities of human experience. Instead of drawing attention to ontological being, Kant analyzed the presuppositions of human experience; inwardness is in the making in him. Descartes, starting with doubt, considered that the world as material substance is run by the mechanical laws; in the material world, no being or being itself is to be found as the object of knowledge. Given the philosophies of Descartes and Kant, being is not the object of knowledge; we do not know what being or being-itself is, and we are left empty-handed. In Descartes and in Kant, there is an inward-leading process, creating the position of inwardness. It is in the situation of inwardness, when the mind awakens to itself and draws itself inward, that the mind tests its limits and possibilities. The position of inwardness, of subjectivity, arrived at through radical doubt, becomes Schelling's starting point. Schelling follows Kant and Descartes, but he also tries to go beyond them.

In the situation of inwardness in Schelling, reflection or reason confronts its own content. What differentiates reason from the mere reflection—and Schelling claims that this is Kant's point as well—is that reason might have its own content as its object; reason is self-relating and self-conscious reason.¹² This far Schelling follows Kant, but he also claims that reason has integral and complementary dimensions beyond the regulative function Kant gave to reason; reason is integral and complementary rea-

son.¹³ Initially, then, Schelling equates reason with the self-conscious mind, with an inwardness aware of itself. This inwardness is the pre-reflexive stage of mind. The potential mind is to be found in inwardness: "Reason, however, is the infinite potency of cognition and, as such, has nothing but the infinite potency of being as its content. Precisely because of this it can, from this content, arrive at nothing, but what is possible a priori."¹⁴ The infinite potency of cognition implies that knowledge is a matter of realization; it is an actualization of the potential possibilities. When we try to think about that *what* being is, starting from the above, from thinking, we fill the word "being" with content, saying that being is nature, is the universe, but all we do is fill the word with finite and transient, *represented content*; being is made congruent with the represented content. The finite and transient content, however, does not fill the criterion of being and we erase the represented content. In this situation, we ask: "Why is there anything at all? Why is there not nothing?"¹⁵ The result of the exclusion, of the preparatory work, according to Schelling, is that only the empty concept of being and of being itself is left; there is no real content, no "whatness" to ascribe to either being or being itself. "Being itself is...only the result achieved through this process of eliminating that which is not being itself."¹⁶ Given the process of elimination, only the empty concept of being and of being-itself is what remains. Philosophy in the position of reflection turns out to be a negative philosophy. "This science can lead no further than to the...negative concept; thus, in general, only to the concept of being itself."¹⁷ If one earlier still thought or dreamed that being has a definite content, the +, the situation of inwardness and the radical doubt show that there is no such content; there is only the – of the negative philosophy. We do not know what being or being itself is a priori. "Reason has none other than a *negative* concept of that which being itself is."¹⁸

The pre-reflexive stage of mind, grounding reflection, is Schelling's starting point; within the sphere of reflection, logic, mathematics, and grammar are applicable, and these are attainable a priori. A rationalist claims that philosophy or thinking proceeds deductively, but this is not Schelling's path. Thought or reason cannot arrive at the content of being nor to being-itself *out of thinking*, out of reasoning, according to Schelling. This means that reason comes to its limit, the limit of rationalism and of reflection, and reason cannot go beyond this limit.

The negative philosophy is rationalism with radical doubt. It is Descartes and Kant; they are negative philosophers in Schelling's view. "What has once begun in thought can only continue in thought and can never advance any further than the *idea*. What shall reach reality must then also proceed directly from reality," Schelling writes.¹⁹ Positive philosophy does not start from thinking; it starts from *existence*. There comes the break or the leap and philosophy can start from reality, or rather, the positive philosophy starts from reality, from existence, from the sensed content, in whatever form that may come.

Thought cannot proceed beyond thought, as Kant's philosophy clearly demonstrates: God, soul, world, are nothing but transcendental ideas in Kant. These ideas do not have any positive content; they have only thought content. In order to reach reality, according to Schelling, one must start from reality, from that which exists, and this is done in the positive philosophy. At the culmination of the negative philosophy, "reason can posit being in which there is still nothing of a concept, of a whatness, only as something that is absolutely *outside* itself...In this positing, reason is therefore set outside itself, absolutely ecstatic."²⁰ The culmination of the negative philosophy is the crisis of self-sufficient thinking that has only itself as object and subject; neither reflection nor self-reflexive processes of thinking give being. "If positive philosophy starts out from that which is external to all thought, it cannot begin with a being that is external to thought in a merely relative sense, but only with a being that is *absolutely* external to thought."²¹ The positive philosophy starts with the different; it thinks in relation to the different.

Opposite inwardness, there is the concrete world. On the one side there is reflection, the $-$; on the other side the world is the sensed, the $+$. The entrance to the positive philosophy is through the senses, through sensing. Reason "must submit to the authority of the senses...(As it is) through the sheer authority of our senses, not through reason...we know that things outside us *exist*."²² Being, or rather the content of being, is given through the senses; being is in the physical world. In this break or transition, "reason possesses nothing *on its own account*, it only watches as its content *dissipates*."²³ This is what happens in negative philosophy, but negative and positive philosophy are related in the differential relation: "To the extent that the positive philosophy brings to knowledge precisely that which remained in the negative as something incapable of being

known, to this extent it is precisely the positive philosophy that straightens out reason *contorted* by the negative."²⁴ World dawns and in that very dawning the difference between conceptual being of negative philosophy (the $-$) and encountered being (the $+$) of positive philosophy becomes visible. "Empiricism is, therefore, not to be directly opposed to a correctly understood rationalism...as it is, more properly speaking, a phenomenon parallel to rationalism."²⁵ The world that dawns is not the ready-made object or finished content, but *the horizon of freedom* opens itself up with and in the world. The world we find in this horizon is "the world as freely created and produced."²⁶ This free creation and production of the world, in which humans actively participate, is no longer a pure conceptual potentiality or a mere mind-potentiality, but it is the world filled with concrete content, the world of material existence, of deed and action, the world loaded with potential possibilities. The positive philosophy "is oriented towards a future that has not yet occurred."²⁷

In Schelling, the positive philosophy responds to the quest of reason, but it gives the content of being and being itself only a posteriori, through experience. The positive, then, is to be known only through experience.²⁸ This led Schelling to talk about a higher empiricism: "that what is highest for it (for the positive philosophy) would itself be something experiential in nature."²⁹ Philosophy "would be a science of experience; I do not mean in the formal sense, but I do mean in the material sense."³⁰ It is not immediate sense perception (lower empiricism or the sensible faculty of representation) that gives all content, but the labour of a higher empiricism, in which the individuals articulate the basic human experiences, their potential and actual realms. "Only resolve and action can *ground* actual experience."³¹ The self-world relation is an active correlation; the content is opened and thinking is the never-ending process of articulation and discernment. This higher empiricism could also be called "a progressive Empiricism, in that it argues from experience forward, into the future."³² God or being-itself is to be found in the horizon of freedom, in the world open as its ground and driving agent. Schelling's world is multi-dimensional; one articulation cannot give the complete picture. The object of this empiricism is not this or that experience, but all experience.³³

In the philosophy proper comprising both the negative and the positive philosophies, there is a moment of transition: there is the going over from the negative to the positive. There is a realization of

freedom, of potentiality, and of knowing being. There is the revolutionary groundwork and ground-event of thought and philosophy in Schelling: the abyss or the chasm between the negative and the positive. There is a going back and forth between the negative and the positive, between reflection and the content, the oscillation, which does justice to basic human experiences.³⁴ Negative philosophy, so to say, creates the conditions of positive philosophy, and there is now awareness of the pre-reflexive dimensions of the mind: of potentiality, of desire, of passion. Desire without an object of desire is nothing.³⁵ From here, from the situation of wanting, longing, wavering, and projection, there comes the leap to the real concrete being, to the +, which cannot be explained by logic or by rational thought. There is the receiving, passive side and there is the constructive, active, willing side in relation to being: the whole human being is active in relation to the sensed world.³⁶

Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Dread* is his philosophy of freedom, and text is about the realization of freedom: "When then the possibility of freedom manifests itself before (the realization of) freedom, freedom succumbs."³⁷ The "infinite resignation," according to Kierkegaard, is the act through which the mind frees itself to its potentiality.³⁸ Infinite resignation belongs to the preparatory work; the situation of inwardness is reached.

Architectonic Structure of Thought: Metaphors and the Moment of Transition

In *My Search for Absolutes*, Tillich expresses a similar structure of argumentation and even a similar *architectonic structure of thought* to what we have found in Schelling. Being or being-itself might be understood in two ways according to Tillich: either as an empty abstraction or as "the result of two profound experiences, one of them negative, the other positive," he writes.³⁹ Tillich's is the second way, and he keeps the concept of being itself as the starting point. The negative experience is the experience of the abyss of non-being, and the positive is that of the conquering of non-being. Further, Tillich's method of correlation might have been inspired by Schelling's philosophy, and not only the method of correlation, but also the entire architectonic pattern of his thought seemed to have been inspired by Schelling. A similar architectonic structure is also to be found in Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard discusses the beginning of philosophy, which first comes when

reflection comes to a halt.⁴⁰ Kierkegaard's philosophy starts in existence and there is a moment of transition in him: "He sank absolutely, but then in turn he floated up from the depth of the abyss, lighter now than all that is oppressive and dreadful in life."⁴¹ In Schelling, reflection reaches its limits through the elimination of the contingent content. There is the experience of the abyss, but there is also the act or the resolution of the will that links with the positive; there is the turning towards the positive. Philosophy proper for Kierkegaard is a matter of inwardness: philosophy does not start with reflection, but with passion and in passion, by decision. More exactly, philosophy deals with infinite passion, and not only with this but also with that which "precedes everything," even the infinite passion.⁴² I wonder what difference there is between the infinite passion and the infinite potentiality, once in the situation of inwardness! In Tillich's view, "ultimate concern" is a translation of Kierkegaard's "infinite passion."⁴³ Kierkegaard admits that, "the heart infinitely bound to God has infinite concern."⁴⁴ Philosophy in Kierkegaard not only deals with "plain" passions, but with "educated feeling," with the development of subjectivity.⁴⁵ Both Schelling and Tillich maintained the rational starting point by clinging to the concept of being or being itself; Kierkegaard's is instead a radical *a posteriori* philosophy: "Truth exists for the particular individual only as he himself or she herself produces it in action."⁴⁶ Schelling and Tillich might agree.

The underlying architectonic structure of thought in all three is very similar; the operational framework is provided by the negative and positive philosophy. In Kierkegaard and in Tillich, this similarity comes to expression, among other things, in their understanding of the metaphorical and the symbolic: the use of metaphors correlates with the moment of transition, in the move from the negative to the positive, in Kierkegaard and in Tillich. In Schelling, metaphors have disclosing power.⁴⁷ Metaphors express the differential finite-infinite relationship; they disclose the human situation in the face of the eternal, both in Tillich and in Kierkegaard.⁴⁸

Tillich wrote that there is only one direct statement about God: God is being itself.⁴⁹ He seemed to share Schelling's starting point: being itself is *prius* to epistemology and in ontology (and in creative act). As it stands it is an empty statement, an abstraction, as Tillich admits; it does not say anything about God or the nature of God. That what we say

about God, says Tillich, comes from experience and from the situation of revelation: there is “the experience of the holy as transcending ordinary experience without removing it.”⁵⁰ But this experience would not be possible if there were not the quest for it: “Although man is actually separated from the infinite, he could not be aware of it if he did not participate in it potentially. This is expressed in the state of being ultimately concerned...This is the point at which we must speak non-symbolically about God, but in terms of a quest for God.”⁵¹ In Schelling, the quest and the potentiality belong to negative philosophy, and they are a given in the human situation; the negative philosophy is non-symbolic. The positive or God, on the other hand, is matter of revelatory experience both for Schelling and for Tillich. Beyond the point of quest and potentiality, says Tillich, all we say about God is symbolic and metaphorical.

Both Tillich and Kierkegaard use metaphors and symbols to express the moment of transition. *The moment of transition, with the architectonic structure of thought, gives metaphors their meaning*, not their literal or linguistic explanation. “Every religious symbol negates itself in its literal meaning, but it affirms itself in its self-transcending meaning...The symbol participates in the reality which is symbolized.”⁵² “Negates itself” is the –, and “affirms itself” is the +. Metaphors and symbols are the only way to talk about the positive; true symbols participate in the positive. Metaphors and symbols express the moment of transition. So also in Kierkegaard: “All human language about the spiritual...is essentially transferred or metaphorical language.”⁵³ The metaphorical or the symbolic explicates, if we only had the eyes, the positive side of the moment of transition: “The spiritual individual and the sensuous-psychic individual say the same thing in a sense, and yet there remains an infinite difference between what they say...The one has made a transition or has let him or herself be led over to the other side; whereas the other has remained on this side.”⁵⁴ The ground-event of going over is explicated in Tillich and in Kierkegaard: “let be led over to the other side,” that is, reflection follows this transition. Thinking and being are in interaction with each other; there is a differential relation between them. In the following, I will discuss the ground-event, and its expressions and implications both in Kierkegaard and in Tillich. How did they view the relationship between the negative and the positive? How is the interplay between the + and the – explicated in them? What kind of metaphors do they use? Both

Kierkegaard and Tillich draw heavily on Schelling in their philosophies and theologies.

It might be thought that the above is relevant only to Schelling, Kierkegaard, and Tillich, but it has bearing on broader philosophical questions such as: What is philosophy? How does philosophy start? How does one talk about the philosophical? What is the philosophical? All three discuss Plato and Aristotle in relation to differential or dialectical thinking. For example, Schelling claims that Socratic ignorance was about opinions, representations, and logical knowledge, not about the true, positive philosophy, in which some knowledge is available. As an absolute philosophical statement, the claim that one does not know anything is absurd, Schelling claims.⁵⁵ We may agree. Kierkegaard thought that Socrates knew more than he was able or willing to express.⁵⁶ Tillich, in the end of *Systematic Theology*, volume 3, claims that considering the God-relationship, or more precisely, considering the understanding of immortality, Plato and Aristotle shared a similar standpoint.⁵⁷ Kierkegaard, in perhaps his finest book, *Works of Love*, explicates the – and the + as poverty and plenty; in true love there is interplay between the – and the +.⁵⁸ Further, the revolution and the transformation of the mind, the preparatory work of the negative philosophy, the critique, is necessary in Kierkegaard’s view for there to be any understanding of the relationship with the positive.⁵⁹ The comparison between philosophers and their philosophical standpoints or interpretations is not the main point here. The main question is if there is something to be known about the positive or God in Kierkegaard and in Tillich. If so, how is the positive explicated or expressed in them?

The Negative and the Positive Philosophy in Kierkegaard

Kierkegaard follows Schelling’s negative philosophy:

The positive in the sphere of thought comes under the head of certainty in sense perception, in historical knowledge, and in speculative results. But all this positivity is sheer falsity...Nothing historical can become infinitely certain for me except the fact of my existence...Negative thinkers (on the other hand) therefore always have one advantage, in that they have something positive, being aware of the negative element in existence; the positive have nothing at all, since they are deceived.⁶⁰

Kierkegaard talks about the positive in the sphere of thought, that is, in reflection, while we try to secure the “whatness” of things in representation. Representations are insecure: sense perceptions are changing; historical knowledge changes because of new investigations; and speculative results presuppose the preceding series, which in themselves are not absolute. “All this positivity is sheer falsity,” and this is Schelling’s negative philosophy. The radical doubt is active in Kierkegaard as well. Those who propagate the immediate “whatness” are not aware of the radical doubt undermining all immediate positive content; they are not critical enough. The “what” of a thing is only an abstraction that does not give the thing, but gives only a representation, an image of the thing. It is useless to seek the positive in terms of “what,” trying, for example, to describe God in objective terms, since God is not an object and never will become an observable object in Kierkegaard’s view. To make God into an object is to make God into a thing. “The god that can be pointed out is an idol,” Kierkegaard writes.⁶¹ The knowledge of God in terms of “whatness” is not possible in Kierkegaard’s view. All “whatness” is about objects, but God cannot be made into an object of observation. If God is not an object, perhaps there is some other way to talk about God’s relation to the world? If God is in creation, as Kierkegaard claims, how to talk about that? “Negative thinkers therefore always have one advantage, in that they have something positive, being aware of the negative element in existence,” might be read as an expression of the minimum mix between the positive and the negative: awareness of the negative is the impact of the positive, even if one does not know about the positive. The awareness of the – presupposes the +: the higher shows the lower. Schelling and Tillich held a similar view; the differential relation is brought to awareness. The possibility of offense is for Kierkegaard “in the most profound sense the expression for “making aware”...Thus the possibility of offense that is taken up into faith, is assimilated by faith, is the negative mark of the God-man.”⁶² Facing the possibility of offense, “the thoughts of your heart are disclosed as you choose whether you believe or not.”⁶³ In being offended, one turns away from the +, or rather, one turns away from the differential play between the + and the – going on in the spiritual self; the play marks the spiritual self.

In Kierkegaard, there is a vision of human existence. The vision might be lifted up as a structural whole; its structural elements might be exposed. In

this vision, Kierkegaard does not shy away from pointing to the essentially human, and he could speak about the essential structure of existence. Kierkegaard might be read in several ways, but at least two levels are discernible in him: the philosophical level and the level of metaphorical communication. He moves on both levels and combines them in his vision of human existence. The metaphors are means of expressing deep philosophical truths. By using metaphors deliberately, he follows Plato. How, then, does he structurally talk about the finite-infinite relationship? He uses metaphors in order to express the “hidden” structure of existence: “As the quiet lake is fed deep down by the flow of hidden springs, which no eye sees, so a human being’s love is grounded, still more deeply, in God’s love. If there were no spring at the bottom, if God were not love, then there would be neither a little lake nor an individual’s love.”⁶⁴ Kierkegaard tells us that this source or ground, the *prius*, one cannot see; if one is turned inward, trying to catch a glimpse of it, one is blinded by the reflection of the surface. The *prius* cannot become an object of observation, as it grounds the subject-object structure. It is on a higher plane than the objectifying approach with its “whatness” or what-truths is able reach. Instead, the source is known by its effects, by “how” it qualifies and determines human existence in the differential relation. One part of the negative philosophy, as we find the negative philosophy also in Kierkegaard, is to work to remove the obstacles: the doubt cleanses the mind and brings the individual in relation to potential being, as seen in Schelling, and even in Kierkegaard. In Schelling, we find the standpoint where the mind arrives the potential being through the preparatory work of the negative philosophy. In Kierkegaard’s vision, as we translate it into philosophical language, the individual’s relation to the infinite or the positive is a potential relation, yet the very being which the individual relates to “precedes everything,” even if we did not call this being-itself.

To translate this vision into the philosophical language, the love at the bottom is potential love or being. Kierkegaard talks about the “ground-level” and about the “ground-work” and he even talks about “being that love gives.”⁶⁵ Love “is known and recognized by the love in another. Like is known by like.”⁶⁶ It is love in the other that makes love recognizable: the – on this side, and the + on the other side. Kierkegaard makes a distinction between two kinds of love: immediate, natural, erotic love, and spiritual love. The first kind of love involves contact

with the other I or the sensual self.⁶⁷ In erotic love, one is in contact with one's sensual self. The play between the + and the -, between activity and receptivity (enjoyment), is going on *within* the self: no self-transcendence is in sight; one enjoys the receptive self. This first love is "the very height of self-feeling, the I intoxicated in the other I."⁶⁸ In such a love, the individual does not have to stand in an aware relation to the preceding source of love nor to the object of love nor to another human being. Like is known by like: the individual recognizes his or her sensual elements in the other human being but this recognition or duplicity is internal to the self. Activity and receptivity are in interaction with each other, an interaction that at this stage is internal to the self. In a moralistic interpretation, the first love is disregarded, but such an interpretation is not true to Kierkegaard: if there is spiritual love, then there is also friendship and the sensual self, with the difference that the spiritual reduplication comes before, and is of higher rank than the internal natural duplication.⁶⁹ The natural duplication is internal to the self, but the spiritual reduplication is higher, as the individual relates to what is outside the self. In spiritual reduplication, the individual relates to the preceding source; s/he is in contact with potential being. Kierkegaard speaks about the right self-love, much in the same way as Tillich did.⁷⁰

In order to deepen love, to enter the sphere of spiritual love, Kierkegaard introduced a key to the potential mind. The key is *the act of presupposing* and this is the act or the action: "The lover does something about him or herself: s/he presupposes that love is present in the other person."⁷¹ In Ethics, Kierkegaard wrote, concepts are developed by presupposing.⁷² As it stands, the act of presupposing does not say so much; it is like being itself, empty and incomprehensible, but if we read Kierkegaard on the philosophical level, we get another view. "To presuppose" is the key to potential being, and it is through this act that the potential is made to manifest itself. The potential is not only internal to the mind, as it is encountered at the pre-reflexive stage, it reaches down into that which precedes the individual mind, into the recesses of the being itself; being has potential dimensions. The mind is set by that what we presuppose; the very act gives the basic perspective or the horizon within which we take in the world and other human beings. The individual presupposes that s/he, while hiking, cannot go up to the mountain because the effort becomes overwhelming; a youngster presupposes that one day s/he will be the best

hockey player in the world, and one day the dream will come true; a teacher presupposes that kids learn math, s/he creates space for active learning and see, they learn, naturally. "To presuppose", then, is to stand in contact with the potential mind or the potentiality of the mind; it touches the entire individual, the ground of individuality. To presuppose is to develop subjectivity. Further, Kierkegaard seemed to think that this very act is related to what precedes the subject or the self; the act might be internal to the mind or the self but it reaches into a "hidden source"; it reaches into "the spring at the bottom." Now, the act of presupposing is not only to be read in an inward direction, as if the mind was only turned inward in the act. The outward direction is the one presupposed in relation to the Other. The individual is to presuppose that there is love in the Other, and through this act of presupposing, s/he builds up love in the Other; the Other is brought into the realm of the higher love; the Other is build up in love—love is build up in the Other. In Kierkegaard's view, the individual is to presuppose that there is love in the Other, and perhaps s/he touches this love at the bottom and in that sense builds up love in the Other:

Thus we have achieved a clarification of what it means that love builds up and on this we shall dwell: *the lover presupposes that love is present in the other person's heart, and by this very presupposition s/he builds up love in him or her—from the ground up, insofar as in love he/she presupposes it present as the ground...* In this way s/he entices forth the good; s/he "loves up" love; s/he builds up...The lover works very quietly and earnestly, and yet the powers of the eternal are in motion.⁷³

The only work a lover does is that s/he presupposes love, and all the rest follows from this presupposition. Set in motion by the act of presupposing, love is brought into being.

When a fisherman has caught a fish in his net and wishes to keep it alive, what must s/he do? S/he must immediately put it in water; otherwise, it becomes exhausted and dies after a time. And why must s/he put it in water? Because water is the fish's element, and *everything which shall be kept alive must be kept in its element*. But love's element is infinitude, inexhaustibility, immeasurability...But what can take love out of its element? *As soon as love concentrates upon itself it is out of its element*. What does that mean, to concentrate on itself? It means to be-

come an object for itself...Love can never infinitely become its own object...For *infinitely* to be an object for itself is to remain in *infinitude* and thus, simply by existing or continuing to exist [since love is a reduplication in itself] is as different from the particularity of natural life as is the reduplication of the spirit.⁷⁴

As love concentrates upon itself or rather, when the individual only enjoys his or her love or love-power, then love is made into an object; natural love is internal to the self. The higher love, on the other hand, builds up the Other. In love, there is an outward movement, the activity of presupposing in relation to the Other, and an inward movement of coming to consciousness. In the God-relationship, the individual gets the self back, and this is repetition. The objective side of the act makes an awareness of repetition possible. "What love does, it is; what it is, it does—at one and the same moment; simultaneously as it goes beyond itself [in an outward direction] it is in itself [in an inward direction]."⁷⁵ Repetition, as an inward movement, takes place in that very moment the outward movement or moment is established. Repetition is the coming into being of the spiritual self; or rather, it *is* the spiritual self. The natural duplication is enjoyment internal to the self; in spiritual reduplication, God is present. We easily forget "that God is present in the relationship" and we forget the rule of love: "In this world of inwardness the Christian like-for-like is at home. ... What you do unto others you do unto God, and therefore what you do unto others God does unto you...For God is...really the pure like-for-like, the pure rendition of how you yourself are."⁷⁶ Spiritual reduplication is repetition; repetition is the rendition. That what we say about the Other, to the Other, to others, the "echo duplicates it immediately."⁷⁷ When we forget the Other, then "Christianity does not resound rightly in the inwardness of our being, we never discover the resonance which is the Christian like-for-like."⁷⁸ And we miss the spiritual self.

We read Kierkegaard's words and think that we only get a dim echo, not being serious enough for the repetition: "The serious individual is serious precisely through the originality with which he or she comes back in repetition...Seriousness means the personality itself, and only a serious personality is a real personality."⁷⁹ This means that the self comes to itself in the God-relationship; the self is retrieved. Repetition shows that between God and the self there is mutual immanence, even if there is an infinite qualitative difference between God as God and

the individual. Actually, the infinite qualitative difference between God and the individual makes repetition possible: repetition does not take away the essential differences; it confirms them instead. We have found this mutual immanence between human spirit and the divine Spirit in Tillich as well. This does not mean that we would be able to describe God in objective terms, but we are able to express something of the "how" of the differential relation. It is possible to describe the impact of the God-relationship on and in the mind; it is possible to describe the finite-infinite relationship from the human side of the relation. The signs of spiritual reduplication are in Tillich as well: "If the self participates in the power of being-itself it receives itself back."⁸⁰

Perhaps by now we have some clarification of how Kierkegaard viewed the relationship to the infinite. God is present in creation in an indirect way; all immediate, representing knowledge of God falls away; there is no objective knowledge of God. This is also what Schelling claimed in his negative philosophy. Still, there is an immanent transcendence in Kierkegaard. There are no objective signs of the positive in Kierkegaard, but there is a developed, educated feeling that makes the individual *aware* of spiritual love in the "how" of human existence. The signs, so to say, are on the human side of the relationship, in human awareness, in reduplication. Self-renunciation and a humbling of oneself are needed in order for love in the spiritual reduplication to take place. Sin is self-centredness—it blocks love. This awareness is brought by love. Given this, the negative is the sign of the positive and the true understanding of the God-relationship is paradoxical and differential.⁸¹ In the God-relationship, existence has a negative qualification and determination; the negative is now the sign of the positive.⁸² Still, if the negative and the positive are dialectically, or differentially, related, then we are not in complete darkness in considering the positive. Kierkegaard expresses the differential relation in the essential structure of human existence in the following way:

This, then, is how it is with loftiness and lowliness. The true Christian's abasement is not sheer abasement; it is only a depiction of loftiness, but a depiction in this world, where loftiness must appear inversely as lowliness and abasement. The star truly is high in the sky, is just as high in the sky although, seen in the sea, it seems to lie under the earth. Likewise, to be a Christian is the highest elevation, even though in this world's depiction it must appear as the deepest

abasement. Consequently, in a certain sense the abasement is loftiness.⁸³

Metaphors give some knowledge of the essential structure of human existence. If we are to talk about faith-knowledge in Kierkegaard, this is all we are able to say. "In a certain sense the abasement is loftiness." This is to be found both in Schelling and in Tillich in their explication of the finite-infinite relationship: the differential relation. The abasement is loftiness, as the one cannot be known without the other; they are to be discerned relationally and differentially. The + shows the – as they presuppose each other in the differential relation, even if the immediate awareness of the positive is lacking and the negative is the only content of actual awareness.

The Negative and the Positive Philosophy in Tillich

In today's theology and philosophy, essentialism is condemned. Several forms of essentialism might be considered: from ontological dualism with two independent realms standing side by side (existence and essences, or idealism) to epistemological dualism (existence and abstraction or rationalism). Essentialism is usually considered as an abstract doctrine that presupposes the unchanging realm of essences. In such essentialism, nothing new could be created in history or by human action; this world is a shadow, a weak reflection of the true world. From Schelling onwards, however, history is the place of the creation of the new, and humans have a role to play in that creation. Neither Schelling nor Kierkegaard nor Tillich could be characterized as essentialists in the above senses: they propagate neither for an unchanging God nor for the unchanging human nature nor for the unchanging world. God, human beings, and world are in the process of becoming.⁸⁴ What the three presuppose is potential being and potential human nature, and the mix of existential and essential elements in human life, in all life. Kierkegaard, as we have seen, could talk about the essential structure of existence. Tillich takes the essentialist position in the sense that there are both essential and existential elements in human existence, in life, in nature at large.⁸⁵ Even the anti-essentialist is able to talk about, indeed, must talk about, the essential human elements as s/he is a thinking, feeling, willing, and sensing individual; the total personality is in him or her, even if potentially. When Tillich claims that existence is a mix of essential and existential elements, he expresses a truth of

human life that might be accepted even by an anti-essentialist. The differential bond between the + and the – expresses the minimum mix: "The finitude of the finite points to the infinity of the infinite," Tillich writes.⁸⁶ The differential bond in Kierkegaard is congruent with the essential structure of human existence; it is these levels of life that we try to express here.

We have pointed that Tillich's structure of argumentation, the architectonic structure of his thought, is very similar to what Schelling expressed in his negative and positive philosophy. Kierkegaard seems to share this structure as well. In Kierkegaard we have found emphasis on the "how": in the concentration, in the development of subjectivity, the how explicates the way the positive qualifies or determines human life, but we have not found any descriptions of the positive, that God would be such and such in terms of "whatness." In Tillich, we find both the "how-truths" of human existence as well as metaphorical claims of the nature of God. These second claims are not "what-truths," as the what-truths presuppose an object or the cognitive relation between the subject and the object, and Tillich denies that God might become an object of observation.⁸⁷ Schelling holds the same opinion. Kierkegaard might have accepted that God is the foundation and meaning of the subject-object correlation, only if "the ground" is understood in the metaphorical sense. In Kierkegaard, we find the free use of symbols and metaphors within a structured vision of existence. In Tillich, we find the frustration of having to use metaphors. Tillich starts with words that remind us of Schelling's philosophy of nature:

The conflicts and sufferings of nature under the conditions of existence and its longing for salvation...serve the enrichment of essential being after the negation of the negative in everything that has being. Such considerations, of course, are almost poetic-symbolic and should not be treated as if they were descriptions of objects or events in time and space.⁸⁸

Still, these claims that consider the nature of the universal life are not peripheral in Tillich; rather, the differential thinking in his philosophy and theology leads to them. It is said that Tillich, when he had finished his *Systematic Theology*, wanted to write a new book, perhaps about the God-nature-human interaction; it is here where he halts, seeing the work of essentialization in Plato and in Aristotle.⁸⁹ And more, he saw that the Christian church and Christian theology had chosen the road of dualism, individu-

alism, and conceptualism, taking the road of Platonism instead of focusing on the immanent transcendence in the life-process itself: "The cognitive situation is totally changed when the conceptual use of the term immortality replaces its symbolic use."⁹⁰ Immortality, he claims, is participation in the positive, and the only way to talk about "it" is metaphorically and symbolically.

The negative philosophy implies that an immediate positive "whatness" is not possible; there is no objectifying knowledge of God. This was both Schelling's and Kierkegaard's position. This same position of the negative philosophy is also seen in Tillich. To secure this, "the negative metaphorical language...must be used."⁹¹ God is not an object, and no informative knowledge of God is possible: "In relation to God everything is by God,"⁹² or shall we say that like is known by like? In the same way as in Kierkegaard, we find a metaphorical communicative level and a philosophical level in Tillich, and we find that he places an emphasis on the "how-truths" instead of the "what-truths": "The finite is potentially or essentially an element in the divine life, everything finite is qualified by this essential relation."⁹³ In estrangement, the relation is broken and only some weak remnants remain according to Tillich. Still, "the relation to the divine ground of being through the divine Spirit is not agnostic [as it is not amoral]; rather it includes the knowledge of the "depth" of the divine...This knowledge is not the fruit of *theoria*, the receiving function of the human spirit, but has an ecstatic character—it has the character of *agape*."⁹⁴ If this knowledge has the character of *agape*, then Tillich's position is congruent with that of Kierkegaard's; in Kierkegaard we find the insight into the depth of the divine-human encounter in *agape*, in love. If we only had the eyes of faith, we could see God everywhere, Kierkegaard claimed.⁹⁵ Tillich, on his side, writes: "only the "eyes of faith" see what is hidden or spiritual, and the "eyes of faith" are the Spirit's creation: only Spirit discerns Spirit."⁹⁶ "Spirit discerns Spirit"; if there is faith-knowledge, it is a participatory knowledge—all knowledge of God is from God or the like is known by like.

In *Mystik und Schuldbewusstsein in Schellings philosophischer Entwicklung*, Tillich notes that the negative and the positive build a differential relation in Schelling: the negative and the positive belong together; the bond between them is never totally broken; and the relation is paradoxical and differential.⁹⁷ The negative is not to be disregarded, but we

are to recognize both the negative and the positive; only through the negative is the positive to be found. The negative is the sign of the positive. Tillich could have written this as well. It seems to be the case that Tillich did not let go of the differential relation, but keeps it as the key of faith throughout his philosophical and theological work. In the uttermost estrangement, when all courage to be is gone, the positive is present, if only in the form of the seriousness of the situation. This seriousness or awareness is an expression of the relation between the finite and the infinite. "As non-being is dependent on the being it negates, so the awareness of finitude presupposes a place above finitude from which the finite is seen as finite."⁹⁸

In atheism, as a state of being without God, the seriousness of questioning is the sign of the positive; atheism is a moment of faith. Even if the individual feels that s/he is without God, God has a hidden presence in the lives of all individuals; as far as there is being and life, there is God. If the Spirit is present in the individual, s/he does not shy away from the negative and the positive, but s/he let them to do the work in him or her; God's strange work destroys what is against love in the individual. Even in a situation of extreme estrangement, there is a differential bond between the + and the –, expressing the minimum mix of the existential and the essential elements.

As stated, there is a subjective side of the "how" in Kierkegaard and this "how" is also seen in Tillich. When Tillich explicates the presence of the New Being, he does so by listing how human awareness changes under the impact of the Spiritual Presence.⁹⁹ We have found that metaphors and symbols in Kierkegaard express the moment of transition: they express the going over from the negative to the positive, making the relation with the positive explicable. For Tillich, metaphors and symbols express participatory knowledge. In Tillich's view, there is "the symbolic expression of the relation of the temporal to the eternal. More specifically, it (the *eschaton*) symbolizes the "transition" from the temporal to the eternal."¹⁰⁰ Beyond this, Tillich also emphasizes the objective side, going beyond the how of human subjectivity. The religious symbols, even if they are metaphorical, "have a *fundamentum in re*, a foundation in reality, however much the subjective side of man's experience may contribute."¹⁰¹ God for Schelling is a living God that goes out of divine ground and, as all living things, there is otherness in God. Tillich writes:

Non-being is not foreign to being, but...it is that quality of being by which everything that participates in being is negated. Non-being is the negation of being within being itself. Each of these words is, of course, used metaphorically. But metaphorical language can be true language, pointing to something that is both revealed and hidden in this language.¹⁰²

Expressive metaphors might open up hidden dimensions of life and being; metaphors might function as explications of the participatory life. In Kierkegaard, we found the standpoint that love makes individuality visible; love touches the total personality of the Other. Tillich draws attention “to the multidimensional love which affirms the other one in the act of reunion.”¹⁰³ In Tillich, love does its work through the multidimensional unity of life; it is in all life’s dimensions, conquering the negative or non-being. Love confirms and affirms the individuality of the Other even in Tillich:

The self-conscious self cannot be excluded from Eternal Life. Since Eternal Life is life and not undifferentiated identity and since the Kingdom of God is the universal actualization of love, the element of individualization cannot be eliminated or the element of participation would also disappear. There is no participation if there are no individual centers to participate; the two poles condition each other.¹⁰⁴

The terms “individualization” and “participation” are concepts with determined content only within the subject-object structure. In relation to the infinite, they are metaphors that should not be understood literally. Kierkegaard writes: “For one who has individuality another person’s individuality is no refutation but rather a confirmation.”¹⁰⁵

As indicated, Tillich goes beyond Kierkegaard’s position, which deals with the qualification or determination of existence by the positive. The differential play between the + and the – is in all beings, on all levels of life in Tillich. All things, including human beings, resist non-being. Given the finite nature of life, all things are threatened by non-being; perhaps only humans are able to be aware of this threat. There is psychological resistance, when we react on the threat of anxiety and annihilation; there is physiological resistance as we die daily and conquer death in every moment in our bodies. Without anything outside this struggle, the opposition between the + and the – would be unbearable. Tillich’s point is that all things, life as such, contain both being and non-being, that in life or in the divine

ground of being, the process of conquering non-being goes on continuously: being is good, but it is constantly threatened by non-being; only being-itself is the constant, on-going conquering of the non-being. Life itself is the differential play; the differential play is life. Tillich claims that the overcoming of non-being in life is God’s continuous directing creation. As far as we become aware of this, the possibility of faith-knowledge is there. There is not only a No to nothing; there is also the source, the ground, the secret source at the bottom of the living, loving heart conquering non-being.

¹ Schelling, 1992:84.

² Kierkegaard, 2009:37, 159.

³ “In the transition from homogeneity to duplicity a world dawns, and with the restoration of duplicity the world itself opens up. And if Nature is only visible spirit, then the spirit must become visible in it generally, as soon as the identity of matter (its absolute rest), by which it is suppressed in itself, is canceled. ... The general expression of Nature is therefore “identity in duplicity and duplicity in identity.” Schelling, 2004:132, 180.

⁴ Ibid., 203.

⁵ Ibid., 202.

⁶ Schelling, 1994:190.

⁷ In his definition of the nature of thinking, Deleuze takes a similar position to Schelling: “The conditions of a true critique and a true creation are the same: the destruction of an image of thought which presupposes itself and the genesis of the act of thinking in thought itself. Something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition but of a fundamental *encounter*. ... Its primary characteristic is that it can only be sensed. In this sense it is opposed to recognition. In recognition, the sensible is not at all that which can only be sensed, but that which bears directly upon the senses in an object which can be recalled, imagined or conceived.” Deleuze, 1994:139.

⁸ Kierkegaard, 2009:259.

⁹ Taylor, 2009:127.

¹⁰ In Gilles Deleuze’s view, differential thinking can be found in Nietzsche as well: “The differential element is both a critique of the value of values and the positive element of a creation.” Deleuze, 2006:2.

¹¹ Schelling, 2007:120.

¹² “According to Kant, reason is nothing other than the faculty of knowledge as such, so that what is posited within us becomes, from the standpoint of philosophy, an object for us.” Ibid., 132.

¹³ In Schelling “our exclusive dependence on a negative and instrumental reason is supplanted by an integrative reason capable of realizing our nature in its wholeness and, therewith, of reconciling our fractured self with nature”. Bruno Matthews in Schelling, 2007:80.

¹⁴ Schelling, 2007:142.

¹⁵ Ibid., 94.

¹⁶ Ibid., 138. “The science that accomplishes this elimination of what is contingent in the first concepts of being—and with this frees being itself—is critical, is of the negative type.” Ibid., 144.

¹⁷ Ibid., 137.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 203.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 179.

²² Ibid., 210.

²³ Ibid., 197.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 166.

²⁶ Schelling, 1994:190.

²⁷ Bruce Matthews in Translator’s Introduction in Schelling, 2007:79.

²⁸ “With what is capable of being comprehended a priori, the negative philosophy busies itself while the positive deals with what is not capable of being comprehended a priori. But the positive philosophy concerns itself with this only in order to transform precisely that which is incomprehensible a priori into what is a posterior comprehensible: what is incomprehensible a priori becomes comprehensible in God.” Schelling, 2007:205.

²⁹ Schelling, 1994:190.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Schelling, 2007:169.

³² Bruce Matthews in Schelling 2007:71. Citation is from the German edition of *Grounding of Positive Philosophy*.

³³ “The experience towards which positive philosophy proceeds is not just of a *particular kind*, but it is the entirety of all experience from beginning to end.” Schelling, 2007:181.

³⁴ “In the unruly hues of embodied existence it is not logic, but rather “(w)anting itself” that is the purest example” of “the transition a *potentia ad actum*.” This example captures the living dynamic beginning that does justice to our actual experience of “being capable of freely deciding” to become “originator(s) of a course of action.” Bruce Matthews in Schelling, 2007:34.

³⁵ “If desire produces, its product is real. If desire is productive, it can be productive only in the real world and

can produce only reality. ... Desire and its object are one and the same thing.” Deleuze & Guattari, 1994:26.

³⁶ “We are...“co-poets” of our history, working in collaboration with the forces of creation. Not only can we read the book of nature, but we can also edit and rewrite it. For the author of this book and writer of our drama does not “exist independently of us, but reveals and discloses himself successively only, through the very play of our own freedom, so that without this freedom even he himself *would not be*.” Bruce Matthews in Schelling, 2007:81. Citation is from Schelling’s *System of Transcendental Idealism*.

³⁷ Kierkegaard, 1973:81.

³⁸ “The infinite resignation is the last stage prior to faith, so that one who has not made this movement has not faith; for only in the infinite resignation do I become clear to myself with respect to my eternal validity, and only then can there be any question of grasping existence by virtue of faith.” Kierkegaard, 1941:65f.

³⁹ Tillich, 1984:81.

⁴⁰ “Only when reflection comes to a halt can a beginning be made, and reflection can be halted only by something else, and this something must be quite different from the logical, being a resolution of the will.” Kierkegaard, 1974:103.

⁴¹ Kierkegaard, 1973:142.

⁴² Kierkegaard, 1974.

⁴³ Tillich, ST I 1978:12.

⁴⁴ Kierkegaard, 2009:149.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Kierkegaard, 1973:123.

⁴⁷ Bowie, 2006:8.

⁴⁸ “Thinking metaphorically means spotting a thread of similarity between two dissimilar objects, events, or whatever, one of which is better known than the other, and using the better-known one as a way of speaking about the lesser known... Metaphor is ordinary language.” McFague, 1983:15f.

⁴⁹ Tillich, ST I 1978:235ff.

⁵⁰ Tillich, ST II 1978: 8.

⁵¹ Ibid., 9.

⁵² Ibid. “Thus it follows that everything religion has to say about God, including qualities, actions, and manifestations, has a symbolic character and that the meaning of “God” is completely missed if one takes the symbolic language literally.” Ibid.

⁵³ Kierkegaard, 2009:199.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ “Socrates does not deny all knowledge, but rather only that knowledge of which the others boasted...Socrates presupposes a knowledge in this ex-

planation of ignorance...Socrates presupposes a knowledge to which the mere science of reason relates as ignorant. ... He sought instead of this (a doctrine) a *higher* historical context, as if only in *this* context there was real knowledge. ... Socrates and Plato both relate to this positive as something of the future: they relate to it prophetically. In Aristotle, philosophy for the first time cleansed itself of all that is prophetic and mythical, and yet in doing this, Aristotle appears as the pupil of both, in that he turned away completely from the *merely* logical toward the positive that was accessible to him—to the empirical in the widest sense of the word, in which the *thatness* [that it exists] is first, and the *whatness* [what something is] then becomes second and, thus, subsidiary.” Schelling 2007:157ff.

⁵⁶ “Here the way swings off; Socrates concentrates essentially upon accentuating existence, while Plato forgets this and loses himself in speculation.” Kierkegaard, 1974:184.

⁵⁷ “Aristotle’s criticism of the Platonic idea of immortality could be understood as an attempt to resist its inescapable primitivization and to take Plato’s thought into his own symbol of highest fulfillment, which is the individual’s participation in the eternal self-intuition of the divine *nous*.” Tillich, 1976:411.

⁵⁸ “The lover always wants that which he nevertheless possesses. ... That simple wise man of old has said, “Love is a son of riches and poverty.” ... Yet love is perhaps best described as an infinite debt: when an individual is gripped by love, he or she feels that this is like being in infinite debt.” Kierkegaard, 2009:171f.

⁵⁹ “A certain prior transformation of mind and thought is necessary in order to become aware of what the discussion is about.” Ibid., 173.

⁶⁰ Kierkegaard, 1974:75.

⁶¹ Kierkegaard, 1974:424.

⁶² Kierkegaard, 1991:140ff,

⁶³ Ibid., 136.

⁶⁴ Kierkegaard 2009:27.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 208ff.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 33.

⁶⁷ “The beloved and the friend are therefore called, remarkably and significantly enough, the *other-self*, the *other I*.” Ibid., 66.

⁶⁸ Kierkegaard, 1991:68.

⁶⁹ True love “will teach erotic love and friendship what genuine love is: in love towards yourself preserve love to your neighbour, in erotic love preserve love to your neighbor.” (Kierkegaard, 2009:74.)

⁷⁰ “To love oneself in the right way and to love one’s neighbour correspond perfectly to one another; fundamentally they are one and the same thing.” Ibid., 39.

⁷¹ Ibid., 208

⁷² Kierkegaard, 1973:32.

⁷³ Kierkegaard, 2009:206.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 175ff.

⁷⁵ Kierkegaard, 2009:261.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 351f.

⁷⁷ Kierkegaard, 2007:352.

⁷⁸ Kierkegaard, 2009:352.

⁷⁹ Kierkegaard, 1973:132.

⁸⁰ Tillich, 1980:181.

⁸¹ ““But if the essentially Christian is something so terrifying and appalling, how in the world can anyone think of accepting Christianity?” Very simply and, if you wish that also, very Lutheran: only the consciousness of sin can force one, if I dare to put it that way [from the other side grace is the force], into this horror.” Kierkegaard, 1991:67.

⁸² “For here again the negative is the mark by which the God-relationship is recognized.” Kierkegaard, 1974:412. “Between God and human being, however, there is an absolute difference...But since there is this absolute difference between God and man, how does the principle of equality in love express itself? By means of the absolute difference. And what is the form of this absolute difference? Humility. What sort of humility? The humility that frankly admits its human lowliness with humble cheerfulness before God.” Ibid, 441. “All ironical observations depend upon paying attention to the “how,” whereas the gentleman with whom the ironist has the honour to converse is attentive only of the “what.”” Ibid., 543.

⁸³ Kierkegaard, 2009:198.

⁸⁴ Tillich dismisses essentialism, see Tillich, ST II, 1978:23ff.

⁸⁵ Tillich, 1976:12.

⁸⁶ Tillich, ST II 1978:8.

⁸⁷ “God can never become an object for individuals’ knowledge or action...The holiness of God makes it impossible to draw God into the context of the ego-world and the subject-object correlation. God is the ground and meaning of this correlation, not an element within it.” Tillich, ST I 1978:271f.

⁸⁸ Tillich, 1976: 405f.

⁸⁹ In Aristotle “the soul is the form of the life process, its immortality includes all elements which constitutes this process, though it includes them as essences. The meaning of the “immortality of the soul” then would involve the power of essentialization. And in Plato’s late

doctrine of the world-soul, the idea of immortality in the sense of universal essentialization seems to be implied". Ibid., 410.

⁹⁰ Tillich, 1974:411.

⁹¹ Ibid., 401.

⁹² Ibid., 133.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 117.

⁹⁵ Kierkegaard, 1974.

⁹⁶ Tillich, 1974:150.

⁹⁷ "Auch in Sünder ist das Band des Geistes wirksam, obwohl die sein-sollende Einheit aufgelöst ist; die Kraft der Sünde beruht auf ihm, und dieses Band ist es, was den Menschen zum Menschen macht, seine "Substanz". "Wird die Einheit ganz aufgehoben, so wird eben damit der Widerstreit aufgehoben". [VII, 371] Das Nicht-sein-Sollende kann nur am Sein-Sollenden offenbar werden.

THE COURAGE TO BE (TRAY): AN EMERGING CONVERSATION BETWEEN PAUL TILlich AND PETER ROLLINS

CARL-ERIC GENTES

In the closing pages of *The Courage to Be*, Paul Tillich turns from the affirmation of personal courage to paint a picture ever so briefly of the Church that can respond to the modern/postmodern predicament. He writes:

A Church which raises itself in its message and its devotion to the God above the God of theism without sacrificing its concrete symbols can mediate a courage which takes doubt and meaninglessness into itself. It is the Church under the Cross which alone can do this, the Church which preaches the Crucified who cried to God who remained his God after the God of confidence had left him in the darkness of doubt and meaninglessness. To be as a part in such a church is to receive a courage to be in which one cannot lose one's self and in which one receives one's world.¹

In this essay, I wish to explore Tillich's ephemeral vision through an engagement with the thought and practice of Peter Rollins.

A prominent voice in the emergent church conversation and author of *How (Not) to Speak of God* and *Fidelity of Betrayal*, Peter Rollins could be properly described as an Evangelical in revolt, albeit

Das Schuldbewusstsein selbst schliesst das Bewusstsein um die wahre Einheit in sich. Je tiefer und absoluter das Schuldbewusstsein, desto höher die Erfassung der wahren Identität- Ja und Nein stehen auch hier in voller Absolutenheit nebeneinander und ineinander. Es ist das Wesen aller Flachheit des Geistes, diese Identität der Widerspruchs abschwächen zu wollen. In die Tiefe des Geistes aber blickt, wer sie als die Form der lebendigen Wahrheit lebendig erfasst." Tillich, 1959:93.

⁹⁸ Tillich, 1960:39.

⁹⁹ Tillich, 1976.

¹⁰⁰ Tillich, 1974:395.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 283.

¹⁰² Tillich, 1960:38.

¹⁰³ Tillich, 1974:160.

¹⁰⁴ Tillich 1976:413f.

¹⁰⁵ Kierkegaard, 2007:254.

a revolt deeply formed by the critique of religion through the lenses of Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche rather than a burgeoning social consciousness. This places Rollins in decidedly different company in that he is more likely to be seen in conversation with Slavoj Žižek than with Jim Wallis and those of the Evangelical Left. Rollins's primary concern is the corruption of Christianity by Enlightenment thinking, more specifically the attempts to turn God and faith into verifiable data to which to be assented. The consequences of which portray doubt as "a negative and corrosive force to be attacked."² In response Rollins suggests a faith that radically embraces doubt. More than this, he proposes a faith that not only acknowledges doubt's presence but actively provokes it through liturgical events of betrayal. Rollins says, "In order to approach the God of faith and the truth affirmed by Christianity, we must betray the God we grasp—for the God who brings us into new life is never the God we grasp but always in excess of that God."³ Rollins's word choice should be mouth-watering for Talihina's eager to offer a poignant turn of phrase: we must betray the god we grasp for the sake of the God who grasps us.

Despite these affinities, Rollins does not incorporate Tillich into his thinking in any comprehensive way. The works mentioned earlier name Tillich in passing among a list of theologians who propose that God is not a being. Most recently in his book, *Insurrection*, released during the editing process of this paper, Rollins displays knowledge of Tillich's *The Courage to Be* when he addresses the anxieties of

death, guilt, and meaninglessness, but does not address faith and courage. Despite this lack of direct dialogue, Rollins imitates traditional Tillichian concepts while addressing, although not by name, the intellectualistic distortion of faith. For the purpose of this study, I will first offer a brief synopsis of general themes that shape Rollins's conception of faith with attention to points of intersection with Tillich. Second, I look specifically at how Rollins and Tillich address the dynamic of faith and doubt. Lastly, I will turn to the concrete practice employed by Rollins and the manifestation of what I am calling the "courage to be(tray)"—a phrase that is attempting to be tongue and cheek in the same breath that it demands attention.

Regarding faith and its distortions, Rollins and Tillich are both clear in their condemnation of faith as belief in factual content. This is what Rollins means by "Enlightenment-influenced Christianity." This term, as used by Rollins, includes Tillich's intellectualistic distortion of faith and its subsequent distortions related to the will and, to a lesser extent, the emotions. Rollins's objection is at least threefold: (1) The objective scientific discourse concerning the truth of faith requires distance from that faith. Thus it asks "that believers engage with the deepest, most intimate, most personal, and most pressing issue in their lives in the guise of a detached, disinterested observer."⁴ (2) Faith that affirms content in the comfort of certainty is actually an idolatrous affirmation of self. (3) An intellectualistic faith offers certainty without risk and therefore regards doubt negatively.

In the affirmative, Rollins argues that "faith involves engaging in an ongoing transformative dialogue instead of seeking some static, final understanding of God and the world."⁵ This dialogical and dynamic understanding of faith is rooted in the belief that faith is both the manifestation of, and response to, an event. Rollins's prime example is the Blind Man of the 9th chapter of John where the man's confession lacks any certainty as to the nature of his healer, but contains full certainty that he has in fact been healed. As such, Rollins says that faith "is a happening, an event, that we affirm and respond to, regardless of the ebbs and flows of our abstract theological reflections concerning the source and nature of this happening."⁶ In light of this, Rollins also will speak of the "miracle of faith" as an event that is radically subjective, lacking any objective content to be theorized while yet offering evidence in the transformation of a personal life in a positive, healing

way. The transformation of life is key for Rollins, albeit not in the form of a will to repent, believe, or live rightly. If the transformation required the will it would be a response to some intellectual content be it threat of damnation or promise of eternal life. Instead, Rollins understands faith as a radical change in one's orientation to the world experienced as an overabundant life.

Rollins has a kindred spirit in Tillich, who summarizes Rollins's project when he writes in *The Courage to Be*:

Faith is not a theoretical affirmation of something uncertain, it is the existential acceptance of something transcending ordinary experience. Faith is not an opinion but a state. It is the state of being grasped by the power of being which transcends everything that is and in which everything that is participates.⁷

In fact, Rollins alludes to many significant Tillichian themes regarding the nature of faith. I have already mentioned Rollins's emphasis on the transformation of a life, a term which, in his use, is inclusive of all the faculties of the person, thus representing a centered act of the personality. Rollins appeal to faith as an event, even a miracle event, shows affinity for the Tillichian state of being grasped by the power of being-itself. This connection is made even clearer when Rollins goes so far as name this event "God," calling it an event that can only be known in action and as blessing. He says, "God is revealed neither as reducible to the status of other objects, nor as outside the world and distant from it, but rather as one who is received without being conceived."⁸

These similarities aside, I find the most fruitful area of dialogue to be in the intersection of doubt and faith. However, it is here that we must recognize an important difference between Tillich and Rollins, that is, the situation in which doubt manifests itself. Tillich places himself and his need to address doubt within the context of the modern problem—the universal breakdown of meaning. As he says,

Twentieth-century man has lost a meaningful world and a self which lives in meanings out of a spiritual center. The man-created world of objects has drawn into itself him who created it and who now loses his subjectivity in it. He has sacrificed himself to his own productions.⁹

Rollins, on the other hand, is responding to an Evangelical assertion of the truth of faith and its factual content despite modernity's attack on meaning. Thus, he reads his situation as one where the truth affirmed in Christianity is reduced to the idea of fac-

tual claims, in turn making doubt a negative and corrosive force to be attacked.¹⁰ Yet, on another level, Rollins sees this phenomenon as symptomatic of a more universal human problem.

Getting people to believe is easy precisely because it is so natural for us. Any persuasive human can do it—and even make money in the process. But to truly unplug from the God of religion, with all the anxieties and distress this involves, takes courage. Indeed, one could say that it takes God.¹¹

This position is captured succinctly in Rollins's catchphrase, "to believe is human, to doubt, divine." So it is that, for Tillich, faith is under attack by historical contingency that calls religious truth into question while Rollins understands faith as being under attack by those who feed the human need to believe beyond question. Therefore, the two make wonderfully complementary discussion partners on the theme of faith and doubt. Tillich seeks to ask how faith is possible in light of all-consuming doubt, while Rollins seeks to ask how doubt is possible in light of all-consuming faith. The two meet in the middle by embracing doubt and affirming a concept of absolute faith.

Tillich positions absolute faith within the acceptance and transcendence of the polarities of participation and individualization expressed by mysticism and personal encounter. Mysticism¹² itself, for Tillich, is not an answer to the anxiety of doubt and meaninglessness because it does not take the concrete seriously.¹³ The divine-human encounter itself is not an answer to the anxiety of doubt and meaninglessness because doubt subverts the subject-object structure of the encounter, thus calling all concrete content into question, especially that of personal address. In their place, Tillich posits the concept of absolute faith as the "paradoxical manifestation of the courage to be" which prevails despite being deprived of any concrete content.¹⁴ It is a faith rooted in the Cross of Christ and the cry of dereliction, a cry to the God above God. Such faith is possible due to the dependency of non-being on being and meaninglessness on meaning, which makes possible the experience of the two and the experience of acceptance by the power of being-itself. Thus, absolute faith as a manifestation of the courage to be is the "self-affirmation of being in spite of non-being,"¹⁵ and participation in the power of being itself. It is this absolute faith that is capable of addressing the threat of doubt and meaninglessness through courage, not denial and risk, not certainty.¹⁶

As stated earlier, Rollins is not concerned with the anxiety of doubt as a threat, but perhaps rather the anxiety caused by the rejection of doubt in contemporary Christianity. Therefore he wishes to embrace doubt "as a deeply positive phenomenon...not as that which strikes up against the truth of faith but as the natural outworking of this truth."¹⁷ For Rollins, the undecidability provoked by doubt is not helpless relativism, but rather the only foundation from which a real decision of faith can be made.¹⁸ This position makes doubt essential to true faith and brings with it an echo of Tillich's call for risk. While risk is an important element of faith, Rollins argues that risk does not rule out appeals to certainty, albeit not the epistemological certainty desired by Enlightenment-Christianity.¹⁹ Rollins, like Tillich, has embraced the cross and the cry of dereliction as the pre-eminent site of faith and doubt's interdependence. Therefore, he warns against those who try to make the cross a guarantor of certainty by arguing that the cross is a site of meaning's rupture, not its security.²⁰ Contrary to these attempts to certify certainty, Rollins appeals to the miraculous nature of faith and identifies doubt as that which "comes in the aftermath of a happening that is itself indubitable."²¹

One possible point of contention between Tillich and Rollins could be Rollins's primary reliance on mystical expressions of Christianity found in Pseudo-Dionysius and Meister Eckhart. Given his context—that of seeking doubt rather than defending against it—it is possible to imagine Tillich accusing Rollins of abandoning the concrete in favor of a one-dimensional mystical faith or, worse, being a skeptic. Such accusations, however, are defended when one looks at Rollins's liturgical practices. For it is in his practice that Rollins distinguishes himself from the mystical and skeptical traditions. It should also be noted that it is his dedication to practice that also sets Rollins apart from other Evangelicals who have received national praise for discovering fresh theological insights such as universal salvation or God's preferential option for the poor. So it is here that I turn my attention to the true novelty of Rollins, that is, a commitment to liturgical acts of betrayal.

To reiterate from the introduction, Rollins says, "In order to approach the God of faith and the truth affirmed by Christianity, we must betray the God we grasp—for the God who brings us into new life is never the God we grasp but always in excess of that God."²² To grasp fully what Rollins is doing, I find it helpful to distinguish between betrayal and sacrifice. I choose sacrifice because Tillich on multiple occa-

sions cautions against the sacrifice of concrete symbols in fear of devolving into a mysticism that does not take the concrete and, therefore doubt, seriously. It is also worth mentioning that, while defining the universal breakdown of meaning, Tillich employs the image of the human sacrificing herself to her own productions.²³

In contrast to typical notions of betrayal, Rollins takes a particularly biblical approach, albeit imaginative, by focusing on the betrayal of Judas. He suggests at least two possible interpretations that reject the conventional scandalizing of Judas as an agent of the devil. The first looks at Judas's betrayal through the lens of Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ*, based on Nikos Kazantzakis book of the same title. There the betrayal comes reluctantly by the request of Jesus himself. The point is that Jesus needs Judas to betray him so that he may complete his mission. Alternatively, Rollins suggests that betrayal is motivated by Judas's desire—as a zealot—to accelerate the coming of the new political order, thus forcing Jesus's hand to claim his Messianic duty. Both interpretations show that Rollins's understanding of betrayal is not a kind of sacrifice wherein that which is sacrificed is lost, but rather a betrayal of the thing that is loved for the sake of the beloved's return in greater glory. Rollins suggests all these images when he talks of betraying God with a kiss.

Such betrayal is actively engaged through liturgical events that often happen in bars with a combination of willing participants and unknowing patrons. Events are a mixture of music, art, storytelling, drama, and parable that Rollins calls "transformation art." A paradigmatic example of liturgical betrayal may be found in an event entitled "prosperity." A well-groomed, affluent looking man sits in a wingback chair reading his Bible alongside a table holding chocolate cake and champagne. The man begins giving his own personal testimony of troubled times followed by the comfort, certainty, and prosperity brought by faith. As he finishes speaking, he stuffs his face with cake followed by a gulp of champagne. Then turning to those gathered with arms wide with invitation, he proclaims this cake and champagne the true body and blood of Christ. The invitation to join in the feast is met with awkward silence and ample time for that silence to fester.²⁴ Similarly, Rollins has also invited people to participate in what he calls "Atheism for Lent." For 40 days during Lent, participants give up God instead of chocolate and engage in reading the likes of

Marx, Feuerbach, and Freud. Events such as these facilitate rupture, provocation, and transformation in a space shared by all, but privileged by none. These events do not pretend to offer understanding and, in fact, attempt to make sense to nobody, therefore allowing faith, doubt, and meaninglessness to move freely. This basic introduction is horribly insufficient to understand completely the nature of these heavily experiential events, but it paints, I hope, a picture of an atmosphere where absolute faith is provoked and allowed to move in and through concrete symbols as points of departure, not places of arrival. As such, these practices embody the power of an ultimate certainty under which we, as Tillich the preacher would say, "walk from certainty to certainty."²⁵

Rollins's liturgical betrayal is a response to the epistemological faith of much of today's Christianity. It is a response to what Tillich called conventional faith; a faith that is the "dead remnant of former experiences of ultimate concern."²⁶ However, Tillich does leave hope that dead faith may once again become alive. Such a resurrection is possible because faith, even dead faith, is symbolic, and symbols are, for Tillich, not arbitrary, but participate in the reality to which they point. Rollins might say that just as Jesus' resurrection called for the betrayal of Judas, so might the resurrection of a dead faith call for the betrayal of symbols in need of new life. Yet, it is my assertion that such a betrayal does not happen without courage. The act of betrayal is not simply a procedural or even liturgical act for the sake of skeptical rebellion, but rather itself an affirmation of the courage to be which transcends all concrete content without sacrificing it. It is that which moves in search of certainty all the while being empowered by a certainty that is not one's own. It is a manifestation of the power of being-itself and a participation in "the Crucified who cried to God who remained his God after the God of confidence had left him in the darkness of doubt and meaninglessness."²⁷ It is through these communal experiences of betrayal that Peter Rollins and his fellow betrayers come exceptionally close to embodying Tillich's vision of the Church while paving the way for the affirmation of a courage to be(tray).

¹ Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1952), 188.

² Peter Rollins, *Fidelity of Betrayal: Towards a Church Beyond Belief* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete, 2008), 142.

³ Rollins, 125.

⁴ Rollins, 90.⁵ Ibid, 60.⁶ Ibid, 141.⁷ Tillich, 173.⁸ Rollins, 113.⁹ Tillich, 139¹⁰ Rollins, 142.¹¹ Peter Rollins, *Insurrection* (New York: Howard Books, 2011), 17.¹² The validity of Tillich's critique of mysticism cannot be addressed in this paper. It is enough to present the question of Rollins's mysticism on Tillich's own terms. That is, I do not wish to avail Rollins of Tillich's critique by saying that Tillich was wrong about mysticism, but that Rollins use of the tradition stands despite Tillich's critique.¹³ Tillich, 186.¹⁴ Ibid, 177.¹⁵ Ibid, 172.¹⁶ Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1957), 118.¹⁷ Rollins, *Fidelity of Betrayal*, 142, italics are Rollins.¹⁸ Peter Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete, 2006), 35.¹⁹ Rollins, *Fidelity of Betrayal*, 142.²⁰ Rollins, *Insurrection*, 22.²¹ Rollins, *Fidelity of Betrayal*, 142.²² Ibid, 125.²³ Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 139.²⁴ Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God*, 123. This book offers ten examples of past services conducted by Rollins and the Ikon community.²⁵ Tillich, "Faith and Uncertainty," *The New Being* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955).²⁶ Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 118.²⁷ Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 188.

**CAN THERE BE A THEOLOGY OF
DISENCHANTMENT? UNBINDING
THE *NIHIL* IN TILlich**

THOMAS A. JAMES

Contemporary philosophy seems to be showing signs of rebellion against an agnostic orthodoxy that has been, according to some, all too comfortable for religion. Beginning with what Quentin Meillassoux ironically calls the "Ptolemaic" counter-revolution of Immanuel Kant,¹ and continuing in both continental and Anglo-American contexts in the forms of phenomenology, linguistic analysis, and pragmatism, philosophy has in one way or another disavowed knowledge of the "thing-in-itself." In so doing, these new realists charge, it has carved out a philosophical niche to shelter some of its most prized notions (God, freedom, and immortality, to recall Kant's own program) from the withering impact of the properly revolutionary turn in cosmological thinking inaugurated by Copernicus.

Meillassoux labels this long-standing philosophical tradition "correlationism," because it maintains that access to objects as they are in themselves is barred—we have access to objects only as correlates of particular perspectives held by knowing subjects. The problem with the tradition, Meillassoux argues, is that it makes it impossible to think what he calls the "ancestral"—it makes the vast stretch of

time before the advent of consciousness not only unknowable but incapable of being conceptualized at all.² This means that philosophical reflection is protected from the results of cosmological theorizing because it is always able to bracket realist interpretations of them. As Meillassoux points out, philosophy always seems to escape the blistering austerity of contemporary cosmology with the addition of the "for us." The correlational "for us" blocks cosmology and abruptly opens the door for the moral idealism and religious belief that appears to be threatened by it. For Kant, the relegation of cosmological knowledge to phenomenality makes room in the world for God, freedom, and immortality. In recent continental philosophy, the perpetual escape of the "wholly other" from the strictures of representation warrants the fideistic "return to religion."³

According to speculative realists, the "for us" of correlationism derails the Enlightenment program of disenchantment. Modern philosophy in the wake of the mathematization of the universe should have eliminated theology from the realm of intellectual respectability, and it was on its way toward doing so before what Meillassoux calls the "catastrophe" of correlationism and its disavowal of absolute knowledge.⁴ As Ray Brassier points out, it is not just ancestrality, but the lifeless eschatology projected by modern science (what he calls "posteriority") which evades correlationist reason. Solar death, and beyond that the entropic dissolution of life and of matter itself in the distant future—knowable not as correlates

of human experience or intuition but as outcomes of mathematization—present to us the speculative opportunity to interface with the real as fatally entropic and hence as devoid of ultimate meaning.⁵ Provocatively, Brassier suggests that it opens the door to the recognition that we are already dead, that life is a contingent perturbation of the inorganic, that the negentropy that defines life over against the entropic is vanishing fluctuation.⁶ In order to close the door once and for all on theology, interestingly, Brassier calls for the “theologization” of these bleak features of recent cosmology.⁷

As a theologian, I want ask what might result if we were to do just that. What if speculative realism were conceded as true? What if we theologians were forced to come out of what these critics call the anti-realist, counter-enlightenment shelter that correlationism provides? Would that be the end of theology, as Brassier believes? To probe this question, I will subject Paul Tillich’s theology to speculative realist analysis, asking if it also invokes a protective strategy that blocks the influence of cosmology; whether it, too, is bound by a philosophical correlationism that makes it impossible theologically to think cosmology. In a word, I will suggest that the answer is “Yes.” Nothing, in fact, could be clearer. In some ways, Tillich’s theology is almost a caricature of speculative realism’s correlationist target. But I also will argue that this does not place Tillich squarely under the heel of speculative realism. There is a life after realism, I suggest, or rather within it, even if realism portends our extinction. Unbinding the nihilizing implications of realist interpretations of modern cosmology within Tillich’s theology, I will argue, opens the possibility for a different sort of theology, certainly more austere but also in some respects more radically Tillichian.

I. Theologizing Life

We begin in the middle of Tillich’s *Systematic Theology*, a section of volume II in which he tries to give an account of the Fall as the universal “transition from essential to existential being.”⁸ Famously, Tillich calls his account a “half-way demythologization.” It demythologizes because it refuses to interpret the Fall as a “once upon a time” event; but the demythologization is only “half-way” because there remains an irreducibly temporal element in the transition to existence.⁹ There is a non-necessary rupture or break from essential being, and such a break cannot be domesticated by a dialectic or some other

kind of logical necessity: rather, it is a contingency which can only be accounted for by way of narrative—i.e., it must remain in part mythological.

What is curious about Tillich’s account is the central claim embedded in the narrative he gives. “One can say,” he writes, “that nature is finite necessity, God is infinite freedom, *man is finite freedom. It is finite freedom which makes possible the transition from essence to existence.*”¹⁰ Dogmatically, the motivation behind this statement is obvious: human beings are responsible for the Fall. Though it is universal and inevitable, it is necessitated neither by nature nor by God: it is the contingent actualization of finite freedom. However, the oddness of ascribing an apparent ontic priority to human beings as finite freedom with respect to existence as a whole is hard to miss. On the face of it, it appears as if the eleven or so billion yearlong stretch of cosmic evolution prior to the emergence of *homo sapiens* either did properly exist or is somehow made dependent in its existence upon the universal Fall effected in the appearance of human beings.

But a Tillichian will no doubt reply that his reading simply shows that the correlational method that governs Tillich’s theology has not been properly grasped. Theological statements, s/he might continue, are not disinterested statements about temporal states of affairs, as if they were in some sort of ill-fated competition with scientific statements. They do not propose an ontic priority of human beings with respect to cosmic evolution, for example, because they are not ontic statements at all, but rather ontological. That is to say, talk about the transition from essence to existence in terms of finite freedom is a way to grasp the ontological connection between freedom and destiny within human experience. “Existence” refers here to specifically *human* existence—*Dasein*, we might say, borrowing from Heidegger—as an uneasy combination of necessity and freedom. To interpret it more broadly is to interpret theological statements as if they were empirical statements of putative fact, and thus to turn Tillich into a creationist.

But this objection is beside the point. I am not arguing that Tillich is a creationist—clearly, he is not—but rather that his construction blocks modern cosmology from having anything theologically important to say about the history of the cosmos prior to human beings. To say that the theologically relevant meaning of existence is what results from the actualization of human freedom is to place theological knowledge of the real in a tight correlation with

its appearance “for us.” In Meillassoux’s terms, the correlational rendering of theological statements—tying their meaning to what existence is “for us”—makes it impossible theologically to think the “ancestral.” And so the problem is that we have a tension in Tillich’s account of creation: he is committed to a theistic evolutionary account (i.e., non-creationist) of the world and yet abstracts the doctrine of creation from knowledge of that from which human life evolved (non-living matter).

I will venture a generalization at this point that could only be fully justified by a detailed consideration of Tillich’s entire systematic theology that I can only suggest here. The correlational method in Tillich functions in just the same way that so-called philosophical correlationism functions in post-Kantian philosophy according to Meillassoux’s reading of it: it protects certain prized notions (for Tillich, the concept of life) from the withering effects of modern cosmology, especially the horrors of the ancestral as well as what Ray Brassier calls the trauma of extinction. At the root of this protective move is the anxiety induced by modern cosmology’s disclosure of a contingency that is literally unthinkable in terms that would privilege human meaning and value. Life arises contingently from non-life, sustains itself negentropically for only a moment of cosmic time, and then lapses into non-life again in the eternal expansion of a cold, dark universe.

Another way to say this is that correlationism is itself the methodological correlate of a kind of theological vitalism. Although not all forms of correlationism are necessarily vitalist, the correlational method, according to which knowledge of the real is always already tied to the existential situation of the knower, serves to protect the self-estimation of the living against data that would undermine or deflate it. In Tillich’s theology, theology answers questions that are borne by the existential struggles of human beings. It is driven, then, by a struggle of a particular form of life—i.e., human beings—against that which would dissolve or reduce it to the non-living, rather than by the quest for adequation to the real that characterizes modern cosmology. By framing theological knowledge in terms of an the interests of the human knower, Tillich’s theology is able to project an essentially vitalist cosmology: seen from the vantage point of the living, the universe is the arena of life, governed and brought to fulfillment by a “living God” who promises “eternal life.”

I suggest that Tillich’s theological vitalism can be seen with special clarity near the beginning and at

the end of his *Systematic Theology*. In volume I, Tillich famously differentiates the idea of God as ground of being from the supernaturalist account of God as the highest being. God is not, Tillich argues, a part of the system of being—God is “beyond the contrast” of being and non-being and thus not constrained by it. By rejecting the notion of a highest being as incoherent and unintelligible, atheism is essentially correct in its protest against traditional, supernaturalist theism.¹¹ Of course, acceptance of an atheist critique does not mean that Tillich is himself an atheist—only that he holds that the reality of God cannot be properly reified or reduced to the status of a discrete individual alongside others. However, the austerity of Tillich’s position is qualified. While God is not a discrete living being in the way that supernaturalism imagines, God is nevertheless not less than that—God is not limited by organic vitality, but is nevertheless also not limited by its negation. In fact, for Tillich, God is not indifferent to life but is positively related to it. In a typically founding gesture, Tillich urges that God is the *ground* of life. This consideration not only warrants but renders non-negotiable the symbol of the “living” God:

Life is the process in which potential being becomes actual being. It is the actualization of the structural elements of being in their unity and in their tension. These elements move divergently and convergently in every life-process. Life ceases in the moment of separation without union or of union without separation. Both complete identity and complete separation negate life. If we call God the “living God,” we deny that he is a pure identity of being as being; we also deny that there is a definite separation of being from being in him. We assert that he is the eternal process in which separation is posited and is overcome by reunion. In this sense, God lives.¹²

What is interesting about this account is the deep connection between Tillich’s affirmation of divine living-ness and the characterization of the life process as absolute and universal. God is the ground of being, and being is always in the process of actualization. To move toward actualization is to become real in the eternal dynamic of separation and reunion, which is nothing other than the dynamic of life. Hence, to be is to be alive, and to become actual in the divine life. There is more than a hint of panentheism here, and it is theologically compelling for Tillich and for others because it powerfully connects the universality of divine rule over the cosmos with

the intimacy of divine presence within the cosmic trajectories that existentially matter to us.

But, we may fairly ask, if God is the ground of *being*, and if it turns out that being is mostly non-living (“mostly” in both spatial and temporal terms), why privilege the idea of God as “living?” There are at least two difficulties. First, can the concept of life do the descriptive work that is being asked of it here? Does the ancestral, the billions of years of cosmic time in which nothing like the autotelic process of life’s negentropic struggle was going on (not to mention the trillions of years in the future in which it will have exhausted itself), really amount to a dialectical interchange between separation and reunion? Are there not plenty of separations without reunions and unions without separations in cosmic history, and is not the fact that separations and unions are not in living relation in the vast majority of instances actually the main story? This gets us to the second problem: Is actual being really to be conceived as the product of something that can be described as living? As will be apparent, this more overtly metaphysical issue is really the same difficulty isolated above in reference to Tillich’s account of the transition from essence to existence. It is hard to see what could warrant denying actuality to that which falls outside even Tillich’s expansive definition of “life.” The ancestral, we know, is not a shadowy world of essences or non-actualized potentials, but a terrifically enormous array of actual events where nothing of interest to life occurs.

Again, Tillich’s existentially compelling, but descriptively odd account of God’s relation to the world is tied to his correlational method. In the end, Tillich is not interested in the ancestral because it falls outside of the correlation of living beings and their interests. As a non-creationist, he does not deny that human beings and even ordinary biological life as we know it came about only after billions of years of cosmic history. But those billions of years are unthinkable within the correlation, which is to say that their metaphysical significance is prevented from coming into view.

Tillich’s theological vitalism is also observable in his eschatology. Significantly, the crescendo of volume III of *Systematic Theology* is the final section on “Eternal Life.” It is here that the life process, which is the subject matter of the volume, reaches fulfillment; it is also here where panentheistic implications of Tillich’s doctrine of God come to full flower. For Tillich, life is ambiguous insofar as the fulfillment of its aims is always mixed with their

frustration or distortion. The spiritual presence heals the split between essence and existence, or we might say it overcomes the estrangement of existence from essence, but the presence of spirit is always incomplete or not fully actualized. The complete actualization of the spiritual presence would be the full essentialization of existence, in which the elements of estrangement that cling to life are, as it were, “burnt” away.¹³ The full essentialization of existence, however, is also the overcoming of the separation of creatures from God. Eternal life as the fulfillment of life’s essential aims is life in the living God. As life, it is never-ending, eternally dynamic process, but, as life in God, it is life completed by its incorporation in the divine life that is eternally complete.¹⁴

But this brings us to what is in some ways the more important objection speculative realism might bring against a correlational theology like Tillich’s. Just as lifeless ancestry falls outside the correlation, so do the lifeless eschatological scenarios suggested by modern cosmology. In other words, correlationism blocks the theological meaning of modern cosmology at the far end of the cosmic story, a “far end” that portends not billions of years of non-life but trillions and more. Dogmatically, it is not difficult to see the appeal of the claim that life is eternally essentialized in God. Tillich is ingeniously working around the notorious difficulties in holding together consummation and the openness of life to contingency pointed out, for example, by Friedrich Schleiermacher.¹⁵ The process is completed in God because God Godself is the eternal completion of the process, and yet the process does not cease in God to be precisely *process*. So, we have the satisfaction of completion without, presumably, the non-living stasis that completion seems to imply. The trouble, however, has once again to do with the status of cosmological knowledge.

Here the problem is somewhat different from the problem raised by ancestry. The challenge of the ancestral is that it asserts a vast realm of actuality which is indifferent to and which bears no relation to life. So, insofar as we inscribe theological knowledge in a correlation between object and living subject, we find the ancestral quite literally unthinkable and thus have no way to integrate it into theology. The challenge of what Ray Brassier calls “posteriority,”¹⁶ however, is the fact that all of our cosmological knowledge suggests that there will be vastly (indeed infinitely) more time in the universe which will transpire after life has become impossible than the time during which life is actual. More starkly put,

the time of death is much greater than the time of life. Therefore, the extent to which Tillich proposes an eternal process of life in God, his theology must also hide or at least ignore the eschatological scenarios mathematically extrapolated from modern cosmological knowledge. And so, eternal life, as an eternal process of fulfilling life's intrinsic aims toward self-actualization, becomes otherworldly. But this is, of course, what Tillich, with his refusal of supernaturalist theisms, is trying to avoid.

The contrast between Tillich's eschatology of eternal life and Ray Brassier's "naturalization of eschatology," or what he also calls the "theologization of cosmology,"¹⁷ could not be sharper. Indeed, they are driven by two conflicting aims: if Tillich seeks to provide an account of the world's future which privileges the perspective of the knower (or, more precisely, the believer) and his/her fate, Brassier's theologization of cosmology seeks to make good on the philosopher's claim to know the absolute—that is, to adequate thought to the in-itself. The mathematization of the universe in the era of scientific enlightenment has handed to philosophy knowledge of the in-itself, and philosophy's job is to think it. The trouble, since Kant, is that philosophers have been disappointed with the world they have been handed, with its lack of a moral God, incompatibilist freedom, and immortality, and that is why Brassier, with Meillassoux, urges that the test of adequation to the real is precisely disappointment or disenchantment.¹⁸ If a view of the world consoles, it has not taken seriously the marginalization of life in a universe that can be shown to be indifferent to it. We must theologize what we know—that is, we must think the meaning of the death of meaning. Out of our disappointment, we must forge a theology of disenchantment.

For Brassier, nihilism is neither a disease nor, in contrast to Nietzsche, something that must be overcome. Rather, nihilism is the speculative opportunity to give adequate thought to the real.¹⁹ The opportunity is "speculative" because it is not the opportunity to realize practical value, but to realize philosophy's desire to know the in-itself. Brassier draws on Freud's notion of the death drive as an analogue. For Freud, there is a primordial pull within life back toward the inorganic. Although life diverges from the inorganic in ever more circuitous detours, these are no more than temporary extensions of the latter, which will eventually contract back to their original inorganic condition, understood as the zero degree of contraction, or *decontraction*.²⁰

However, this drive toward death is not to be understood in Aristotelian terms as a teleology intrinsic to the organism. The problem with such an inner *telos*, according to Brassier, is that it has no existence independently of the organism, and so it can be assimilated into the organism's primordial drive to fulfill itself. In contrast,

Freud maintains the realist thesis according to which 'inanimate things existed before living ones,' and uses it to underwrite the reality of the death-drive. Consequently, the inorganic as 'initial state' and 'aim' of life cannot be simply understood as a condition internal to the development of life, whether as the *essence* that life has been, or the *telos* which it will be. Just as the reality of the inorganic is not merely a function of the existence of the organic, so the reality of death is not merely a function of life's past, or of its future. Death, understood as the principle of decontraction driving the contractions of organic life is not a past or future state toward which life tends, but rather the originary *purposelessness* which compels all purposefulness, whether organic or psychological. With the thesis that the 'aim of all life is death,' Freud defuses Nietzsche's metaphysics of the will: the life that wills power is merely a contraction of the death that wants nothing. The will to nothingness is not an avatar of the will to power; rather the will to power is merely a mask of the will to nothingness.²¹

In short, death is the in-itself of life—or, alternatively, life is just a variation upon death. The truth disclosed by the mathematization of the cosmos, then, is not simply that we are all going to die and that the human project will come to a close, but that we are, in fact, already dead. The enchanting "manifest image" of ourselves as a vital subjectivity that transcends the lifeless physical system of which we are a part, to borrow a phrase from Wilfred Sellars, is destroyed.²² The challenge is to think theologically about this destruction.

II. Theologizing Cosmology: A More Radical Atheism for a More Radical Tillich

Again, what if speculative realism's critique of correlationism were true and it is possible to know the absolute on the basis of the mathematization of cosmology? Given the challenges of ancestry and posteriority, how might the theologian respond? As I

see it, three types of responses might be given. First, in response to the challenge of posteriority, one may simply deny that eternal life has anything to do with this cosmic realm. The difficulties to be faced here would be several, however. Among them would be the push back of some speculative realists that this response does not touch the realist claim that life is just a variation upon death. But, much more importantly for our purposes, this response would amount to a re-deployment of the dualistic supernaturalism that Tillich's theology seeks, rightfully in my judgment, to avoid. Therefore I will not pursue that course here.

A second type of response is much more sophisticated, and is developed by the other speculative realist we have discussed, Quentin Meillassoux. In *After Finitude*, Meillassoux argues that there are no metaphysical necessities—no necessary being, nor any necessity behind the laws of nature. Thus, though natural laws describe the system of nature as it currently exists, nothing prevents them from changing in a moment.²³ They literally rest on nothing so there need be no reason for them becoming something different. In his unpublished though famous work, *The Divine Inexistence*, Meillassoux suggests that this radical contingency applies also the inevitability of death. Quite simply, death is just as contingent as life, and may be replaced without reason by immortality, without having to posit another world.²⁴

I believe there is considerable promise in this perspective. However, its genius is that it uses radical contingency actually to undermine nihilism, and the purpose of this paper is to ask about the prospect of a theology that embraces at least some, though not all, of the nihilism of Brassier's version of speculative realism. What happens if, in a third option, we unbind the *nihil* in Tillich?

The key to this thought experiment is in the observation I made above—if God is the ground of being, and if being turns out to be mostly inorganic, what sense does it make to privilege the notion of the “living God?” Famously, Tillich accepts the criticisms of atheism with respect to the supernaturalist account of God that is characteristic of popular and some more sophisticated philosophical versions of theism. The protest of this atheism was against a reified personal God who dwells in a realm somehow apart from the world. However, the atheism of Ray Brassier, for example, is much more radical. One can be an atheist in the first sense and still accept a vitalist account of the universe. Then, as Til-

lich does, one can simply recast theism by calling that vital reality which grounds the dynamics of cosmic history “God.” But Brassier denies the vitalist account, and so undercuts such a move. The question, then, is whether there is a parallel between the rejection of a reified personal God and the rejection of a vitalist cosmology, and if so, whether Tillich's methodological acceptance of atheism in order to open the possibility of a deeper, richer account of the divine can work in both cases. I believe there is such a parallel, and that Tillich's dialogue with atheism can be similarly productive in both cases. In support of this claim, I offer the following reconstruction of Tillich's view of God that accepts the mathematization of the universe and at least some of its nihilizing implications.

God is the ground of being. Or, we might just as well say that God is that which renders the world absolutely contingent. If being grounded itself, then it would be necessary. If it were necessary, there would be no dynamism to being, or else its dynamism would simply be the necessary unfolding of its potential being (Hegel). But, to say that God is ground is to deny the status of ground to any entity or set of entities within the universe and also of course to deny such status to the universe as a whole.²⁵ Conversely, it is to say that God is ontologically indifferent to any particular configuration of being including the universe as a whole. Thus, in effect, God's grounding *un*-grounds the universe. As un-grounding ground, God is both the ontological support of being and the primordial menace to its configurations, whether they are regional or universal.

If we say, going at least this far with Quentin Meillassoux, that the ordering of the universe is subject to chaos insofar as there is no intrinsic or immanent reason at all for it being what it is—and that would be a way of saying that it is un-grounded, then we may say that God is the chaos, or what Meillassoux calls the “hyperchaos,” the primordial un-reason for being: simultaneously its support and its threat.²⁶ And in a sense we would not be far from Tillich in doing so. Tillich, for his part, resists pitting God against the threat of non-being that is chaos ($\mu\eta\ \omicron\nu$), and so distinguishes his account of God from classical process theology. Chaos, if it has any ontological standing, is *within* God rather than outside of God as something that is opposed to God.²⁷ Here, I am suggesting that to say as much is at least to invite the thought that chaos may be a way of naming the divine itself, especially when we have

taken the step of identifying God's grounding as a primordial un-grounding.

The point toward which I am pressing here is that if God is the hyper-chaos which un-grounds the world, if God is thus indifferent to the various possible configurations of being, then God is connected only in a maximally ambiguous way with the trajectories in the universe that lead to and support life. It is important to see that naming the divine hyper-chaos is not tantamount to saying that God is the dynamism which unsettles, haunts, and/or lures the world forward in a vitalist fashion. It is not to label an alleged foundational vitality of the universe divine. Rather, the divine chaos can unsettle, and it can stop the unsettling. That is, it can yield becoming and it can yield eternal stasis. It can support life and it can close the doors on life. As Tillich himself holds, God is not reducible to becoming, and we might add that God is in no way required to support becoming rather than to curtail it. Moreover, there is no reason for either happening at all—that is why it is called “chaos,” or “hyper-chaos.” To say that God is the “living God” in this context would be an example of the fallacy of misplaced concreteness. Living is only one of the expressions of divine chaos, and as far as we know only a tiny sliver of the whole.

But what about God's relationship to life? To attempt to think the ancestral and the posterior outside of the correlation of knower and known does not mean that we have to bracket questions of existential significance—only that we have to adjust our answers to these questions to the disenchantments entailed by our knowledge of a fully mathematizable universe. So adjusted, it does not appear that life is at the center of what is going on in the universe, and so it does not appear that it is the signature expression of divinity. God is neither the ambience of life nor the auto-telic, negentropic process which is its own point—to borrow a thought from a more recent Tillichian of sorts, Mark C. Taylor.²⁸ Rather, God is that which enables and limits the process. God is external to life without being unconnected to it. God enables life by un-grounding static structures which would have preserved the absolute hegemony of the inorganic. But God limits life in two ways: first and principally, by un-grounding or non-necessitating the negentropic processes of life, but also by being expressed in a natural order which portends the un-encroachable temporal boundary of life in the form of an ineluctable entropic dissipation of energy.

God, in other words, is the ontological context in which life and meaning arise and pass away.

None of this, it seems to me, would mean that Tillich's analysis of finite being, with its tensive interplay between the polarities of freedom and destiny, dynamics and form, and individuation and participation, is overturned—only that it would be relativized. With Tillich, we would want to say that God is beyond the tension between the polar elements in each case, but we would want to go further to say that God does not constitute a more fundamental harmony between the two elements in each case, nor does the outworking of divine purposes, or the incorporation of the finite into the divine life, resolve or overcome them. That is to say, the divine chaos does not guarantee the fulfillment of life's urge to harmonize the tensions of finitude and to overcome its ambiguities. Rather, with Brassier's reading of Freud in mind, we would want to say that the tensions themselves are preceded and will consequently be succeeded by a simpler and much less interesting state of being which is neither tensive nor dynamic in the least. Again, it is not as if the polarities in their tension are deficient (because merely finite) expressions of a more primordial harmony which will in the end be regained—rather, they are simply contingent and temporary. What we see in the absolutization of the polar elements is an ontologizing of life and its internal tensions, and therefore the relativization of life entails the relativization of the polarities. God is finally indifferent to them—ontologically speaking, contrary to Tillich's claim at the end of his system, the cosmic drama means nothing for God.²⁹

And, so, does “unbinding the nihil” in Tillich leave us with a kind of theological nihilism? In a sense, it does: rather than meaning being guaranteed or grounded by the divine, meaning is hemmed in by the divine. God is the final menace to meaning—the abysmal real that issues meaning only to revoke it in the end. But we should ask whether a stern rejection of theological vitalism really means nihilism in the way Brassier envisions it. It is really the case that, since organic life is simply a fluctuation of the inorganic, the fundamental truth about human life is that we are already dead and our lives have no meaning? This viewpoint is not only unattractive—which in Brassier's *Schadenfreude* only makes it all the more attractive!—it is also crudely reductionist. Just because meaning is temporal and temporary does not mean that it is not real. It still seems to me possible to characterize the universe and therefore the divine

who grounds/un-grounds it as the cradle of a meaning and vitality, even if they have a limited run, as it were. Meaning, we might argue, is only intensified by the fact that it is hemmed in by chaos. Life is, if anything, more precious for being rare.

I suggest that Tillich's theological framework, when cosmologized in the way a dialogue with speculative realism suggests, in fact offers a middle course between vitalism and nihilism. God, in such a revised framework, is the beyond of being. As such, God is beyond life, beyond hope, even beyond the confines of what we call "meaning." God offers no complete and final redemption nor does the divine ground an eternal return. Rather, God is the eternal mystery that envelops the real, creating and also destroying, radiating and extinguishing. God is that real before which we arise and pass away, lending ontological seriousness once again, this time for a post-theistic age, to a piety which affirms that we "blossom and flourish like leaves on a tree, then wither and perish, but naught changeth thee!"

¹ Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (London: Continuum, 2008), p. 118.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 3-7.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 43-49.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

⁵ Ray Brassier, *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 223-230.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

⁸ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Volume II: *Existence and the Christ* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 31.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 31. Italics added.

¹¹ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Volume I: *Reason and Revelation, Being and God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), pp. 235-236.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 241-242.

¹³ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Volume III: *Life and the Spirit, History and the Kingdom of God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 399.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 420-423.

¹⁵ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed., H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh, UK: T & T Clark, 1999), pp. 703-707.

¹⁶ Brassier, *Nihil Unbound*, p. 229.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 73. Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p. 98.

¹⁹ Brassier, *Nihil Unbound*, p. xi.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 235-6.

²² *Ibid.*, 26.

²³ Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p. 53.

²⁴ Portions of *The Divine Existence* have been published in Graham Harman, *Quentin Meillassoux: Philosophy in the Making* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2011). See Harman, 197-193.

²⁵ In Meillassoux's terms, it is to deny there is a "whole" to which its elements must be subject. In *The Divine Inexistence*, he calls this God's "inexistence." See Harman, pp. 177-182.

²⁶ For Meillassoux's concept of "hyperchaos," see Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p. 164.

²⁷ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. I, pp. 179, 247.

²⁸ Mark C. Taylor, *After God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. 345-347.

²⁹ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, III, p. 422.

Coming in the Fall Issue:

- ♦ The Program for the Annual Meeting of the NAPT's and the AAR Group on Tillich in Chicago in November 2012, and information about the Annual Banquet and Banquet Speaker.
- ♦ And more papers from the 2011 Meeting.

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TILlich AND ONTOtheology: ON THE FIDELITY OF BETRAYAL

J. BLAKE HUGGINS

For every philosophical work, if it is a philosophical work, drives philosophy beyond the standpoint taken in the work. The meaning of a philosophical work lies precisely in opening a new realm, setting new beginnings and impulses *by means of which the work's own means and paths are shown to be overcome and insufficient.*

—Martin Heidegger¹

[Tillich] thought counter to his time, acted on his time, and...his thinking acted *for the benefit of a time to come.*

—Charles E. Winquist²

[D]econstruction has never been Marxist, no more than it has ever been non-Marxist, although it has remained *faithful to a certain spirit* of Marxism, to at least one of its spirits....

—Jacques Derrida³

Introduction: On the Boundary Line

Paul Tillich always considered himself to be a “boundary thinker,” perpetually positioned between different locations, contexts, and disciplines. The careful reader is sure to find references to “the boundary line,” one of Tillich’s favorite phrases, in virtually all of his major works, both technical and otherwise. Indeed, Tillich considered this sort of liminal posture to be such an integral part of who he was and what his work represented that it was the title and subject of two of his later autobiographical works, a 1960 article in *The Christian Century*,⁴ and a book-length reflection titled *On the Boundary*.⁵ There and elsewhere he claims, “the boundary is the best place for acquiring knowledge” and that “at almost every point” in his life he aimed “to stand between alternative possibilities of existence, to be completely at home in neither and to take no definitive stand against either.”⁶ For Tillich, this position is difficult and dangerous but is ultimately the most fruitful place for thought, the most fecund site for discursive practice. To continually position oneself as such thus requires both courage and risk. Occupying such a space is rewarding, to be sure, but it requires existential courage as well as eschatological risk.

This boundary ethos permeated the entirety of Tillich’s life and thought. From his status as a German immigrant living in the United States, to his method of correlation, to his continual insistence that philosophy and theology need not be estranged, that Athens and Jerusalem desperately need one another if the full breadth and depth of the human predicament is to be plumbed, Tillich is *the* boundary thinker.⁷ In addition to these well-known and easily recognized instances, I argue that Tillich is also a boundary thinker, or at least a liminal figure, between two other important coordinates in theological discourse: the modern and the postmodern, the ontotheological and the post-ontotheological.⁸ As a boundary thinker, Tillich’s work foresees the necessity of its own overcoming for the benefit of a time *to come*, as the epigraph from Charles Winquist quoted above indicates.

My contention is that certain aspects of Tillich’s theology, when further explored with care to detail and nuance, reveal that Tillich’s project anticipates the arrival of a post-ontotheological discourse even while it remains deeply indebted to the ontotheological tradition. To risk the over-simplification: Tillich is to contemporary theology what Heidegger was for twentieth century continental philosophy—and both discourses are still wrestling with their aftermath. It will be the task of a responsible and robust theology in a certain Tillichian spirit of anti-parochialism and disciplinary cross-pollination to wrestle with both in tandem.

The claim that Tillich serves as a discursive antecedent for certain theologies in the late twentieth century is, of course, not new. For instance, Winquist and Thomas Altizer both acknowledge the indebtedness of radical death-of-God theology and secular theology to Tillich’s legacy. Yet, the post-ontotheological tradition has unfortunately missed the opportunity to discover and make explicit some important genealogical connections with what I am calling the Tillichian gesture it now continues, i.e., the attempt to move beyond the confines of conventional theology and traditional theism. This is likely due to the impulsive identification of Tillich with the ontotheological tradition as such and the hasty assumption that he thus has no real bearing on a post-modern theology. I am suggesting that these claims are not as simple as they seem. It is incumbent upon postmodern theologians to reevaluate both their understanding of Tillich himself and the veracity of his legacy, a legacy in which I claim they are participating. Such postmodern, post-ontotheological dis-

courses, at their worst, seem to suggest that metaphysics can once and finally be overcome in favor of the purely phenomenological. At their best, they offer an incisive and penetrating critique of modernity and its modes of reasoning, a critique I believe theology must take into account if it is to retain any sense of veracity in the current situation. But the notion that ontology can cease to become a thorn in the side of theological discourse is, I think, misguided and wrongheaded. My claim is that postmodern theology is, in the unacknowledged spirit of a certain Tillich, correct to criticize and move beyond the limitations of Tillich's immediate work and, in the hasty move to dismiss Tillich as nothing more than an ontotheologian, wrong to announce the end of ontology.⁹ The best postmodern theology is one that acknowledges the internal *aporias* intrinsic to metaphysics while rejecting any delusions that they can be completely overcome. The ontological and the phenomenological are not mutually exclusive or irreconcilable, but rather exist, or at least should exist, in a type of chiasmic relationship in thought and discourse. The best, most fruitful way to do theology in a post-ontotheological context would thus amount to holding these two in constant tension such that discourse emerges from the edges of the boundary line between the ontological concepts that shape thought and experience and the phenomenological overabundance that exceeds and indeed ruptures such concepts and structures in everyday life. This is a boundary line position Tillich portends even if he does not completely occupy it himself. The goal, then, is to think a theology which inhabits tradition—in this case Tillich's thought—in ways which anticipate and expect their own (in)terruption, to use tradition to speak against itself even while taking responsibility of one's deep indebtedness to it.

Awareness of the indebtedness to Tillich's legacy will thus involve the critical enactment of a certain Tillichian gesture that necessarily moves beyond Tillich himself. My point of departure here—a methodological point of departure that I submit should be the *sine qua non* of any theology worth its salt—is what Peter Rollins calls “the fidelity of betrayal.”¹⁰ The deepest, most intimate act of fidelity involves the crucial move of divergence from the source—a post-ontotheological discourse displays its enduring faithfulness to Tillich by affectionately overcoming and effacing him.

The argument will develop in the following fashion. I begin by briefly sketching the contours of post-ontotheological discourse and offer a working

definition of ontotheology in relation to Tillich's thought, a seemingly simple task that is often overlooked or simply left in critiques of so-called ontotheologians like Tillich. After establishing what ontotheology is and what its cultured despisers aim to achieve post-Heidegger, I will draw out the parallels and ambivalences Tillich's thought seems to display in relation to such a discourse. Throughout, I will make note of the ways in which postmodern theology is, in the unacknowledged spirit of a certain Tillich, correct to criticize and move beyond the limitations of Tillich's immediate work and, in the hasty move to dismiss Tillich, wrong to sound the death knell of metaphysics and herald exaggerated eulogies of ontological categories.¹¹ To paraphrase Mark Twain's often-quoted adage, rumors of the death of metaphysics are greatly exaggerated. The best postmodern theology, one which I would argue is more faithful to the core Tillichian gesture *and* the aims of early postmodern thinkers, is one which acknowledges the inconsistencies in metaphysics while refusing any delusions that they can be ultimately overcome. For such would amount to the end of language and discourse as a discursive practice. This is, to put it simply, a discursive move made possible by Tillich and, as such, it is a move that necessitates, in the spirit of his entire project, the courageous move beyond Tillich himself.

Ontotheology and its Discontents

Ontotheology, much like the term postmodern, has become an increasingly slippery word. Those thinkers who criticize it in favor of some sort of post-ontotheological, purely phenomenological discourse rarely define it or explain with any degree of precision what it is that they actually mean when they use the term. The result, then, is that the word ends up functioning as a type of amorphous weapon or trump card in discourse used to amass rhetorical capital but rarely in a substantive manner. As John Thatamanil puts it, ontotheology often serves as “a very long four-letter word and is invoked to dismiss any mode of philosophical reflection that one happens to oppose.”¹² It is, therefore, incumbent upon any investigation of Tillich's relationship to this tradition to briefly track the meaning and usage of the word such that the importance of the critique it levies is not lost and to combat its vacuous usage.

Kant is the first thinker in the history of thought to use this term, but its contemporary usage has its origin in Heidegger's later work and his assertion

that in modernity the ontological enterprise and the theological project are collapsed into one another such that “metaphysics is ontotheology.”¹³ The tradition of Western metaphysics, for Heidegger, involves the search for an answer to the question: what is an entity? The form of this question concerns an entity’s being as such, i.e., its constitution as a present and comprehensible object in the world alongside other objects or entities. For Heidegger, the more precise answer to this question of what entities actually are in themselves, should be understood as the “being of entities.” That is to say, “asking what entities *are* (or what an entity *is*) means asking about the being of those entities.”¹⁴ Thus, metaphysics answers questions concerning what things or objects are by making statements about their being, i.e., about the totality of entities as such. As Heidegger sees it, this metaphysical problematic necessarily involves a twofold answer. On the one hand, the question “what is an entity?” can be read or heard as a query about what it is that makes an entity an entity. This line of analysis involves an investigation into the essence or the “whatness” of entities as such, the fundamental constitution of an entity as an entity within a formal structure alongside other objects or entities. On the other hand, this question can be parsed as an inquiry about the way that an entity is or becomes an entity within a specific structure. This line of thought would thus examine existence itself, the “thatness” of reality and entities as a whole.¹⁵

In his 1961 lecture “Kant’s Thesis about Being,” Heidegger identifies these two sets of questions respectively as “ontology” and “theology,” ontology being the “whatness,” that is the constitution of an entity as an entity in the world, and theology being the “thatness” or the ultimate constitution of the totality of entities as such. This constitutes the “fundamentally ontotheological character of metaphysics.”¹⁶ Ultimately, both sets of questions lead to a larger, more ominous question in the history of Western thought, i.e., what is the highest entity or being, the *causa sui* under which the formal structure of reality is ordered? At this point, it is worth quoting Heidegger at length.

If we recall once again the history of Occidental-European thought, then we see that the question about being, taken as a question about the being of beings, is double in form. It asks on the one hand: What are beings, in general, as beings? Considerations within the province of this question come, in the course of the history of

philosophy, under the heading of ontology. The question “What are beings?” includes also the question, “Which being is the highest and in what way is it?” The question is about the divine and God. The province of this question is called theology. *The duality of the question about the being of beings can be brought together in the title “onto-theo-ology.”* The twofold question, What are beings? Asks on the one hand, What are (in general) beings? The question asks on the other hand, What (which one) is the (ultimate) being?¹⁷

For Heidegger, then, the history of Western metaphysics brings theology and ontology together under the moniker of ontotheology insofar as it seeks to locate and delineate the inner essence and structure of being and the ultimate cause or grounding—the highest or ultimate Being—from which contingent beings or entities in the world derive their ontic constitution. Insofar as these two core questions—of being *as such* and being *as a whole*—are inextricably intertwined, metaphysics is theological.¹⁸ Ontotheology, to put it bluntly, is a basic, and for Heidegger, unavoidable conflation of theology and ontology to the extent that both pursue the question of ultimacy and its relation to object and entities in the world and their fundamental grounding. For the purposes of relating this directly to Tillich’s thought, Kevin Hart defines the ontotheological project as an enterprise in which “God is defined in terms of being: first of all, as the *highest* being, endowed with every reality; then as the *original* being, underived from anything else; and ultimately as the *being* of all beings, the ground of all that is.”¹⁹ Ontotheology thus amounts to the union of ontology and theology in the quest for the ultimate edifice or foundation upon which reality is structured and without which nothing could or would be.

The standard critique of ontotheological discourse is also located in Heidegger’s work, albeit in nascent form. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger explicates the notion of *Destruktion*, a concept further radicalized in Jacques Derrida’s project of “deconstruction” as a very specific type of reading and writing against the history of Western ontology as a “metaphysics of presence;”²⁰ this means Being immediately present for apprehension to what Husserl called a few years earlier “the transcendental ego,” by bracketing all subjective assumptions outside pure consciousness itself.²¹ For Heidegger, the history of metaphysics and ontology is the “forgetting” of being *qua* being, i.e., of being itself as “that

which determines beings as beings,”²² as opposed to the general or ostensibly obvious apprehension of beings as specific ontic realities present in the world. This legacy of forgetfulness bequeathed to philosophy must therefore be systematically “de-structured” such that the criteria and the conditions for the possibility of an entity’s ontological constitution in the transcendental horizon of being itself might be discursively examined and formally analyzed.

If the question of being is to achieve clarity regarding its own history, a loosening of the sclerotic tradition and a dissolving of the concealments produced by it is necessary. We understand this task as the “destructuring” [*Destruktion*] of the traditional content of ancient ontology that is to be carried out along the *guidelines of the question of being*. This destructuring is based upon the original experiences in which the first and subsequently guiding determinations of being were gained.²³

Heidegger is clear that this process has nothing to do with what he calls “the pernicious relativizing of ontological standpoints.” Whatever else it may entail, this destructuring retains a decidedly positive character insofar as it aims to “fix” the boundaries of the ontological enterprise.²⁴ *Destruktion*, then, is the intentional act of destroying those ontological concepts and categories which “forget” the real question of metaphysics, that of Being-itself as the condition of possibility for all other beings in the world. It is worth recalling here that *the* ontological question for Tillich is the question of Being-itself—of “God—as the ground of reality.”²⁵ Tillich thus shares a certain affinity with Heidegger in his attempt to remove the question of being from the totality of beings to that of being itself as the condition for such a totality in the first place.

The mantle of Heidegger’s critique is taken up and radicalized in the phenomenological tradition by, among others, Jacques Derrida, Emmanuel Levinas, and Jean-Luc Marion, all of whom suggest in varying divergent ways that the question of being *and* of being itself—the ontotheological problematic—categorically privileges sameness over difference, homogeneity over heterogeneity, and univocity over alterity. The character of post-ontotheological discourse since Heidegger thus involves the attempt to construe thinking “otherwise” than ontology and metaphysics. Derrida, for example, is insistent throughout his work that metaphysics and ontotheology are “system[s] functioning as the effacing of difference”²⁶ insofar as they privilege one side of a totalizing a binary, namely being *qua* presence and

time *qua* the present.²⁷ The work of deconstruction is to unmask and expose the internal inconsistencies and structural lacunas or fissures—aporias, as Derrida was fond of calling them²⁸—within metaphysics itself such that that which is otherwise might rupture or irrupt such a system rather than be subsumed by it. The project of overcoming ontotheology thus amounts to the gesture beyond metaphysics to that which is phenomenologically other than *a priori* categories.

Tillich and Ontotheology

In relating ontotheology and its critique to Tillich’s thought, it is helpful to return to Hart’s tripartite definition of ontotheology where God is defined as (1) the *highest* being, (2) the *original* being or first cause, and (3) the *being* of all beings, i.e., the ground of reality or being itself.²⁹ The language of an ontological “ground” strikes to the very heart of Tillich’s ontology and his understanding of God as being itself or the ground of being. If the standard critique of ontotheology in postmodernity involves the rejection of all three connections of God to being, then my contention is that Tillich, despite his elaborate ontology, takes the necessary first steps required of a decidedly *theological* critique of ontotheology by rejecting the first two identifications of God as the highest being and God as the original being, i.e., of God as *a* Being among the totality of beings. Though this does not warrant an admittedly retrograde claim that Tillich is free of ontotheology, it will suffice to substantiate my thesis that Tillich’s project marks a significant shift in discourse, a watershed event that has direct genealogical connections to present phenomenological and deconstructive theologies after ontotheology that are not always recognized. Tillich certainly remains embedded in the ontotheological tradition by laying claim to a foundational metaphysical edifice—God as the ground of being—yet he displays an intriguing degree of discursive equivocation toward this tradition by removing God from the category of ontic existence as *a* being among others in the totality of beings.

It is on these grounds that Tillich can be read as a surprisingly ambivalent ontotheologian, which is why theologians like Altizer and Winquist credit him as the progenitor of radical theology. Moreover, Tillich’s ambivalence can offer an important remediation to those quarters of the post-ontotheological tradition that at times seem to suggest that meta-

physics can be completely put aside and supplanted by phenomenology. While ontological constructions must always expect their own effacement, their own rupture with the coming of the other, the specter of metaphysics will always remain. For language itself is inherently ontological such that to announce the final death of metaphysics would be to announce the death of discourse itself. Even Derrida himself, often caricatured as the ultimate figure of so-called post-modern relativism, is uncharacteristically clear on this point.

There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to shake metaphysics. We have no language...that is foreign to this history; we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition that has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest.³⁰

Postmodern theologies that seek or hint at fully ridding themselves of the residue of onto(theo)logy manner miss the point. Tillich's thought is a helpful, perhaps surprising, aid in this respect, representing a position that inhabits the language and categories of metaphysics and ontology while still acknowledging their internal tensions. As such, Tillich does not represent the pinnacle of modern, post-Enlightenment arrogance but instead prefigures post-ontotheological thought even while he remains embedded in modernity.

How, then, does this discursive ambivalence with regard to ontotheology function in Tillich's work? At the core of Tillich's theology is the dual rejection of God as highest or original being and a Being among the totality of beings. Together they comprise Tillich's intriguing project of "transcending theism,"³¹ mentioned in the final sections of *The Courage to Be*. The underpinnings of these rejections are laid out Volume I of his *Systematic Theology* where develops his ontology and understanding of God not as *a* being or *the* being as in conventional theism, but as Being-itself. "God is the answer to the question implied in being," writes Tillich (ST, 1:163).³² As such God cannot be construed as *a* Being among beings but as the very ground of being or as Being-itself (ST, 1:235). This "ground of being cannot be found within the totality of beings" but is rather the depth from which those beings...derive their ontico-ontological constitution (ST, 1:205). Attempts to construct arguments for the existence of God as a Being within the totality of beings contradict the very idea of God as "both the concept of existence and the method of arguing to a conclusion

are inadequate for the idea of God" as the ground of being (ST, 1:204). For Tillich, God cannot exist *within* the totality of beings. God can only be the very *ground* of such a totality. Expressing the full weight of this claim, Tillich will go so far as to say that when approached as a being or even the highest being "God does not exist" and to argue for God's existence on such a basis is to resolutely deny the very idea of God (ST, 1:205, 236-7). In fact, so-called arguments for God's existence are not arguments or proofs at all, but rather "expressions of the question of God which is implied in human finitude" (ST, 1:205). Existence as an ontological category is not applicable to God. God does not exist as a personal, anthropomorphic being in the world; God is the ground from which all beings derive their character and essence as the expression of that which concerns, apprehends, and grasps human beings ultimately. Thus, as the power and depth of being and the very structure of ontological reality, God transcends every individual being and the totality of beings as such (ST, 1:237). As he will put it later in *The Courage to Be*, God, for Tillich, is always above or beyond God as an intuited object in thought.³³ This is the pinnacle of the Tillich's attempt to transcend theism.

Might it be the case that this gesture beyond conventional theism creates discursive space for the wide proliferation of post-ontotheological discourses in the phenomenological tradition and thereby anticipates its own overcoming? At first blush, the notion of God as the ground of being, as being-itself, or the God beyond God, smacks of ontotheology, reasserting yet another indubitable metaphysical foundation. Even the apophatic hint in the epigram "God above God" is susceptible to the Derridean critique that negative theological gestures decouple God from being only to lay claim to a higher type of superessential being, an even stronger and more unquestionable ontological superstructure.³⁴ While it may be true that Tillich is guilty here of the third characteristic of ontotheology, i.e., of positing God as an ontological ground, his understanding of God as being itself is more nuanced and less ossified than a pure charge of ontotheology would suggest. Indeed, Tillich himself further qualifies his thinking on this point between the publication of the first and second volumes of his *Systematic Theology*. This is evidence, I think, of his intuitive ambivalence toward completely absolute ontological language, an ambivalence shared by later theologies that will become outright critiques of such calcified discourse.

In Volume I, Tillich makes the following seemingly damning ontotheological statement.

The statement that God is being-itself is a nonsymbolic statement. It does not point beyond itself. It means what it says directly and properly; if we speak of the actuality of God, we first assert that he is not God if he is not being-itself. Other assertions about God can be made theologically only on this basis...Theologians must...begin with the most abstract and completely unsymbolic statement which is possible, namely, that God is being-itself or the absolute (ST, 1:238-39, italics mine).

Later, in the introduction to Volume II, Tillich makes an important and revealing clarification to this claim, noting that even one non-symbolic statement seems to endanger God's "ecstatic-transcendent character" (ST, 2: 9). The point at which one begins to speak non-symbolically about God must be understood in terms of what he calls a dialectical "quest for [God]" where "a combination of symbolic with non-symbolic elements occurs," such that one speaks "rationally and ecstatically at the same time" (ST, 2: 9-10). Invoking one of his favorite phrases yet again, Tillich claims that this is where "the boundary line at which both the symbolic and the non-symbolic coincide," such that "the point is both non-symbolic and symbolic" (ST, 2: 10). Thus, while ontological concepts are always *a priori* in Tillich's system, they do not constitute, in his often-overlooked words, "a static and unchangeable structure which, once discovered, will always be valid" (ST, 1: 166). Ontological concepts are presupposed in experience and constitute the structure of experience itself—this is unavoidable as the quote from Derrida above suggests—but experience always exceeds them in phenomenal excess that is in some sense prior to language. The God beyond God is that which is interpreted in discourse through metaphysical concepts. This is after all unavoidable, but it is experienced as something sublime—what Tillich calls the depth of reality—that confounds even the most elaborate ontological system, something ecstatically transcendent that outstrips the belated nature of discourse. This is captured beautifully in volume II where Tillich makes a statement showing real congeniality with the postmodern desire to move beyond metaphysical concretization. He writes, "being remains the content, the mystery, and the eternal *aporia* of thinking" (ST, 2: 11, italics original). God *qua* being itself has no determinate, ontologically verifiable content for Tillich.³⁵ Being-

itself is the most fundamental statement Tillich can make about God but it points to the truth that any statement about God is always already in some sense symbolic. As Thatamanil puts it, "Being-itself turns out to be a singular term in Tillich's lexicon, one that serves to demonstrate that all (subsequent) talk about God has to be symbolic."³⁶ God may indeed be the ground of being and the very structure of ontological reality, but this ground is, in some sense, itself groundless. Though Tillich still retains the ontotheological terminology here, he demonstrates clear resonance with the postmodern gesture toward the *aporia* of the heterogeneous, of the conviction that God is otherwise than a pristine ontological Archimedean point.

In a similar vein, and keeping with his rejection of God as a being in the totality of being either highest or original, Tillich is careful to avoid any insinuation that God, although the ground of being, functions as *actus purus* or *causa sui* free from all potentiality. For Tillich, "the God who is *actus purus* is not the living God" (ST, 1: 246). One must always account for the abysmal element or "undertow" of the divine. God is the *depth* of being and reality. Depth here denotes a deep sense of profundity, contingency, and even ambiguity. For Tillich this means that even being itself includes non-being, that God is both the richness of the ground of being and the dynamic, chaotic abyss of being. God is both ground and abyss. Recalling the ontological polarity between dynamics and form, Tillich maintains that holding ground and abyss together "prevent[s] the dynamics in God from being transformed into pure actuality" (ST, 1:246). Moreover, this abysmal side of divinity can never be named as such, it "cannot be thought as something that is; nor can it be thought as something that is not" (ST, 1: 179). This is perhaps as close as Tillich comes to actually employing the same rhetoric as post-ontotheological thinkers. God *is* *aporia*. God as being itself, despite the ontotheological connotations, denotes as much for Tillich. Both the formless void and the ordered structure of reality are contained in God such that the "ground is not only an abyss in which every form disappears; it also is the source from which every form emerges" (ST, 1: 158). God as both ground and abyss are thus held in tension and constant contestation in Tillich's thought.

Although in inchoate form here, Tillich anticipates and indeed prepares for a discourse different from a garden-variety ontotheology. I do not mean to anachronistically suggest here that Tillich is a

postmodern theologian or even a post-ontotheological thinker. The elaborate ontological schematic outlined in Volume I of his *Systematic Theology* would suggest otherwise. My point here is merely to leverage a reading that teases out the genealogical connections between Tillich's project, his own discursive ambivalence toward ossified ontology, and the postmodern, phenomenologically oriented theologies that have garnered attention in discourse. These theologies are in some sense enacting a certain repetition—a non-identical repetition to be sure—of Tillich's gesture and are therefore indebted to his work, perhaps more than they realize or readily admit. Tillich's project of transcending theism, his important, often unnoticed qualification of his earlier contention that God as being-itself is a non-symbolic statement, and his holding together the notion of God as both ground and abyss all suggest that Tillich in some sense prefigures postmodern theology even as he employs the very terminology much post-ontotheological discourse altogether jettisons.³⁷

Conclusion: Remaining Haunted by Tillich

In the early 1990s, after the fall of the Berlin wall and the pervasive disenchantment with Marxism, Derrida penned an intriguing text titled *Specters of Marx*. There he reveals, in the final epigraph quoted above, that his work owes—indeed has always owed—a great debt to a certain spirit of Marxism, that deconstruction was and is always haunted by the specter of Marx even as it aims to move beyond the confines of Marx's own thinking.³⁸ It is in the spirit of this double movement, a gesture of both affectionate acknowledgment and critical departure, that Tillich must be approached in a post-ontotheological context. Postmodern theology is haunted by a specter of a certain Tillich, the interstitial Tillich of the boundary line, the liminal Tillich who, through his tacit ambivalence, anticipates the arrival of such discourses even as he remains embedded in the conceptual categories they aim to critique. These discourses, whether they acknowledge it or not, enact a certain Tillichian gesture even as they move beyond bounds of Tillich himself. At times, the hasty move to reject categorically Tillich and the kind of posture his project represents, while understandable and even desirable in some cases, often ignores the inextricable persistence and the enduring presence of ontological concepts within language itself as first generation thinkers like Der-

rida continually noted. Here Tillich offers a corrective to the more pretentious tendencies of post-ontotheology by demonstrating the contingency of theological discourse on metaphysics, for better or worse.

By making constructive use of his “boundary line” ethos and placing ontology and phenomenology in intentional chiasmic relation so that the one is always implicated in the other, perhaps postmodern theology can more fully embrace the momentous event of Tillich's thought; perhaps it can take ownership for the Tillichian gesture it enacts while at the same time enacting the double movement characteristic of the fidelity of betrayal in taking Tillich beyond the confines of his own thought, to places Tillich himself could not go. This is the act of faithful betrayal crucial to any creative and responsible theological project: to display fidelity to Tillich and to continue his gesture toward the God beyond God, the other that comes to us through and in spite of our metaphysics, by affectionately overcoming and effacing Tillich himself.

Postmodern theology at its best aims to posture itself in expectation and anticipation that the circularity of ontology will be interrupted by what it does not contain—in Tillich's words the “aporia of thinking”—but with no illusions of pure escape and always with the stipulation that it will ultimately fail, but hopefully fail better, falling and stumbling into new, more fecund and imaginative discursive spaces unthought and untouched before. A generous reading suggests that Tillich hopes for such a movement, one that will ultimately move beyond him. Insofar as it remains haunted by the specter of a certain Tillich, post-ontotheological discourse shares this same hope and by acknowledging its indebtedness to the Tillichian legacy, Tillich will not only haunt its projects in his absence, but guide their aims through his presence in the tradition—a tradition whose attempts to reach toward the ecstatic transcendent, the event that is God beyond God, both the ground and abyss of reality, must always and inevitably be marked by gestures of both affirmation and castigation: for such is the fidelity of betrayal.³⁹

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¹ Martin Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1985), 11. Italics mine.

² Charles E. Winquist, "Untimely History," *Truth and History: A Dialogue with Paul Tillich* (New York: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1997), 69. Italics mine.

³ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 2006), 95. Italics mine.

⁴ Paul J. Tillich, "On the Boundary Line," *The Christian Century* (1960): 1435-37.

⁵ Tillich, *On the Boundary: An Autobiographical Sketch* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁷ It is worth noting that this last example—the boundary line between theology and philosophy—is the one the Tillich cherished perhaps the most. In the same autobiographical piece he writes, "As a theologian I have tried to remain a philosopher, and vice versa. It would be been

easier to abandon the boundary and choose one or the other. Inwardly, this course was impossible for me." Cf., *On the Boundary*, 58.

⁸ When referring to the "post-ontotheological," a term with which I am not wholly satisfied and employ with a certain degree of ambivalence, I do not mean to suggest that there is in fact a visible historical break between ontotheology and the discourses that appear in its aftermath. Rather, I mean to suggest that there is a certain crisis underway in thought vis-à-vis the relationship between ontology and theology and how such a relationship might be construed in discourse. To use Mark Lewis Taylor's language, I am not claiming that "the present moment constitutes a new epoch in a chronological narrative, but that there is a crisis in thinking underway, as well as, perhaps, an opportunity for fresh thinking." See his *The Theological and the Political: On the Weight of the World* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 2. In short, my argument here is that after modernity—after the incisive insight of the master of suspicion and the penetrating critiques metaphysics—theology has crossed a critical Rubicon, one which Tillich himself perhaps foresaw even while standing at his threshold.

⁹ Cf. Peter Rollins, *The Fidelity of Betrayal: Towards a Church Beyond Belief* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2008).

¹⁰ Cf. John Thatamanil, "Tillich and the Postmodern," *The Cambridge Companion to Paul Tillich*, ed. Russell Re Manning (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 290.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Here I will be relying heavily on Iain D. Thompson's *Heidegger and Ontotheology: Technology and the Politics of Education* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), the first few chapters of which provide an excellent, penetrating analysis and explication of Heidegger's project and his understanding of ontotheology.

¹⁴ Thompson, 12.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* Already, this bifurcation—between essence and existence—strikes to the heart of Tillich's *Systematic Theology*. Cf. Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Vol. I* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), passim. See especially, 202-204.

¹⁶ Quoted in Thompson, 13.

¹⁷ Heidegger, "Kant's Thesis About Being," *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (New York: Cambridge, 1998), 340. Referenced also in Thompson, 13.

¹⁸ Kevin Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign: Deconstruction, Theology, and Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 78.

¹⁹ Hart, 76.

²⁰ The notion of a metaphysics of presence strikes to the heart of Derrida's criticism of the whole of the Western tradition. He defines this concept as "the exigent, powerful, systematic, and irrepressible desire for... a [transcendental] signified." A transcendental signified here functions similar to the idea of a singular, self-originating, and self-sustaining Being among beings from which the ontological structure of reality is constituted. See Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 49.

²¹ Cf. Edmund Husserl, *The Essential Husserl: Readings in Transcendental Phenomenology*, ed. Donn Welton (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), passim.

²² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996), 6.

²³ *Ibid.*, 22. Italics original.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. I, 163.

²⁶ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 23.

²⁷ Cf. Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences," *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 278ff.

²⁸ Cf. Derrida, *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993).

²⁹ Hart, 76.

³⁰ Derrida, "Structure Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences," *Writing and Difference*, 280. Years later, Derrida returns to this double bind and in a text on economy and the impossibility of the gift makes a programmatic statement that I take to be the *sine qua non* of proper deconstruction.

[T]he effort to think the groundless ground of [a] quasi-transcendental illusion should not be either—if it is going to be a matter of thinking—a sort of adoring and faithful abdication, a simple movement of faith in the face of that which exceeds the limits of experience, knowledge, science, economy—and even philosophy. On the contrary it is a matter—desire beyond desire—of responding faithfully but also as rigorously as possible both to the injunction or the order of the gift as well as to the injunction or the order of meaning: Know still what giving wants to say, know how to give, know what you want and want to say when you give, know what you intend to give, know how the gift annuls itself, *commit yourself even if commitment is the destruction of the gift by the gift, give economy its chance.*

See Derrida, *Given Time I: Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 30. Italics mine. Thus, it is not a matter of completely abandoning anything, be it the gift, economy, or for our purposes, metaphysics and ontology. Rather, the gesture here involves inhabiting these traditions and categories in a manner that allows them to speak against themselves, anticipating the irruption of that which they do not presently contain. This coheres quite nicely with the spirit of Tillich's notion of the "Protestant principle" as that mode of perpetual, provisional, and limited criticism the prime function of which is to "point to the ultimate which is beyond [it]." Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York, NY: Perennial Classics, 2001), 33.

³¹ This is the language Tillich uses in *The Courage to Be*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 182ff. It is representative of the wider, more technical aims of part two of his *Systematic Theology*.

³² Unless otherwise noted all parenthetical references in this section are to Tillich's *Systematic Theology*.

³³ Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 186ff.

³⁴ Cf. Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials," trans. Ken Frieden, *Derrida and Negative Theology*, ed. Harold Coward and Toby Foshay (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1992), 43-143. See also Derrida, *On the Name*, trans. David Wood, John P. Leavey, Jr., and Ian McLeod (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995) and the first section of John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997) titled "The Apophatic." It is also worth noting that while I use Derrida as an example here, there is some internal disagreement in the post-ontotheological, phenomenological tradition over the merit of negative theology and, really, over what constitutes ontotheology as such. See, for instance, Jean-Luc Marion, "In the Name: How to Avoid Speaking of 'Negative Theology,'" *God, the Gift and Postmodernism*, ed. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 20-42. For a clear and lucid exposition of a few of these disagreements, see the exchange between Derrida and Marion in the same volume.

³⁵ John Thatamanil, "Tillich and the Postmodern," *The Cambridge Companion to Paul Tillich*, ed. Russell Re Manning (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 294.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 292.

³⁷ I do not have space here to explore the parallels between what I believe is Tillich's pronounced ambivalence toward pure ontological absolutes and contemporary post-ontotheological thinkers. For now I will simply note that

Tillich, though he uses different terminology, is very close here to what Richard Kearney has called a “fourth reduction” in continental philosophy of religion following the moves of Husserl, Heidegger, and Marion respectively. For Kearney, who no doubt draws on Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutical framework, after metaphysics one returns again, post-critically, to metaphysics acknowledging that there is an important “metaphysical desire to understand” within such systems despite their tendency toward totalization and ossification. Kearney brings this up in a dialogue with Jean-Luc Marion. See “Giving More,” *Givenness and God: Questions of Jean-Luc Marion*, ed. Ian Leask and Eoin Cassidy (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 245. See also Kearney’s essays in *After God: Richard Kearney and the Religious Turn in*

Continental Philosophy, ed. John Panteleimon Manoussakis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006).

³⁸ Derrida writes, “[D]econstruction has never been Marxist, no more than it has ever been non-Marxist, although it has remained *faithful to a certain spirit* of Marxism, to at least one of its spirits....” See Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 2006), 95. Italics mine.

³⁹ As a final note, it is worth pointing out here that this entire sentiment coheres quite nicely not only with Tillich’s method of correlation but also his notion of the broken myth or symbol which speaks no less powerfully in its brokenness and finitude. See Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 58-62.

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